



Private Thomas Henry WEST **893 – “C” Company, 36th Battalion**

Born: Oct 1888, Yeoval, NSW.

Parents: John & Sarah West

Occupation: Labourer

District Connection: Yeoval, Wellington, Gilgandra.

Enlistment Date: 14 or 20 Jan 1916, Liverpool, Sydney.

Enlistment Age: 27yrs 3mths.

Embarkation: 13 May 1916, Sydney, *HMAT Beltana A72*

Served: France

Fate: KIA 21 Jan 1917, aged 28yrs

Buried: Cite Bonjean Military Cemetery, Armentières.

WW1 Honour Boards:

Australian National War Memorial;

Yeoval Roll of Honour;

Cumnock War Memorial Gates;

Memorial headstone Gilgandra Cemetery.

Biography

Thomas Henry West was born in October 1888 at Yeoval. He was the youngest child of John and Sarah Ann West.

John and Sarah Ann Miller were married at Orange on 11 May 1865. Sarah was the daughter of John Miller and Martha Packham.

John and Sarah had ten children: Eliza Matilda (Kerr) 1866-1960; John T 1867-1868; Amy Ada (O'Donald) 1871-1969; James Herbert 1873-1962; William George 1875-1954; Edith Anne (Naylor) 1878-1976; Alfred Arthur 1881-1969; Sydney (Sidney) Raymond 1883-1925; Elsie May (Hampton) 1885-1962; and Thomas Henry 1888-1917.

John and Sarah moved to Yeoval to live in the 1880s, where John worked as a Carrier. Yeoval was described in *the Wellington Times* – 22 Sep 1904, p3 as “...*This small town, which is on the Parkes road, 26 miles from Wellington, comprises an hotel, three small stores, a blacksmith's shop, a small hall, several private dwellings, a post office, and last, but by no means least, a provisional school...*” Mrs Sarah West was reported in the same newspaper in 1906 as running a small store selling groceries.

John West moved to Gilgandra, where he died on 11 Apr 1913, aged 71yrs. A son, Sidney West, also moved to Gilgandra to live. Sarah West was listed in the 1913 and 1916 Electoral Rolls for Macquarie/Yeoval as living in Yeoval with the occupation of storekeeper, with her son Arthur Alfred a farmer at ‘Wanabeen’ and Thomas Henry working as a labourer at Yeoval.

Thomas Henry West attended the Yeoval Public School and was mentioned in *the Wellington Times* – 30 Apr 1900, p8, as representing the Yeoval Public School in a cricket match against the Obley juveniles and defeating them by four wickets. T West scored 0 runs. However, Thomas developed into a good cricket player over the years, and *the Wellington Times* – 9 Apr 1914, p6, reported T West as being presented with gold medals for the Best Batting Average and Best Catching Average. He played as a forward in the Yeoval football club over a number of years and also played tennis. *The Molong Express & Western District Advertiser* – 9 May 1908, p10, reported Mr T West as winning the Gent's prize at a Euchre (card game) party, held under the auspices of the newly-formed Labor League.

Thomas West travelled to Liverpool, Sydney, to enlist in the Australian Imperial Forces (AIF) and was sworn in on 20 Jan 1916, along with Arthur Brown, David Byrne and brothers Henry and Leslie Cooper.

They were all incorporated into the 36th Battalion. Thomas's medical examination reported him as being 5 feet 8½ inches tall, had brown hair, grey eyes, a fair complexion and was of the Church of England religious denomination. His mother, Mrs Sarah West of Yeoval, was listed as his next of kin.

The Molong Express & Western District Advertiser – 22 Apr 1916, p8, reported: “Messrs. AJ Miller and John Whittaker, of Yeoval, brought into Molong in their motors on Saturday last, to catch the train, several soldiers who had been on final leave— Ptes D Byrnes, T West and A Brown (Yeoval) and H and L Cooper (of Obley)”.

They all embarked on 13 May 1916 from Sydney on HMAT Beltana A72, sailing via Colombo, Cape Town, South Africa, and Dakar, Senegal, taking ten weeks to reach Devonport, England on 10 Jul 1916.

“Pte. TH West, a Yeoval soldier, writing to Miss M Whittaker, of ‘Pacific Valley,’ [Mary Whittaker, daughter of John & Hannah Whittaker, ‘Pacific Valley’, Yeoval] from England, describes his journey from Australia, and says ... [Ink blobs blur out most of the sentence] he was in hospital on two occasions, suffering from measles and the mumps.

Referring to a death on the transport and the burial of the body in the Indian Ocean, he says:— There was a platform erected at the side of the boat, and the corpse was wrapped in canvas with a Union Jack put over it. The body was then placed on the platform, and the burial service was read. A volley was then fired, the ‘Last Post’ sounded by the bugler, and the body was slipped over the side into the water. We had seven deaths on the trip. Six of the bodies were buried at sea, and the other was taken ashore and buried at South Africa.

Pte West says that the troops were treated splendidly at Cape Town, whence a battle-cruiser escorted them on the journey, and later on a battleship and four destroyers assisted to convoy the four transports, to protect them from submarines and guide them through the mine fields. The transport Pte West was on carried 1700 troops and 35,000 tons of cargo.

The soldiers disembarked at Dover, and travelled 800 miles by train to Amesbury, whence they marched three miles to their camp, which resembled a city, containing as it did 100,000 men. The camp was well guarded by aeroplanes, which flew overhead almost continuously. Pte West did not expect to remain long at the camp, as an officer had said that a number of troops would soon be taken to France.

Evidently the training at the camp was hard – We are just like camels now, with full web equipment in. It gets heavy after awhile. It does not get dark here till 10pm, so we have plenty of time in which to drill. But I am still going strong, and starting to feel just the same as usual.”

During the voyage, Pte Thomas West was promoted to Lance Corporal on 30 May 1916. He reverted to the rank of Private on 7 Jun 1916 at his own request. His Charge Sheet had only one entry, and that was for being “Absent without leave from afternoon parade” at Liverpool, NSW, on 14 Feb 1916. He received a 10/- fine (forfeit of 1 days pay) and his general character was stated to be “good”.

The 36th Btn was part of the 9th Brigade of the 3rd Australian Division and spent four months training on the Salisbury Plains. The troops travelled by three trains from Amesbury station to Southampton before embarking at Southampton on 22 Nov 1916 and disembarking on 23 Nov at Le Havre. Le Havre is located about 50km west of Rouen, at the mouth of the River Seine, Upper Normandy, France.

On 24 Dec 1916 the 36th Btn left Le Harve by train and travelled to Bailleul, northern France, on 25 Nov. The 36th Btn left for Armentières 28 Nov in 16 motor lorries and reported in billets there. The 36th Btn War Diary reports that “C” and “D” companies were billeted at Blue Factory, Rue Jules Le Blue. Troops were not allowed to congregate or wander round billets during daylight, as this practice was likely to draw shell fire. Steel helmets were to be worn by all ranks proceeding to Armentières.

On 4-5 Dec, each of the 36th Btn companies proceeded to the front line to relieve 34th Btn. Heavy artillery bombardment from both sides occurred on 6 Dec. From 7-11 Dec the 36th Btn held the left sector of the 9th Brigade defence. Their duties were to patrol No Man's Land, repairing the front line and strengthening defence. Casualties were 7 killed, 4 wounded. They were relieved by the 34th Btn on 11 Dec and returned to their billets at Armentières.

The 36th Btn again relieved the 34th Btn on the left sector of 9th Brigade defence of the Armentières Houplines sector on 18 Dec when heavy snow storms were occurring. They returned to billets at

Armentières on 23-24 Dec where they were busy until 8 Jan 1917 carrying out repairs and undergoing training. On 18-19 Dec platoons of each company went into the Houplines to relieve 40th Btn.

The 36th Btn Unit diary entry for 21 Jan: "*Colonel Simpson and Lieut. McGrath killed at top of Cambridge Avenue. Very little shelling today.*" However the Intelligence report in the same diary states "*At 3.10pm enemy sent 34 shrapnel & 6 HE (high explosive) shells over considerable area, inflicting 3 casualties.*"

The 36th Btn Unit diary entry for 22 Jan: "*Enemy start light shelling at 10am. At 2pm locality 16 & 17 was heavily bombarded also locality 14, which ended in a box barrage being put on at 4-10pm and an attack by the enemy from the pimple salient. They entered our trenches but were only in 10 minutes. Our casualties were 11 killed, 36 wounded and 4 missing. It is quite possible the 4 missing have been buried by Minnies [Minenwerfer mortar shell].*" The list of men killed in action at the end of the unit's monthly report actually lists 7 soldiers KIA on 21 Jan and 8 KIA on 22 Jan.

Pte Thomas Henry West was one of seven soldiers killed from "C" company on 21 Jan 1917. He was aged 28yrs. He was most likely killed by a shell burst and was buried at the Cite Bonjean Military Cemetery, Armentières, France.

The Wellington Times – 26 Feb 1917, p2, Local Jottings:

"Private T H West, who was farewelled at Yeoval about 12 months ago, was reported killed in France some little time ago. A memorial service was held in the Church of England, Yeoval, on Sunday, 18th February, by the Rev. C. W. Leavers, which was attended by over 300 people, as well as the mother, two sisters, and a cousin of the deceased soldier. Mr and Mrs White played the organ and violin, the music being in keeping with the solemn service. The Rev. gentleman delivered a most touching and impressive address, which brought tears to the eyes of both men and women. This young soldier was very highly esteemed in Yeoval, and his loss was deeply regretted by the whole community.

Pte Thomas West was the first of the Yeoval/Obley soldiers who enlisted in the AIF on 20 Jan 1916, to die. Two others were also killed in action: Corp Henry Cooper – 723, 36th Btn, was KIA 7 Jun 1917; and Pte Leslie Cooper – 725, 36th Btn, was KIA 12 Oct 1917. Two returned to Australia: Pte Arthur Brown – 708, 36th Btn & 3rd Machine Gun Company, RTA 10 Apr 1919, and Pte David Byrne – 1806, 36th Btn, RTA 14 Feb 1919.

Thomas West's elder brother, Sidney Raymond West died on 10 Jul 1925, aged 42yrs, and was buried near their father's (John West) grave, in the Anglican portion of the Gilgandra Cemetery. A monument was also erected for Thomas:



Sarah Anne West died on 24 Nov 1933, age 87yrs, at Cowra, and was buried in the Anglican portion of the Orange Cemetery. She may have been living with her daughter, Eliza Matilda Kerr, of 'Blair Athol', Woodstock, near Cowra.

Pte Thomas West: Listed in the "Yeoval Central School Centenary 1883-1983", book, edited by James Coleborne, 1983. Photo p35 of the Yeoval WW1 Roll of Honour which was set in a Rotunda in the school grounds; Mentioned on p157 in "The Crossroads" by Joan Marriott, 1993; and Profiled on p742 in "Wellington's Finest" by Trevor Munro and Graeme Hosken, 2005.



Above: The 36th Battalion at Newcastle, NSW, 1916. (www.google.com.au)

Below left: Pte Thomas West Grave, Cite Bonjean Military Cemetery, Armentières, France.
(Photo courtesy of Peter Tremain)

Below right: WW1 Yeoval Roll of Honor, Memorial Hall, Yeoval. (Photo Val McKenzie)

