



Private Samuel BROWN **2137 – 54/56th Battalion, 4th reinforcements**

Born: 30 Nov 1878, Auchencairn, Rerrick, Kirkcudbright, Scotland.

Parents: Jane and James Brown, Kirkcudbright, Scotland.

Occupation: Labourer

District Connection: Cumnock

Enlistment Date: 22 Mar 1916, Molong, NSW.

Enlistment Age: 37yrs & 4mths.

Embarkation: 19 Aug 1916 Sydney, HMAT A42 *Boorara*

Served: France, Belgium

Fate: RTA 23 Jun 1919

Biography

Samuel Brown was born on 30 Nov 1878 at Auchencairn, Kirkcudbright, Scotland (Ref 879/50 Rerrick - Scottish Statutory Births & Statutory Declaration 1940). His parents were James and Jane (nee Grierson) Brown, who were married on 13 Jan 1860 at Rerrick, Kirkcudbright.

In the 1861 Scotland Census, James (25yrs) and Jane (21yrs) and their son John (5mths) were living at Hall Farm in the parish of Rerrick, Kirkcudbrightshire, and James was working as a stone mason. In the 1871 Scotland Census, James's occupation was that of a Mason Master, employing 3 men. Children were listed as John (10yrs), Henrietta Jane (8yrs), Robert (8yrs), Catherine Hannah (3yrs), Richard (2yrs) and Agnes (1yr). By the 1881 Scotland Census, James's occupation was that of a Master Builder, employing 5 men and 1 boy. In addition to the children listed in the 1871 Census, there were two more added: James A (8yrs) and Samuel (2yrs). The 1891 Census has only four children listed: Robert (25yrs), Catherine (23yrs), James A (18yrs), and Samuel (12yrs) - a scholar. The family's address was listed as Auchencairn and James' occupation was that of a stone mason. In the 1901 Scotland Census, James (65yrs), Jane (61yrs) and Catherine H (33yrs) were living at a Draper's Shop and house at Auchencairn, Rerrick, and James's occupation was that of a stone mason. James Brown died on 3 Mar 1913, aged 77yrs, at Park Place, Auchencairn, Kercudbrightshire.

There is very little information of Samuel's life before April 1916, when he enlisted in the AIF, but a Samuel Brown is listed in the Electoral Rolls (ER) for Orange/Forest Reefs for 1913 and listed as a labourer. (In a 1940 Statutory Declaration he gives his next of kin on enlistment as a Mrs Meyer, Forest Reefs. In the 1913 ER there are an Elizabeth Ellen & Frederick Meyer listed as living at Forest Reefs and Frederick Meyer's occupation is that of farmer.)

The Molong Express & Western District Advertiser – 1 Apr 1916, p9, had the following report:
“*The Amaroo Shire Recruiting Sergeant signed on the following this week: - John Stanford, John Burrell, S Brown, Jno. Moore, Arthur Grey and Martin O'Neill.*”

Samuel and John Burrell appear to have been friends as they both enlisted around the same time in March 1916. Pte John Burrell – 2134, 54th Btn, was 43yrs, married, and living at Eurimbla, Cumnock, in 1916. Samuel's medical certificate states that he was a labourer, 5 feet 4 inches tall, had grey eyes, dark brown hair, a fair complexion, and was of the Church of England religious denomination. Samuel named his mother Mrs J Brown, of Park Place, Auchencairn, Kirkcudbrightshire, as next of kin. However, Jane Brown died on 12 Apr 1916, aged 77yrs. No update of next of kin was found in his war dossier.

Both Privates Samuel Brown and John Burrell embarked from Sydney on 19 Aug 1916 on HMAT A42 *Boorara*. Pte Brown was charged at sea on 22 Aug 1916, with “Failing to be on board at appointed time” and forfeited 4 days' pay. They disembarked at Plymouth 13 October 1916 and spent two months training at Bovington Camp in Dorset, before the 54th Btn embarked at Folkestone on the “*Princess Henrietta*” to France on 14 Dec 1916.

The reinforcements, including Ptes Brown and Burrell, joined the 54th Btn at Buire in Northern France on 24 Dec 1916. The 54th Btn had been in the front line, but were relieved on 21 Dec and spent the Christmas season 23-25 Dec resting, refitting, and cleaning up.



The 54th Btn's Unit Diary for 26 Dec states: *"Training commenced. Early morning parade at 7.15am devoted to physical exercises and running. Remainder of day to general brushing up. One hundred and ten partially trained reinforcements joined up. These are a fine stamp of men and fully equipped. They have been posted to the Companies and will take up duty with the platoons and receive individual attention during the training period."*

After enduring the coldest winter in 40 years in the Somme, the 54th joined the Allied pursuit of the Germans as they withdrew to the Hindenburg Line in early 1917. The 54th Btn relieved the 31st Btn in the front line from 20-24 Jan 1917 near Montauban, Somme district. Pte John Burrell reported sick on 18 Mar 1917 and did not return to the 54th Btn, having been transferred to the Australian Veterinary Hospital, Calais, on 12 May 1917.

During the Second Battle of Bullecourt the Australian 2nd Division, 5th & 6th Brigades, made an attempt to secure the fortified village of Bullecourt between 3-17 May. The 54th Unit diaries state:

"On the 11 May, the 54th Btn prepared for the front line and on 13 May, relieved the 53rd Btn in front line in front of Reincourt, in portion of Hindenburg line. They carried in rations for coming 24 hours and also three sand bags per man."

"15 May 1917 – During the early morning our front line and support trenches were subjected to a heavy bombardment from enemy artillery, also their minenwerfer and pineapple bombs. 'C' Company, at that time commanded by Captain AG Morris, came in for a severe grueling, being in a part of the Hindenburg Line where the trenches were very badly knocked about. 'B' Company, who were in support with two platoons on the sunken road in the rear, fared even worse, and our casualties were unfortunately heavy."

The 54th Btn repelled an attack by troops from the Imperial Prussian Guard and on 17 May the Germans had withdrawn from their positions. The capturing of the Bullecourt salient ensured that the Allied frontline was complete. However, this taking of a small, tactically useless village caused the loss of 7,000 Australian men and 10,000 German men.

General Birdwood sent the following congratulatory message to the 54th Btn on 17 May;

"Please convey to Major Lecky and all ranks of the 54th Btn and others of the Brigade who assisted, my congratulations on the excellent work they did in repelling with such heavy loss to the enemy the counter attack on our positions yesterday morning."

Pte Samuel Brown was wounded in action by being gassed on 15 May 1917 and received medical attention in various Casualty Clearing Stations before eventually being admitted to No 22 General Hospital. He was transferred from Calais on 4 Jun 1917 and admitted to 1st London General Hospital, Camberwell. In 1917 the hospital contained 231 beds for officers and 1,038 for enlisted men. The medical and nursing staff were seconded from St Bartholomew's Hospital.

Pte Brown was granted leave from 8-23 Aug 1917, but did not return until 25 Aug and was charged on 27 Aug of being *"AWL from 3.30pm 23.8.17 to 4pm 25.8.1917."* He received an admonishment from his superior officer and forfeited 3 days' pay. He may have returned to Scotland to visit his siblings during this leave. On 20 Nov 1917, he was again charged with being *"AWL from 6am 17.11.1917 to 9.30am 19.11.1917."* He received 10 days Field Punishment No 2, and forfeited 13 days' pay. Field Punishment No 2 consisted of heavy labouring duties and possibly by being restrained in fetters and handcuffs.

On 19 Dec 1917, Pte Brown returned to France and re-joined the 54th Btn on 25 Dec 1917.

"In early 1918, the capitulation of Tsarist Russia allowed the Germans to concentrate their strength on the Western Front, and they subsequently launched a major offensive. The strike came against the British southern flank, and as the Allies were pushed back towards the vital railhead at Amiens, the Australians were rushed from Flanders. Thrown into the line to stem the tide, the 54th mounted a strong

defensive action around Villers-Bretonneux during which its entire headquarters, including the battalion's commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel David McConaghy, were killed. In August, the Allies launched their own offensive – the Hundred Days Offensive – which ultimately brought the war to an end. For their actions during the fighting in Anvil Wood, around Peronne, in early September, two members of the 54th Battalion – Alexander Buckley and Arthur Hall – [1876 Pte. AH BUCKLEY, KIA 1 Sep 1918 & 2631 Corp. AC Hall, RTA 8 May 1919] received the Victoria Cross.

The medieval walled town, surrounded by an unfordable river, was heavily defended by machine-gun nests, and during the assault the battalion, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Norman Marshall, advanced through marshy ground over foot-bridges under fire while breaking into the position.

During late September and early October 1918, the battalion took part in the Battle of St. Quentin Canal, attacking at Bellicourt, which proved to be their final action of the war before they were withdrawn from the line. The Australian Corps had suffered heavy casualties during 1918, which they had been unable to replace. As a result, the Australian battalions were withdrawn from the line and reorganised in preparation for future operations. The 54th Battalion, as the most depleted battalion in the 14th Brigade, was chosen for amalgamation and was merged with the 56th Battalion on 11 October forming the "54th/56th Battalion". In response, the battalion's enlisted soldiers briefly went on strike in an effort to maintain their battalion identity, before complying with the order. Ultimately, the newly merged unit did not see any action before the war ended in November 1918. During the winter, the 54th/56th billeted at Charleroi, as the demobilisation process began. As its personnel were slowly repatriated back to Australia and its numbers dwindled, the amalgamated battalion was also merged with the rest of the 14th Brigade into one unit, with the 54th/56th Battalion disbanding on 10 April 1919. During the fighting, the 54th Battalion lost 544 killed in action or died on active service and 1,592 wounded.”
[[http://military.wikia.com/wiki/54th_Battalion_\(Australia\)](http://military.wikia.com/wiki/54th_Battalion_(Australia))]

Pte Samuel Brown embarked from France to England on 30 Apr 1919. He returned to Australia on the SS *Orita*, leaving England on 23 Jun 1919 and disembarked at Sydney on 9 Aug 1919. He was discharged on 23 Sep 1919 and received the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Pte John Burrell had returned to Australia due to illness on 24 Aug 1918 and disembarked at Melbourne. He died at the 11th Australian General Hospital, Caulfield on 21 Oct 1918, as a result of Myocarditis and Pulmonary Oedema. His wife was present at the time of his death and he was buried at the Coburg Cemetery on 22 Oct 1918.

After his return to Australia, Samuel Brown inserted the following IN MEMORIAM in *the Molong Argus* - 17 Oct 1919, p5:

*“BURRELL – In loving memory of Private John Burrell, a great mate, whom I expected to meet on my return, but, with sadness, found he had passed away in the Melbourne Hospital, October 21st. [1918]
No space of time, no lapse of years,
Can dim my dear friend's past;
A loving memory holds him dear,
And will unto the last.*

Inserted by his sincere friend, Private S Brown.”

The Molong Argus – 21 Nov 1919, p4, Cumnock, WELCOME HOME:

“Friday night last saw a very big assemblage at Leary's Hall, the occasion being the welcoming home of thirteen local lads who have done their bit for the Empire. The proceedings opened with the 'Welcome Home,' and as the brave lads marched into the hall the company rose and sang, 'Home, Sweet Home,' after which came the National Anthem.

Mr GH Bowhay (Amaroo Shire President), who occupied the chair, in a few appropriate words welcomed the guests of the evening back home again, and complimented them on their action on going to fight the Huns. He was very glad to see them back safe and sound. On behalf of the residents he then presented each one with an inscribed gold medal. The returned men present were Tprs W Cahill, RG Bellamy, A Fox, Corps WH Young, B Hart, L/Corps FT Meurant, C Weston, Ptes L Lentz, S Brown, JG Taylor, Tpr R Starr, Drivers TH Holman and CV Hodges. Medals were also provided for Ptes AV and FW Hart, who were not present.

After the presentation, the guests were entertained at a sumptuous spread, provided by the ladies with their customary liberality. Later, dancing was engaged in and kept going till about 8am, a most enjoyable time being spent.”

According to the 1930 Electoral Rolls (ER) for Calare/Orange, a Samuel Brown was living at 195 Summer Street and working as a builder. On 5 Jun 1940, he completed a statutory declaration saying that he had been attacked by 3 men in Orange about two years previously and robbed of his army discharge certificate, wallet and Food Relief Ticket and requested a new discharge certificate. In the 1943 ER for Calare/Orange, a Samuel Brown was living at 243 Summer Street and working as a labourer.

In his war dossier, there is a letter from the Repatriation Commission to say that Pte Samuel Brown, 2137, 54th Btn, died at Orange on 4 Jun 1944, apparently without any next of kin. He would have been 65yrs of age and is buried in the Orange Cemetery.

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Cumnock War Memorial Gates, Obley Street, Cumnock.