

**SAPPER CHARLES GLEW**  
**5326 – 1st Tunnelling Company**

The Reefer's Arms Hotel, Mosman Street, Charters Towers, Queensland was home to a single 37 year old miner named Charles Glew. Born in Fryers Creek, Victoria about January, 1879 the son of Andrew and Ellen (nee Cattle) Glew.

He applied to enlist for active service at the Charters Towers Town Hall on February 16, 1916 and passed his medical examination two days later. Acknowledgment to the volunteers was published in *The Northern Miner* on Saturday February 19, 1916:

Joseph Bovey, William Thomas Bontoft, William Mullins and C. Glew, all of Charters Towers, enlisted on Friday morning. These men, with Messrs Phillip Ivey and D.T. Thomas were sworn in the morning.

His Attestation Forms show he was 165cms (5ft 4¾ins) tall, weighed 54kgs (118lbs) with a chest measurement of 90cms (35ins). Dark was his complexion with brown eyes and brown hair and bore a scar on his left leg. Church of England was given as religion and allotted two-fifths of his pay to his widowed mother, Ellen Glew, care of his sister Mrs E. Newman, Post Office, Balaclava, Victoria and later 5 Blenheim Street, Balaclava who was also next-of kin.

Further news of volunteers was published on Monday February 21, 1916:

The volunteers last week on Charters Towers totalled 25. The following are the names of the men: C. McGowan, G. Turner, G.T. Thomas, P.R. Hilder, G. Robertson, D.T. Moxham, W.G. Moxham, S. Brackley, J.J. Bamford, W.J. McAlpine, W. Melling. C. Glew, W.T. Bontoft, G. Price, J. Bovey, P. Ivey, J.J. Norris, C. Zurvas, W. Mullins, A. Hicks, H. Stour, J. Moore, W. Eade, J.W. Miles, and A.C. Moore. All of the men came from the Charters Towers district except one. The whole of the men have already been sworn in.

Basic training took place at the 11 Depot Battalion from March 3 to April 28, 1916 when transferred to the Queensland Miners' Corps for further tuition. He joined other reinforcements at Seymour camp, Victoria on June 29 and assigned the Regimental number 5326 and the rank of Sapper.

After training of several months sailed with the September Reinforcements on transport HMAT A23 *Suffolk* which left Melbourne, Vic on September 30, 1916. The 168 reinforcements departed Fremantle, W.A. on October 10 travelling via the ports of Durban and Dakar docking at Plymouth, England on December 2, 1916. The troops were detrained to Tidworth and marched in to Perham Downs Camp for further training on procedures for the front.

The men proceeded overseas to France from Folkstone on New Year's Day, 1917 aboard *S.S. Arundel* marching in to the Australian General Base Depot the following day. Sapper Glew was attached to the 1<sup>st</sup> Tunnelling Company which was detailed to working underground on the British secret plan, by tunnelling and maintaining explosives laid under Hill 60 and surrounds in Belgium. Their eight month plan culminated in the exploding of 19 mines which began the Battle of Messines on June 7, 1917.

On the second anniversary of Anzac Day, April 25, 1917 near Hill 60 an accidental explosion occurred when a mine charge was being set up, exploded in "D" Gallery situated in the sandy layer. Three officers and six sappers plus a Corporal rescue worker died and numerous others were almost asphyxiated by the toxic fumes.

The official history records "*that a minenwerfer exploded during heavy enemy bombardment which pierced the Officers Dugout Quarters, exploding therein.*" But two Captains give their oral versions which recall that "*the disaster was caused by the circuit receiving the test current during checking of the detonators, still assembled in the primer, a supersensitive detonator had exploded during the test.*" Other

speculations give that the detonator was not covered under a sandbag and its filament was probably the problem. It was described at the time as a *thousand to one chance*.

Whatever the cause the Company's Advance Headquarters was extremely defenceless to this unfortunate situation with the corridors, quarters and common rooms underground, poisonous gasses permeated anywhere it could by the pressure of the discharge. The Officer's mess, kitchen and adjoining sleeping room were completely wrecked and the Batman's dugout severely damaged. Timbers were driven thirty to thirty-five feet into the Berlin sap by the detonation. Unfortunately, Batman Sapper Glew was in the quarters nearest the detonation point. The rescue room housing the Proto-breathing apparatus had to be cleared first but a quick inspection of the Batman's Quarters showed a high level of gas haze making visibility difficult. A second Proto-man inspected and reported "*all bodies appeared to be lifeless*".

The rescuers succeeded in resuscitating other Officers and men found and immediately arranged for them to be transferred to the nearest medical facility. Due to the enemy bombardment along Marshall Walk the closest service was the A.M.C. Dressing Station at Larchwood where 20 to 30 men with severe symptoms were treated.

As soon as the dangerous gasses had dissipated the rescue and relief teams went into action and eventually found the bodies now amongst the collapsed timber and sand. It was not until April 28 that all the bodies of those killed were retrieved and placed in blankets and with the exception of the Officers, all others, including Sapper Charles Glew who lies in plot 4, row C, were buried in the nearby Railway Dugouts Cemetery, Transport Farm, Zillebeke, Belgium. The loss of his life shows not only how vulnerable their work was underground but also the enormous risks they took to recover their comrades despite the gruesome traumas of war raging above them.

His active service consisted of only 73 days and his mother was notified of his death on May 8, 1917. A Certificate of Death was posted to his sister's address.

A package conveyed via transport A38 *S.S. Ulysses* was signed for by his mother Ellen on February 26, 1918 containing Charles' personal effects of two discs, wallet, 2 keys, money belt and coins, playing cards, rosary, fountain pens and ink pot. Another package numbered 25705 returned on the troopship A14 *Euripides* and she again receipted for his cardboard wallet, cards, knife, religious book and handkerchief.

His Memorial Scroll (321350) was forwarded to his mother, Mrs Ellen Glew c/- Mrs Newman, Balaclava, Victoria on August 10, 1921. Regrettably Ellen had passed away in 1919.

Sapper Charles Glew 5326 1<sup>st</sup> Tunnelling Company for his supreme sacrifice was awarded the British War Medal (48295) and the Victory Medal (47714). These were applied for on March 17, 1923 by his eldest brother George Glew, of 50 Edward Street, Elsternwick, Vic, owing to both parents deceased. He also received the Memorial Plaque on April 10, 1923. A daughter of George Glew, A.H. Haynes on March 26, 1967, applied for the Anzac medal as she was in possession of his service medal and memorial plaque.

His name was engraved on the original (1919) 1st Australian Tunnelling Company Memorial at Hill 60, near Ypres, Belgium. Australian War Memorial Image ID P00735.017 & P00735.018 refers.



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