Alexander Hales Ingram was born in 1891 at Bagshot, Vic where he spent his younger years. His family then moved to Seville in the Yarra Valley where he attended the Seville State School. He was known locally as Abe.

He remained a pupil at the Seville State School long after his two older brothers, George and Ronald, left the district and when he finished there he helped his father with his postal contract. Eventually he found work with the Victorian Railways as an electrical mechanic and moved to 1 Charles St, Prahran, not far from his Hubbard relatives.

When war was declared Alex was moved by the events that unfolded, especially when his brother George enlisted and was sent overseas to Rabaul. The campaigns at the Dardanelles through 1915 would have also played on his mind.

During 1915 Alex met Agnes Estella Wright and soon after they began seeing each other. Agnes had been born in Dimboola, Victoria in 1891, the third of seven children to Arthur and Merinda Wright (nee Jones). Her father had been a wood merchant and she grew up in the family home at 41 Margaret St, South Yarra until she met Alex. On February 19th, 1916 they married at Christ Church, South Yarra and moved in with Agnes’ sister and brother-in-law, Leslie and Gertrude Wilson, at 39 Brougham St, Box Hill.

A month before they married Alex decided to follow his older brother George and enlist to serve in the war. On Friday January 21st, 1916, aged twenty-four; he walked into the recruiting office at Prahran and joined the AIF.

His medical examination showed he was five feet ten inches tall, weighed ten stone, six lbs and had blue eyes with light brown hair. Two days later he reported for duty at Royal Park where a military encampment had been established to process those who had just enlisted. He remained here until February 7th, 1916 when he was sent to Broadmeadows, the AIF’s camp for training new recruits.

Alex spent the next couple of months undergoing basic training at Broadmeadows and here he was given the rank ‘Driver’, the Number 221 and was allotted to ‘A’ company of the newly formed 3rd Pioneer Battalion.

Pioneer battalions had been created to perform construction tasks in the forward areas, such as digging and reinforcing trenches and dugouts, although they occasionally acted in the engineer role on tasks such as the building of bridges. They had a large proportion of tradesmen like Alex in their ranks and were organised along the same lines as infantry battalions and if needed could serve as infantry in the front line. The 3rd Pioneer Battalion were formed in Victoria in March 1916 and were assigned to the Third Division.

Alex Ingram was one of the originals to join its ranks. Also in his unit was Walter Peeler, who would go on to get the Victoria Cross at Broodseinde in 1917 and after the war become a good friend of his brother George. Others who were amongst the originals in the 3rd Pioneer Battalion included Lyall Howard, the father of former Australian Prime Minister John Howard, and Arthur Marven, the grandfather of the current Federal member for Casey, Tony Smith MP. All four of these men would sail together on the same ship to war.

In March 1916 his old friends at Seville decided to give him and other local volunteers a farewell function in the Seville Public Hall. The Lilydale Express reported: *‘On Thursday evening, March 9, a social was held in the Seville Hall, in honor of five recruits just enlisted, W Bethune, A H Ingram, H and J Payne and W Wood. Mr A Douglas was in the chair, and during the evening presented the boys with wristlet watches, given by the residents. Three returned soldiers took part in the entertainment, and gave their experiences. Sergeant Buchecher and Corporal Preston very lucidly explained the position the Empire was placed in at the present time, and appealed most strongly to all young men that were fit, to enlist forthwith. Songs were given by Corporal Preston and Signaller Pritchard, and after refreshments were partaken of, which were supplied by the ladies, an hour’s dance took place, ending a very pleasant and enjoyable evening’.*

Driver Alex Hales Ingram finished his training in June 1916 and departed from Melbourne on the HMAT Wandilla with the 3rd Pioneer Battalion. Before he left his wife Agnes gave him a greenstone heart, a sweetheart keepsake to carry with him while away.

On the ship over he contracted measles and had to be confined in the ships sick berth for eight days. Arriving at Plymouth, England in July 1916, the battalion undertook further training at Larkhill, near Wilthshire, and then in late November they crossed the Channel to France.

Moving up into the lines they were billeted at Armentieres and weren’t there long before they came under heavy bombardment and gas attacks, sustaining their first casualties. Their time here was mainly spent repairing trenches and maintaining drainage systems and making fire steps and duckboards for those in the trenches to walk on.

By now winter had set in and the [winter of 1916](http://www.anzacday.org.au/miscellaneous/snow.html)-1917 was one of the worst on record. Living in these trenches, under freezing conditions, was certainly challenging. Australian troops had only two blankets issued each and many of them had to sleep as close as possible to one another just to survive.

Alex wouldn’t get to experience much of this. On January 3rd, 1917 he was taking a wagon into the Houplines area when German artillery started raining gas shells down on the road he was on. One of these shells hit Alex’s wagon killing him and his two horses, whether they were killed from the blast or the gas is not known. He was just twenty-five years old and had only been in the frontline for just over a month. He was later buried at Cite Bon Jean Cemetery in Armentieres.

In Seville his parents, George and Charlotte Ingram, were sent the tragic news via a telegram, for them this was the second child they had lost and had to grieve over. In Box Hill the Rev R W Thompson of the Methodist Church was handed the same telegram and was given the sad task of informing Alex’s widow, Agnes. Eight months later his personal effects were sent to her in a package that included: letters, postcards, photos, pipe in case, wallet, belt, two knives, fountain pen, metal mirror, two cigarette holders, razor, shaving brush, a testament, an English-French-Arabic booklet, the greenstone heart Agnes had given him and the watch the people of Seville had presented to him.

Agnes mourned Alex’s death for the rest of her life. Even though they were only married for a short time she never went on to remarry. She lived with her parents at the family home at 41 Margaret St, South Yarra for a number of years and after they passed away she lived alone in a flat in Hawthorn. Alex’s service medals were sent to her in 1922 but where they are now is unknown. Agnes died, still Alex’s widow, in the 1960’s.

Alex’s older brother George had been discharged from the Tropical Force in Rabaul as he had contracted malaria. He then went off and enlisted in the AIF and served on the Western Front with the 24th Battalion. He would go on to be awarded the military medal and the Victoria Cross, the last Australian to receive one during WW1.

In 1954 George went to England for the centenary of the Victoria Cross and took the opportunity to visit Alex’s grave in France. When there he took out of his pocket soil from their family farm in Seville and sprinkled it on his brother’s grave.