

# Herbert William Homer

2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant

26<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Battalion

7<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance



Herbert (Bert) William Homer, born in Kington in 1894, was the second son of Benjamin and Elizabeth Homer. He was the older brother of Harry Homer, who sadly died of jaundice at Gallipoli in 1915. Bert attended Lady Hawkins' School but was with his family when they emigrated to Australia in October 1910. Benjamin had travelled to Australia in advance of the family and established a home for them in Station Road, Indooroopilly, a suburb of Brisbane, Queensland. The rest of the family followed and having sailed non-stop from London to Australia aboard the SS Norseman, the adventurers were reunited in Brisbane on 21st December 1910. Australian immigration records list a large Homer family arriving consisting of Elizabeth, who at the time was 43, Lauderdale (17), Herbert (16), Harry (15), Ernest (14), Fred (12), Edna (9), Hilda (4) and Master Jack Homer aged two. It is unclear if Bert attended any further schooling in Indooroopilly but Australian records do show he subsequently found work as a Clerk for the local Queensland Railway Company.

Britain declared war on Germany on 4<sup>th</sup> August 1914. Subsequently there was a call to arms dispatched to Imperial forces across the world. Herbert rose to the challenge and on 2nd September 1914, at the age of 21, he took one pace forward, signed on the dotted line and attested. Herbert was called up by the Australian army on the 22nd February 1915. He joined the Australian Army Medical Corps, 7th Field

Ambulance, 'A' Section, as Private 3509 Homer. On 24th of May 1915 the Hospital embarked aboard the HMAT Ascanius in Brisbane, bound for Egypt, where they undertook training for their inevitable entrance into the war at Gallipoli. With training complete they were advanced to Gallipoli, landing on 13<sup>th</sup> of September 1915. Here they immediately established their Hospital at the notorious Waldens Point, just above the ANZAC beaches. Lance Corporal Homer was employed as a Waggon Orderly, whose duties included forming stretcher parties employed in transporting wounded soldiers from the front lines. Conditions on the peninsular were dire and illness was rife. Those fortunate enough not to be injured often succumbed to disease. On one occasion Bert benefitted from this situation when he was temporarily advanced to Corporal while his superior, a Sergeant Bell, recovered from one such bout of illness. You will recall that



*ANZAC Cove 1915, photo by Lieutenant Colonel Millard*

Bert's brother Harry was also in the 7<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance and that he sadly died of jaundice, an illness of the liver, while at Gallipoli. It would appear that Bert too was afflicted with jaundice, an illness which necessitated him being evacuated from Waldens Point down to the ANZAC beach hospital on 18<sup>th</sup> December 1915. Such was the severity of his illness, he was further evacuated to a hospital on the island of Mudros, south west of the peninsula, where he recovered his health and was able to re-join his unit on the 26th December. Fred was put on light duties, only returning to full duty on 12th January 1916. He was again advanced, this time to temporary Sergeant Clerk for 'A' Section following the previous incumbent Sergeant Bailey, being evacuated through illness.

Early in 1916 the 7<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance were evacuated from the horrors of Gallipoli and initially relocated back to Alexandria in Egypt. On 14th March 1916 the unit reembarked and sailed for France, landing at Marseilles just five days later. From here they made their way up through France, heading toward the Western Front. On 29<sup>th</sup> May 1916 Bert's position as Staff Sergeant Clerk was confirmed. Herbert's career in the Australian army was exemplary and, on 18th June 1916, he was recommended for the Military Medal (MM) for his efforts in the Gallipoli campaign. The included picture of Herbert, resplendent in befeathered headdress, appeared in local Brisbane newspapers, lauding his achievement, his parents must have been very proud.



Herbert's Military Medal citation reads as follows:

*'Constant and unfailing devotion to duty as a bearer, Gallipoli Peninsula, from 13/09/15 to evacuation'*

And again, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1916, he was further recommended for the Meritorious Service Medal (MSM). On that occasion the citation read:

*'This NCO has done consistently good work since the unit arrived in France. He has been acting as Senior Sergeant Clerk since January 1916 and has been untiring, most conscientious in carrying out his duties, which were most arduous during the large number of evacuations during the fighting on the SOMME'.*

It is not clear whether Bert was actually awarded the MSM but we do know he did receive the MM, his award notified in the London Gazette dated 27th October 1916 which reads:

*"His Majesty the KING has been graciously pleased to award the Military Medal for bravery in the field to the undermentioned Non-Commissioned Officer: — 3509 Sergeant H W Homer Aust AMC."*

Bert officially received his Military Medal on 15th November 1916.

In March 1917 the 7th Field Ambulance were attached to the 26th Australian Infantry Battalion. The battalion, raised in April 1915, comprised men from the Queensland and Tasmania areas. Herbert's meteoric rise through the ranks continued and, on the 7th April 1917, he was commissioned in the field and promoted to 2nd Lieutenant. The battalion fought extensively on the Western Front and on 3rd May 1917 were involved in the second attempt to breach the Hindenburg Line defences around Bullecourt. With this in mind the 7th Field Ambulance joined with other Divisional Field Ambulances (9 in total) to support the offensive. On the day of the advance 7th Field Ambulance were located at a small village called Vaulx-Vraucourt about 4 miles from Bapaume. Casualties from the offensive were high and while medics fought to save the lives of wounded soldiers their Casualty Clearing Stations and Advanced Dressing Stations were constantly under threat of



enemy shellfire. On 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1917, while undertaking his duties, Herbert was seriously injured. Caught by shellfire, a piece of shrapnel tore through the Supra Clavicular region of his upper shoulder. His injury was classified as serious and he was immediately removed from the front and admitted to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Advanced Casualty Clearing Station. Almost immediately he was further evacuated, to the 6th Army Field Hospital, and then moved still further back toward the French coast. On 17th May he was admitted to 2nd Hospital in Abberville and later, on the 20<sup>th</sup> May 1916, he was embarked aboard the Hospital Ship (HS) Mantilly Castle at Le Havre bound for England. Bert's smooth and efficient transition to safety continued with him being admitted into the 3rd General Hospital in Wandsworth, London on the same day. Initially he made good progress and was removed from the seriously ill list. However, such were his injuries, he did eventually succumb to them and at 3pm on **1<sup>st</sup> June 1917** Herbert William Homer died of wounds sustained.

On 5<sup>th</sup> June 1917, Herbert was buried with full military honours, at the Australian Military Burial Ground, Brookwood Military Cemetery, Pirbright in Surrey, grave reference XI.E.8. Brookwood Cemetery was established in 1917 as a final resting place for Commonwealth soldiers, killed by the war, who died in Britain. A band and firing party were in attendance and Herbert's younger brother Ernest was one of the pallbearers, as was a lady called Violet Mills, who was recorded as a friend. The coffin was covered in the Australian flag and surmounted by floral tributes. Rather fittingly, at the end of the service the Last Post was sounded. Like his brother Harry, Herbert's death is commemorated on the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, New South Wales, panel 107.

Bert had written a last will and testament, while in the field, on 1st May 1917. His will stated that upon his death all his worldly goods should go to his mother in Indooroopilly. He additionally required that his collection of English Birds Eggs should go to a Mr George Gall Junior back in Brisbane. He also made a bequest of £50 to go to Miss Violet Mills of Cheltenham, England. The identity, and connection of Violet Mills to Bert is unknown, but £50 in today's money equates to about £2000.

Back home in Indooroopilly the family mourned the death of their second son. Herbert's personal effects were sent to his mother and on 23rd July 1917 and she received a very special parcel, Herbert's Military Medal. Elizabeth applied for a death pension for Herbert and in August 1917 she was awarded a pension of £1 per fortnight. This to go with the 10 shillings awarded for Harry's death. For his bravery and sacrifice Herbert was awarded the 1914/15 Star, Victory medal and British War medal.

It is worth mentioning at this point that Australian records concerning the 1<sup>st</sup> World War are particularly extensive and accessible at the National Archives of Australia website. An incredible amount of detail is available at the 'Discovering ANZACS' area of the website and reveal how the Homer brothers fared during the conflict.

## **Lauderdale Homer**

Bert's older brother, served in the 1<sup>st</sup> Herefordshire Territorials for four years prior to him leaving Kington. Lauderdale states his reason for leaving was because of the families move to Australia. Consequently, when Australia declared war on the Axis forces, Lauderdale was one of the first to sign up, on 21<sup>st</sup> August 1914, at the age of twenty-one. He joined the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion as Private, 104 Homer, but his military service was short-lived. Two weeks after enlistment he was discharged as medically unfit. On the 11<sup>th</sup> April 1918 he married Marjorie Ella Hooper. He worked as a Buildings and Health Inspector and died, in Redcliffe, Queensland, on 12<sup>th</sup> March 1973. Lauderdale was 80 years old.

## **Ernest Thomas Homer**

Private 15750 Homer enlisted on the 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1916 in Brisbane. He was 19½ years old. He worked as a Clerk and prior to enlisting had completed three years compulsory army training. Like his brothers he joined the 7<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance, Army Medical corps. He embarked aboard the HMAT Marathon on the 27<sup>th</sup> October 1916 and sailed for Plymouth arriving on the 9<sup>th</sup> January 1917. He first entered France with his unit on the 1<sup>st</sup> February 1917 and was sent to Etaples Military Hospital, arriving on the 26<sup>th</sup> February. Less than a month later, on the 15<sup>th</sup> March, he was shipped back to England suffering from Pleurisy. It appears he stayed in England from then onwards and was finally sent back to Australia on the 13<sup>th</sup> March 1918 for discharge. You will recall Ernest was at the funeral of his brother Herbert at Woodbrook Military Cemetery on June 1917. Ernest was issued with the Victory and British War medals and finally discharged from military service on the 24<sup>th</sup> March 1918. He married Mary Iveson Schofield and went back to his original job as a clerk. Later Ernest was to become an accountant and worked virtually up to his death on the 5<sup>th</sup> November 1960 in Warrambol, Victoria, he was 63 years old.

## **Alfred Charles Homer**

Alfred enlisted into the 5<sup>th</sup> General Service Regiment on 13<sup>th</sup> July 1918 and became Trooper, 63995 Homer. He was two months short of his 20<sup>th</sup> birthday and he too had completed a form of National Service in the Citizens Force which had prepared him for military service. Alfred left Darwin on the 14<sup>th</sup> September 1918, bound for the Suez, where he arrived on 28<sup>th</sup> October. Unbeknown to him, he joined the conflict virtually at its end. He served all his time in Egypt and was due for demobilisation in July 1920. He requested to be demobbed to England where it appears his family planned to return. The family had passage booked to leave Australia on the 28<sup>th</sup> April 1920 and desired for Alfred to meet them in England. Despite Alfred having employment arranged in England his request to demob to England was refused and he was returned to Australian soil. Alfred was finally discharged on the 7<sup>th</sup> July 1920 and

went back to his original job as a Civil Servant clerk. He died on 24<sup>th</sup> October 1950 in Queensland, he was just 51.

It is unclear if the whole family did return to England. It seems unlikely since Elizabeth, their mother, died in Indooroopilly on the 25<sup>th</sup> July 1921, aged 54. Records do indicate that Benjamin, accompanied by Jack and Hilda, did return in late 1924 and stayed at 35 Church Street, Kington. They returned to Australia on 24<sup>th</sup> February 1925 bound for Brisbane. No records exist of them ever returning. Benjamin George Homer died in Brisbane on 16<sup>th</sup> June 1946, he was 82.

In spite of the Homer family being so far from the fighting they did their bit for their mother country. Five of Benjamin and Elizabeth's sons answered the Empire's 'call to arms'. Two, Harry and Herbert, were destined never to see Australian soil again, but their sacrifice will for ever be remembered in Kington. Long may they rest in peace.

