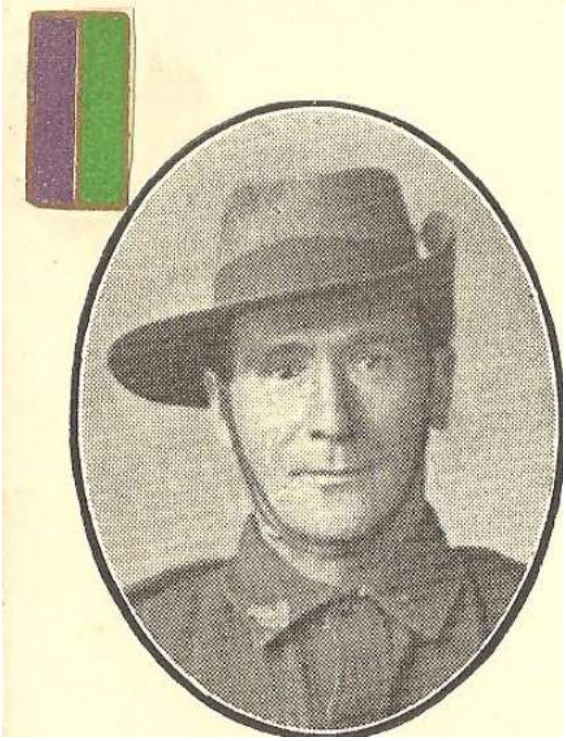


Private John BURRELL

2134 – 54th Battalion & Australian Veterinary Hospital

Born: 1875, Spring Hill, Reg. Orange, NSW.
Parents: William & Catherine Burrell
NoK: Wife – Margaret Burrell

Occupation: Labourer

District Connection: Eurimbla, Cumnock

Enlistment Date: 18 Mar 1916

Enlistment Age: 41yrs (stated 43yrs 5mths on his records)

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

Served: France

Fate: DOD 21 Oct 1918, aged 43yrs

Buried: Coburg Cemetery, Victoria.

Honour Boards: National War Museum, Canberra: Wellington War Memorial; Cumnock War Memorial Gates.

Biography

John Burrell was one of twelve children born to Catherine (nee Gavin) and William Thomas Burrell. The children were: Albert 1868-1940; Susan 1870-1900; Martha 1871-1919; William 1872-1952; Mary Ann 1874-1940; John 1875-1918; Charlotte 1877-1934; Arthur 1879-1903; Thomas 1881-1884; Amos 1883-1884; Jane 1885-1959; & Jessie May 1888-1954.

William Thomas Burrell married Catherine Gavin in 1867, registered at Richmond, NSW. The Burrell family lived near Orange until the 1890's when they moved to Curra Creek, a farming community near Wellington.

The Wellington Times – 28 Aug 1899, p3, Curra Creek, reported that John Burrell suffered blood poisoning after helping his father's dog. The dog had been poisoned with a bait from a neighbouring farm and bit his finger. A doctor was called after he suffered "convulsive fits", but he recovered soon after.

On 26 Sep 1906, aged 31yrs, John Burrell married Margaret Munro at Catombals. 'Maggie' was the daughter of John and Elspeth Munro. It was a double wedding with John's younger sister, Jane, marrying Hugh Munro, at the Munro's property at Catombals. John and Margaret then went to live at Suntop. Around 1907 they moved to Catombals. The couple had three sons: Percy 1908-1977; Leslie 1911-1939; and John 1915-1916.

The Wellington Times - 10 Sep 1908, p3, reported that John Burrell had met with a painful accident while out rabbit-shooting with a pea-rifle. The rifle went off accidently, and the bullet struck the calf of his leg, coming out near his ankle. The Molong Express & Western District Advertiser – 17 Oct 1908, p12, reported*: "Mr J Burrell, of Catombals, underwent a serious operation at the local hospital during the week, and we are pleased to learn that he is progressing favourably."*

The Australian Electoral Roll for 1913, Macquarie/Two-Mile, have John & Margaret Burrell residing at Ringwood, and John's occupation as a farmer. Catherine Burrell, John's mother, died at Curra Creek 1 Jul 1915, aged 73yrs.

John (known as Jack) Burrell enlisted in the AIF at Cumnock on 18 Mar 1916. His medical examination was attended by Dr Ivie Aird, at Cumnock. He was 5ft 11½ins tall, had grey eyes, light brown hair, a fair complexion, two marks of a pea rifle bullet through calf of the left leg, a small round scar on inner side of his right knee, and was of the Presbyterian religious denomination. His next of kin was his wife Margaret Burrell, Eurimbla, Cumnock. It is not known why he stated his age as 43yrs instead of 41yrs.

The Molong Express & Western District Advertiser – 1 Apr 1916, p9:

"A farewell evening was tendered Mr John Burrell this week, at Avondale, on the eve of his departure to enter the Dubbo camp."

The Molong Argus – 14 Jul 1916, p4:

"On Monday last a large number of district residents gathered at the Shire Chambers to say farewell to Privates J Burrell, F Meurant and J Brown [should be S for Stanley Brown, all members of the 54th Btn], *who were home on final leave.*

Other newspapers reported that Privates Ferdinand Meurant and John Burrell were also entertained at Catombal and presented with a set of pipes in a case, before returning to Bathurst camp.

Pte John Burrell was called home again in early August, as his youngest son, John, was seriously ill in Nurse Gilmore's private hospital, at Cumnock. John (Jnr) died on 9 August, aged 9 months, and was buried at the Cumnock cemetery the following day. Just 9 days later, on 19 Aug 1916, Pte John Burrell, along with his mates 2191 Pte Fred Meurant and 2137 Pte Samuel Brown, set sail on HMAS A42 *Boorara* for England, with the 4th reinforcements for the 54th Battalion.

L to R back: 2132 WH Bowers, 2136 AE Brown, & 2295 JH Roe. Front: 2134 John Burrell & 2295 Ferdinand Meurant. 1916, before sailing.

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. Pte John Burrell was charged with "being out of bounds" on 21 Dec 1910 and had to forfeit 8 days' pay. The reinforcements 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.

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 13 Mar 1917 with Trench Fever and did not return to the 54th Btn, having been classified as permanently unfit by the Medical Board and was transferred for duty at the Australian Veterinary Hospital (AVH), Calais, on 12 May 1917.

"In France, all the horses needed by the ANZACs were supplied by Britain which also supplied horses to Belgium and 6,000 to the Americans when they arrived in 1917. By 1917, Britain had over a million horses and mules in service, but harsh conditions, especially during winter, resulted in heavy losses, particularly amongst the Clydesdale horses, the main breed used to haul the guns.

An Australian Veterinary Hospital horse float used for conveying sick horses. E04468 AWM.

Disease was a major issue for horses at the front, with equine influenza, ringworm, sand colic, sores from fly bites, and anthrax among the illnesses that affected them. Many horses died as a result of exhaustion, drowning, becoming mired in mud and falling in shell holes.

Britain lost over 484,000 horses, one horse for every two men."

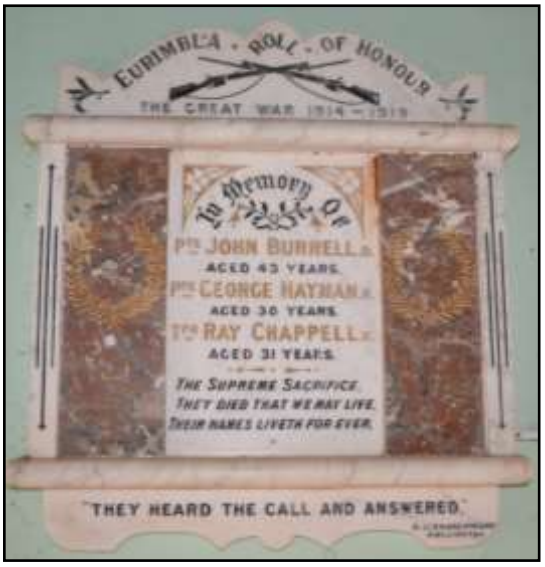
http://baroquehorse.com.au/100-years-for-the-anzac-horses-in-war/

"The AVH was established in Calais in Apr 1917 and could accommodate 1,250 horses and had an establishment of seven officers and 459 men. 25,000 animals were treated during the eighteen months of its existence. In a gas attack on the Division on 24 April about 250 horses were lost. Apart from battle casualties there was little sickness in the horses in the Division. During this offensive, the Mobile Veterinary Section was constantly on the move as the Division moved forward. Animal wastage resulted from animals killed in fighting or having to be destroyed for a variety of reasons. During the greater part of the service of the AIF in France battle casualties were from shell and bomb wounds and from poisonous gases."
(Australian Veterinary History Record- https://ses.library.usyd.edu.au/bitstream/ 2123/922/1/avhs_045.pdf)

Pte John Burrell had leave in the UK from 3 Oct-13 Oct 1917. His friend, Pte Fred Meurant in a letter to Miss E Reilly, of Cumnock, from England on 4 June, and commented: *"I had a letter from Mrs Burrell recently. Jack is in the Veterinary Corps, doctoring sick horses. He will be quite a horsey man when he gets home."*

He was admitted to No 10 Canadian Hospital at Calais, sick on 18 Jun 1918 and transferred to England for admission to 1st Australian Hospital at Harefield on 11 Jul 1918. He was diagnosed with Valvular Heart Disease and Aortic Insufficiency on 14 Jul 1918 and his medical history stated that he had suffered from Rheumatic Fever at 15yrs of age and had spent 21 weeks in bed. He had been well and doing all work in France until 2 months previously when he got a heavy cold, pain over his heart and shortness of breath. His age on the medical report stated he was 48yrs old. He was found permanently unfit for all duty and embarked per HT *Medic* from Devonport on 24 Aug to return to Melbourne on 11/12 Oct 1918.

Pte John Burrell was admitted to No 11 Australian General Hospital, Caufield, Victoria. His wife Margaret and brother-in-law, Robert Munro, went to Melbourne to be with him. John Burrell died, aged 43yrs, from Myocarditis and Pulmonary Oedema on 21 Oct 1918 at the 11th Australian General Hospital, Caufield, Victoria.



Pte John Burrell was accorded a military funeral and was buried at Coburg Cemetery, Coburg on 22 Oct 1918.
A memorial plaque hangs in St Paul's Church, Eurimbla, honouring the three soldiers from the district who made the Supreme Sacrifice.

Newspaper reports after his death state that Pte Burrell suffered from rheumatism and had been gassed, but his war records do not mention either of these two conditions.

William Thomas Burrell, John's father, died on 27 Nov 1921 at his son's (William) residence at Gilgandra, aged 77yrs.

Margaret Burrell moved to Orange to live and died in 1965, aged 88yrs. Ms June Burrell, a daughter of Percy and Nita Burrell, still lives in Cumnock.

Pte John Burrell is profiled on page 108 in "Wellington's Finest" by Trevor Munro & Graeme Hosken, 2005.

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