

Herbert Edwin Stear



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P03484.001 1915

Educated at Lake Charm State School and employed as a Porter with Victorian Railways in Bendigo, Herbert Edwin Stear enlisted as a Gunner in the 2nd Field Artillery Brigade in the 1st Australian Division in Maribyrnong on 1 August 1915.

He embarked overseas on 5 January 1916 and disembarked in Egypt in early February, where he was taken on strength of the 1st Divisional Ammunition Column in Cairo on 10 February.

A short while later, on 9 March he was transferred to the 21st Field (Howitzer) Artillery Brigade in the 1st Division and allocated to the 23rd Battery. Each battery was equipped with three 4.5-inch howitzers (below) designed to destroy concrete bunkers and pillboxes.



At the same time, he was re-mustered as a Driver (Dvr), which meant he drove a team of two horses, as all field artillery remained horse drawn throughout the war.

Dvr Stear left Egypt on 22 March and landed at Marseilles on 28 March, where the brigade entrained north to le Havre to collect their howitzers, horses and other equipment in early April. This done, they moved to the Hazebrouck area and then into the line at Fleurbaix on 25 April, where they operated throughout May – June 1916.

The brigade moved south to the Somme region in mid-July, where they provided fire support for the Australian assaults on the village of Pozieres, and Mouquet Farm beyond, between 23 July – 7 August, for the loss of ten brigade casualties (three killed).



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DA12822 *Sept 1916*

Owing to difficulties maintaining the howitzers, the 21st Field (Howitzer) Artillery Brigade was disbanded in January 1917 and the men allocated to other units. Consequently, Dvr Stear was taken on strength of the 2nd Field Artillery Brigade at Buire on 24 January and assigned to the 4th Battery, which operated six 18-pounder field guns.

Just a month later, on 21 February, the Germans deliberately minimised their front line and withdrew to the Hindenburg Line. The situation was quite difficult for the artillery batteries, as the infantry at first tentatively, then with greater speed, advanced to occupy the old German lines. Eventually the field batteries also moved forward to support the infantry, and the 2nd Brigade had reached Lagnicourt by early April.

Before dawn on 15 April and without any warning, a strong force of 16,000 Germans attacked the 1st Division lines at Lagnicourt, behind which the field batteries were located.

The Germans penetrated the Australian lines and overran several batteries – including the 4th – and captured 21 field guns. The situation was so dire that all the field batteries were ordered to remove their guns' breech blocks and withdraw their men.

At around 7:00 am, a counterattack by four AIF battalions – around 3,000 rifles – advanced back through the Australians' own field battery positions and eventually drove the Germans out of the village. They re-captured all the guns, 16 of which remained intact (four of the five damaged guns belonged to the 4th Battery). Overall Australian casualties amounted to 1,010, including 300 captured, while German casualties totalled 2,300, with 362 taken prisoner. Remarkably, the Australian field batteries were back in action by 11:30 am.



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Australian 18-pounder field guns west of Lagnicourt, March 1917 (note the horse Drivers)

The brigade remained in Lagnicourt and later provided fire support for the Australian infantry during the 2nd Battle of Bullecourt from 3 – 17 May.

In late July the brigade moved north to Belgium to take part in the Third Ypres offensive. They established their firing lines near Dickebusch, where they were subjected to regular German aerial attacks and artillery bombardments. During one such barrage, Dvr Stear sustained multiple shrapnel wounds to his abdomen, knee and feet on 6 August.

He was immediately evacuated to the 32nd (British) Casualty Clearing Station at Brandhoek, but ultimately succumbed to his wounds the following day, 7 August 1917.

Driver 10356 Herbert Edwin Stear was buried in the Brandhoek New Military Cemetery, Belgium later the same day.



Dvr Stear's grave in Brandhoek New Military Cemetery, Belgium



Lake Charm SS Roll of Honor

Name: Stear, Herbert Edwin	
Service Number	10356
Date enlisted	1 August 1915
Place enlisted	Maribyrnong, Victoria
Rank on enlistment	Gunner
Initial Unit	2 nd Field Artillery Brigade
Date and ship embarked for overseas	5 January 1916 HMAT A19 <i>Afric</i>
Stated age/DOB (if known)	30 years 6 months (actual age ~32 years)
Place of birth	Lake Charm, via Swan Hill, Victoria
Marital status	Single
Occupation	Porter (Victorian Railways)
Religion	Church of England
Next of kin and address	Stear, Mrs Catherine, mother, 58 Little Breen Street, Bendigo, Victoria
Permanent address	Bendigo, Victoria
Appearance	Dark complexion, dark brown hair, green eyes, height – 5 feet 7 inches, weight – 10 stone, 7 lbs
Final Rank	Driver
Final Unit	2 nd Field Artillery Brigade
Theatres of war served in	Egypt, France, Belgium
Fate	Died of wounds
Date and place wounded	6 August 1917 near Dickebusch, Belgium
Nature of wounds	Multiple shrapnel wounds to abdomen, knee & feet
Date and place died	7 August 1917 32 nd (British) Casualty Clearing Station, Brandhoek, Belgium
Cemetery details	Brandhoek New Military Cemetery, Belgium. Plot III, Row D, Grave 6
Honours/medals	British War Medal, Victory Medal
Notes	Also remembered on the Bendigo Roll of Honor, Junortoun Roll of Honor (held at Bendigo Soldiers Memorial Museum) and the Lake Charm State School Roll of Honor.

