

WASS, 239 Sergeant William MM MiD

239 Sergeant William Wass MM MiD

1st Sherwood Foresters

2nd Battalion AIF

54th Battalion AIF

By Robert Simpson

In his Australian Imperial Force Attestation Paper, William stated he was 30 years and 10 months old on 21st August 1914, which meant he was born in October 1883 in Ambaston, Derbyshire, England. He must have reduced his age by a few years, as a previous British service record stated he was born in March 1881, and he is documented in the 1881 census. He was a son to Germain Wass and Harriett Mellor, and was one of nine or more siblings to them. Germain had been born in 1849 in Windley, Derbyshire and Harriett had been born in Wirksworth, Derbyshire in 1852. Germain's parents had also come from the Derbyshire area. Germain and Harriett had been married 1869 in Derby. In the 1881 English census, they were living at Yew Tree farm in Windley, Derbyshire and Germain was a farm labourer. By the 1891 census, they had moved to Ambaston, Elvaston, Derbyshire, England, where Germain was an Agricultural Labourer and William was a Scholar. (In about half of the records his name is spelt German). They were still there in the 1901 census, but German's occupation was Waggoner for farm.



Yew Tree Farm Cottage

William signed a Short Service Attestation Form on 1st February 1900 for the Derbyshire Regiment as Private 6505. It was for 7 years with the Colours and 5 years in Reserve. On the form, he stated he was a labourer of 18 years and 11 months, a British Subject who had lived at home, was not an apprentice and was single. His description was 5 foot 5 inches tall, weighed 123 pounds, had a chest measurement of 33½ to 35½ inches, and was of fresh complexion with hazel eyes and dark brown hair. Church of England was his religious denomination. He had no distinctive marks. The Medical officer certified him fit on the same day and the Commanding Officer appointed him to the 45th on that day. William was posted to the 1st Battalion on 27th May 1900. He was granted 1 pence Good Service Pay on 1st February 1902 and he was permitted to extend his service to 8 years with the Colours on 1st April 1904. On 23rd September 1904, he was appointed Lance Corporal and granted Class I Service Pay. William was granted 2 good conduct badges on 1st February 1905. He was appointed to Paid Lance Corporal on 13th February 1905, but reverted to Private at his own request on 6th June 1905. William was posted to the Depot as Private on 19th December 1905. He reverted to Class II Service Pay at 5 pence per day on completion of a Classification Course. On 31st January 1908, he transferred on termination of his period of engagement. William re-engaged as Private on 26th August 1911 in the Army Reserve, with the same number and rank at Derby (a

record of which was recorded by the Paymaster), but was struck off for Absence having failed to render a Life Certificate for the months of September and December 1912, on 16th January 1913.

Army Form B 178 shows his medical history. He was examined on 1st February 1900 at Derby by a Medical officer who was a Surgeon Captain. He was born at Ambaston Derby, was an 18 year old labourer, height 5 foot 3 inches, weight 123 pounds, chest measurement 33½ to 35½ inches physical development good and no small pox marks. He also had no other vaccination marks in either arm, although he said he was vaccinated at infancy. William had no defects or congenital marks or marks showing previous disease. He was re-vaccinated on 15th March 1900, with three in the left arm, the result of which was "perfect".

His Military History Sheet showed his service at home and abroad and included: Home 1/2/1900 to 26/5/1900, South Africa 27/5/1900 to 7/9/1902, China 8/9/1902 to 6/12/1904, Straits Settlements 7/12/1904 to 1/10/1905 and Home 2/10/05. He had a 3rd Class certificate of education (the date of which is illegible). His campaigns were South Africa from 1899 to 1902. From that, the medals he was entitled to were Queens South Africa medal with Cape Colony and Orange Free State, and Transvaal, and the Kings South Africa medal with clasps 1901 and 1902. William listed his next of kin as Father German, Mother Harriett and Brother Arthur of Ambaston near Derby. The 1st Battalion Notts & Derbyshire Regiment were already in South Africa, so he was sent there as a reinforcement. They were involved in most of the major battles and he would have faced the long hard marches and privations of that campaign.

The rest of his records have been damaged from bomb and fire damage that occurred in WW2, but parts are still readable. A letter sent to the Regimental Paymaster at Lichfield said "In view of the circumstances mentioned in Minute II, the man has been struck off strength for Absence." It was noted and returned by Records in No. 6 District. Another note, stamped 24th January 1913, says "The attached Army Form D443 for No 6505 Pte W. Wass, Section D, Army Reserve, Notts & Derbyshire Regt," and the rest has been destroyed. Another note headed "The officer i/c Records No. 6 District", reads "In reference to your Min I, I beg to state that Wass rendered a life certificate on the 4th of June last, from "Moor Bridge, Chellaston, Derbys, and a Money Order was consequentially issued to him, at that address, on the 1st July last which was a period of over four months after he had apparently" ... Most of the rest is destroyed, but it also says "he remains shown "struck off for absence" in my Pay List." Another note also said that he had supplied a Life Certificate for the months of September and December 1912. An official form is also in his records stating he had failed to supply Life Certificates and it was recorded in the Regimental Books of the No. 6 District on 31st January 1913. Another damaged record notes something about him getting Class I service pay having (passed?) musketry on 23rd September 1904. The regiment he was in was also known as the Sherwood Foresters.

For some unknown reason, his pay book is also with his records. It shows that Private 6505 William Wass attested with the Notts & Derbyshire Regiment on 28th January 1900 at age 18 and 11/12 years. His pay was 1 shilling, with proficiency pay of 6 pence and clothing allowance of 3 pence. Nothing else in the book is filled in, including his will.

A certificate showed he was at Roy Herb Hospital at Woolwich on 14th October 1905. He was 23 years old, had served for 5 years and 9 months, he was admitted to the hospital on 1st October and transferred on the 14th. He had dysentery and was transferred for further treatment. Another record shows that on 28th July 1905 in Singapore, he had dysentery and a change of climate was recommended. In London on 14th December 1905, he was discharged to duty.

A list of transfer documents shows he was posted to a Battalion of the Notts & Derbyshire Regiment on 7th March 1900, to the 4th Battalion in March 1900 and to Army Reserve on 1st March 1908. Different sheets were marked as being sent with the postings, but some of the record is not clear due to water damage.

His hospital admission record is also water damaged and parts are hard to read. Up to 27th March 1900, he had had no admissions. He embarked on SS Wakool on 8th September 1902 and had no admissions. William was admitted sometime in 1903, after arriving on 8th October 1902 in Hong Kong, with a note that "Cause unknown, probably error in diet & chill, disease once treated by purgatives, & tonics." He was also admitted on 12th April 1904 in Hong Kong for an examination. Unfortunately the rest of the words are too faint to read, except for the last word "fit". At an unknown place, from 24th July 1904 to 14th August 1904, he had dysentery. The notes say

“infection, not severe, mag sulph etc.” The next line says Transferred SS “Avoca”. He boarded it on 27th November 1904 with dysentery, and was convalescing with diet and Ipecac. Again, he was transferred on 5th December 1904, arriving at Singapore on 12th December 1904. He was admitted there on 12th July 1905 with dysentery, which appears severe and he was invalided to Woolwich, arriving there on 11th October 1905, and then to Millbank S.W. on 14th October, where he was admitted with dysentery from there 19th December 1905. The report says “Severe. Stools now well formed, bowels regular. No mucus or blood. Somewhat anaemic still. Is on food & tonics & rectal injections of AgHO₃. Full diet. Convalescent. Released for furlough. He was then on duty. The entry on that line is faint for the dates which could be November to December 1904 or 1907. The remarks say: Bed. Plain bulk diet. Opium 1 grain over 4 hours. Then fish diet. No drugs. Recovery. Man now only has one motion a day. Has marked rectal stricture.”

A Company Conduct Sheet for the Regiment of Sherwood Foresters has a handwritten entry at the top saying “sheet destroyed. Last entry” and possibly some date in 1903. Details were filled out for 6505 W. Wass, who joined Depot on 1st February 1900 then P.B. on 27th March 1900. He was 18 years and 11 months old, 5 foot 3 inches tall, born in Ambaston Derby and enlisted in Derby on 1st February 1900 for 7 years active service and 5 years in the reserve. William had a fresh complexion, dark brown hair, hazel eyes, his trade was labourer and his religion was Church of England. He was promoted to Lance Corporal on 7th June 1904, had his first good conduct pay on 1st February 1902 and the second on 1st February 1906. He was also given three lots of special pay. No offences were written on that page.

He is recorded in the medal rolls for the 1st Battalion Derbyshire Regiment for the Queen’s South Africa Medal as Private 6505 W Wass. He was entitled to the clasps Cape Colony, Orange Free State and Transvaal. They were issued in Rustenburg on 10th October 1901. He is also on the roll for the 1st Battalion, The Sherwood Foresters (Notts & Derbyshire Regiment) for the King’s South Africa Medal as Private 6505 W Wass and he was also entitled to the clasps South Africa 1901 and South Africa 1902. They were issued in Hong Kong on 5th February 1903.

In the 1911 census, William was living back at home with his parents and family. William was listed as a single 30 year old male, a labourer, general railway carriage works. The record shows German and Harriet, who were both 60, had been married 41 years, they had 10 children, of which 8 were still alive. By then, German was a farmer, owning his own property at Moore Bridge Farm, Linden Lane Chellaston.

On 26th July 1912, William departed London on the Rangatira in 3rd class, bound for Sydney. He was listed as ticket number 154, a 30 year old male labourer from England who intended to make his future permanent residence in New South Wales. The ship arrived in NSW on 11th September 1912, before travelling on to New Zealand, the final destination. At some time, he moved to Pelaw Main, where he worked as a fitter, presumably in the mine. Pelaw Main is a few kilometres from Kurri-Kurri in New South Wales. Its’ name is from the coal mine, Pelaw Main Colliery, which was a major concern and large employer. There were 4 coal loading roads which could take enough wagons to hold 4000 tons of coal at any one time. The colliery closed in 1962, due to a coal slump.

William enlisted as Private 239 in the 2nd Battalion AIF on 17th August 1914 in the 2nd Military District. The 2nd Battalion was raised within a few weeks of war being declared and was part of 1st Brigade. He filled out the questions, stating he was a British Subject, born in Ambaston Derbyshire, was 30 years and 10 months old, a fitter, had not been an apprentice, and he was single. His next of kin were his parents, listed as Mr German Wass, Ambaston near Derby (later changed to Germain and Chellaston). He had no conviction or dishonourable discharge. For previous service, he recorded (South Africa) Sherwood Foresters, 3 years 8 months Hong Kong SFC, 1-year China, 1½ years Singapore and Malay, 1½ years at Derby and 4 years on Reserve. He had never been unfit to serve. William took the oath at Randwick on 21st August 1914. His description was 30 years 10 months, height 5 foot 5 inches, weight 9 stone 8 pounds, chest measurement 33 to 35½ inches, and had a dark complexion with black hair and brown eyes. His religion was Anglican. Captain Spencer Dunn RAMC certified him physically fit on the same day. Lieutenant-Colonel George Braund, Commanding Officer of the 2nd Battalion appointed him to the 2nd Battalion on 21st August.

From 17th August 1914 to 25th September 1914, William was a Private with the 2nd Battalion. The Nominal Roll for the 2nd Infantry Battalion AIF shows that William was with Headquarters as 239 Signal Corporal, aged 31, a

fitter and single. His address was Second Street, Pelaw Main and his next of kin was G Wass, father, of Anderston, near Derby, England. His religion was Church of England and he enlisted on 17th August 1914. He was previously with the 43rd Infantry AMF when he enlisted. His rate of pay was 5 shillings a day. They embarked at Sydney on Transport A23 Suffolk on 18th October 1914.

The Battalion embarked at Sydney for active service abroad on 18th October 1914, disembarking at Egypt on 8th December 1914, where they undertook training. He had been promoted to Signalling Corporal on 25th September 1914 and appointed to Headquarter Signals on 13th January 1915. He embarked to join the MEF on the Derflinger at Alexandria for the Gallipoli Campaign on 5th April 1915 while a Corporal with the 2nd Battalion. On 8th April 1915, he was promoted to Sergeant with the 2nd Battalion Headquarter Signals, while on Lemnos. On 25th April 1915, the 2nd Battalion was part of the second and third waves to land at ANZAC. In May, the Battalion was involved in repulsing a determined Turkish attack with strict fire discipline. The 1st Brigade led the charge at Lone Pine on 6th August, where they gained possession of the main Turkish trenches. They repulsed very determined Turkish counter-attacks over the next three days, but they were costly to the Battalion, having a lot of their strength killed or wounded. He was wounded on 8th August 1915 on Gallipoli with a bomb wound to the head. On the 9th, he was admitted to the No 3 Field Ambulance D C Station on Anzac and was transferred to Mudros on the 11th. Another entry says he was discharged to duty on the 11th. He was sent to Malta on HS Gascon and admitted to St George's Hospital there on the 16th, recorded as slightly wounded, before being transferred to St Patrick's Hospital on the 21st. There is a note in his service records that on 14th September MRs G Wass was asking about him being wounded, but there is no letter in his service records noting that. A reply was sent on the 29th, again it is not in his records. A note in his records says he had a GSW Skull on one line and GSW knee on the next. On 18th September 1915, he was admitted to HS Oxfordshire, bound for England. He was admitted to King George Hospital Stanford Street in England on 24th September 1915.

An article in the Sun of Sydney on Saturday 11th September 1915, page 5 read:

FURTHER LOSSES. THE ATTACK FROM ANZAC.

LONG CASUALTY. LIST MANY KILLED IN ACTION.

Mr Ashmead Bartlett's vivid accounts of the fierce fighting that occurred in the attack from Anzac by Australasian troops on and about August 7, at the time when the new force was landed at Suvla Bay, prepared Australians for heavy casualty lists. Another of them has come to hand. It is the 76th list issued. Although it refers apparently to only the first two days of the battles, it records 131 deaths in action – only one from New South Wales – and 21 deaths from wounds. The wounded number 475. Only one officer died of wounds, and five were wounded. In all the fresh casualties number 351, and the missing run to 165. Victoria and West Australia have suffered particularly heavily in fatalities. The list is as follows :-

VICTORIA.

WOUNDED.

Sgt. W. WASS. 2nd Bn., England

The Sunday Times of Sydney on Sunday 12th September 1915, page 2 had the following entry:

NEW SOUTH WALES

WOUNDED

Sgt. W. Wass, 2nd Bat. (England)

Also in the Sydney Morning Herald of NSW on Friday 17th September 1915, page 6 had:

NEW SOUTH WALES

DISEMBARKED AT MALTA.

Sgt. W. WASS, 2 Bn. England.

A nominal roll of other ranks recommended for Honours for the 1st Australian Division, dated 17th January 1916, had 239 Sergeant W Wass, 2nd Battalion, was number 21 in the order of merit. The recommendation read "Date & place of action. Lone Pine, 6 to 10 August. Took part in the assault and subsequent grenade throwing and repairing parapets under fire, continuing at his post for four days though the back of his skull was fractured by a bullet. He was on the Peninsula from 25-4-15 to 11-8-15." It was signed by Harry Chauvel, Major-General, Commanding 1st Australian Division. William had previously been recommended on 25th September 1915 and 8th December 1915.

Another handwritten record had: Sgt W Wass 25th April to 10th August 1915. For continuous good work while in charge of signal section. This work culminated with the assault on LONE PINE on 6th August when in the assault he was wounded in the head. He did not report the injury but kept to his work, and on one occasion during the evening returned across the open to the old trenches from the captured position to repair a broken telephone wire. His wound was not attended to until four days later, when it was seen that he was suffering badly, and he was ordered to parade before the L.M.O. On examination it was found that the bullet wound received on 6th August had fractured his skull, and he is still in hospital.

From the A&NZ Base, he proceeded with the 17th Draft to join MEF at Weymouth England. A date was not recorded when. Arriving at Zeitoun on 20th February 1916, he was transferred to Tel-el-Kebir and re-joined his unit on that day. On 22nd February 1916, he was transferred from 2nd Battalion to the 54th Battalion at Tel-el-Kebir. At Alexandria on 19th June 1916, they embarked on HT Caledonian, to join the BEF. They disembarked at Marseilles on 29th June. He was killed in action sometime on the 19th-20th July 1916 in France. The words "Killed in action" were stamped on his service record in red capitals. On 8th November 1916, form AFB 2090A was forwarded to AIF Headquarters.

The 54th Battalion was formed in Egypt in mid-February 1916. They then trained at Tel-el-Kebir until the end of March 1916, before going to Ferry Post in April, and Katoomba Heights in May. They then left Egypt for France, arriving at Marseilles on 29th June.

The Daily Telegraph of Sydney on Friday 14th July 1916, page 7 had:

"ANZACS.

RAIDING EXPLOITS. "GIVE CANADA LIMELIGHT."

COMMONWEALTH OFFICIAL CORRESPONDENT.

BRITISH HEADQUARTERS, FRANCE. June 14.-Yesterday morning in the small hour the Australians again raided the German trenches. As before, this raid was preceded by a sharp bombardment. The arrangements, worked like clockwork down to the smallest detail. The party, which was chosen from one of the earlier Victorian battalions, spent several interesting minutes in the German front trench. They pulled six prisoners out of the dugouts, bombed others, killed several Germans, and returned, with prisoners, at a total cost of two wounded. Within half-an-hour of the first gun being fired the party was safely back. The uproar of the guns then ceased and the night was quiet again. These raids are small affairs, but are common along the whole line. They are always gratifying when the arrangements work so perfectly as on these two occasions. At the same time I have been constantly asked by many Anzac officers and men to state again, what I stated strongly some weeks ago, that the Anzac troops do not claim or desire the public attention which has been directed to these small feats. Wherever one goes in the trenches one finds that both the men and officers are very sensitive on this point, and that they rather dread the undoubted tendency of the people of Britain and Australia to exaggerate the feats of the Anzacs.

They all realise that the line they hold does not bear the faintest resemblance to awkward corners, such as the Ypres salient, which was held by the British troops for nearly two years. Officers of the Anzac Battalion's Mess expressed, what I believe to be the general wish of the whole force, when they said to me to-day, referring to the tremendous bombardments which we heard at intervals throughout the week from the far north, "It is the Canadians who should be in the limelight now." SUPPLEMENTARY DESPATCH. LONDON, Thursday. — The London "Gazette" contains a supplement to General Munro's despatch of April 10, mentioning a number of Anzacs for distinguished and gallant services. The additional list was delayed owing to the miscarriage of the Australian portion when sent abroad for verification. The following are mentioned: — Headquarters Staff: Lieutenant-General Birdwood, Major-General Russell, Colonels W. Holmes, Monash, and Rylie, Lieutenant-Colonels Antill, C. Cox, Foott, Lamrock, McGlenn, Meldrum, J. Paton, and C. White, Majors W. Foster, Gellibrand, T. Griffiths, R Smythe, and E. E. Wisdom, Captains J. Anderson and C. Bean, Lieutenants H. S. Hall, W. Hughes, C. Littler, W. Locke, and Wawn. New Zealanders: Captains Daltry, G. King. Powles, and J. M. Richmond. AUSTRALIANS. Australian Naval Bridging Train: Lieutenant-Commodore Bracegirdle, Lieutenant Bond, Warrant Officer Shepherd, Petty Officers Beton, Offer. Littlewood, Pender, Wiggins. Light Horse. First Regiment, Major Granville, Lieutenant White, and Corporal Crisp; Second Regiment, Major Glasgow, Corporal McDonald; Fifth Regiment, Lieutenant-Colonel Wilson, Major Midgley, Lieutenant Brundrit; Tenth Regiment. Corporals Rickards, Knowles, Berry, Trooper Renton; Eleventh Regiment, Quartermaster-Sergeant Searle. Artillery: Lieutenants Newman (N.Z.), Thornthwaite, Newmarch, Corporals G. Cook, McNichol. Engineers: Majors Williams and Goold, Captains Vasey, McNeill, Cutler, Watson, and Dodd, Lieutenants Mason, Greenway, Townsend, and Titford, Sergeant-Major Pease, Sergeants Dawson, Lundy, Foulsum, and Park, Corporals Shaw, Arkins, Hall, Cameron, Thomas, and Adeney. Infantry: Second Battalion, Captain Pain, Sergeant Wass, Privates Nichol and Goudemey;" and a lot more names are listed.

The 54th Battalion occupied front line trenches near Bac-St-Maur at about 6pm on the 19th July. A preliminary bombardment on the morning of the 19th July 1916 began what would be known as the attack at Fromelles. It was just a diversionary attack. The 54th Battalion was part of the attack, advancing from the Rue Tilleloy near Picantin. Some of the attackers reached the German trenches, holding their second line for the day and night. The right side however, was held off by a fierce machine gun barrage and only reached the front line in isolated groups. On the morning of the 20th, the attack was called off after the 5th Australian Division had lost over 5000 officers and men. Preceding the attack, the weather had been awful, with rain turning the area to a boggy mess and the artillery could not see where to bombard. General Munro did have the opportunity to call off the attack, but did not. The Battalion had 3 officers and 70 men killed and many others wounded or missing, losing 65% of its' strength. They then returned to Bac-St-Maur and then went into defensive positions.

His report on a death of a soldier shows that Sergeant 239 William Wass of the 54th Infantry Battalion AIF was killed in action in the Field in France on 19-20th July 1916. It was reported on Army Form B.213, dated 21st July 1916 by the Commanding Officer of the 54th Battalion. Notification of his burial had not yet been received nor was his will yet to hand. The record was signed by a Lieutenant in charge of Records at Anzac Section 3rd Echelon GHQ BEF 18th October 1916.

A form from the Post Office Saving Bank in London on 13th September 1916 about "William Wass deceased" asked if details could be filled in and forwarded to the War Office as a claim done by his father to claim money in his bank account could not be proceeded with until they received information on his will. The bottom part of that form was a request German filled out to The Secretary at the War Office, giving service details of William and a request to forward the Bank a copy of his will, if done, and a death certificate. It was signed German Wass, Moor End Farm Chellaston Derby on 16th September 1916. The War Office Effects Registry received in on 18th September.

The Red Cross Society have a Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau file for him. In it they have a copy of a German death card, the original of which is in his service record:

Land England toten		Listen Nr. 10536 / 106 W	
Name	W a s s , W.		
Abschrift			
Dienstgrad	Sgt.	Nr. der Erf.-Marke	239
Truppenteil	H.C.S. 54. A.I.		
Zeit u. Ort der Gefangennahme	Erf. Marke überwiesen v. N.O.A.O.K. 6		
Aufenthaltort	d.M.A. Zentralstelle f'Nachl.		
Bemerkungen	12.10.16		
Heimatsort			

They state there was no enquiry, that 239 Sergeant William Wass 54th Battalion AIF was killed in action on 19-20.7.16. "German Death List dated 4.11.16. Identity disc received from Germany and despatched to N./K. 11.5.17. Cert by list from O.C.Kit Stores 1.9.19." London 9.10.19. The translation of the German Death Voucher says "The Aust. Pte. Wass, W. H.C.S. 54th A.I.F., No 239., fell on 19/7/16 in the neighbourhood of Fromelles." It was signed by a German Captain and Intelligence Officer.

Auszugsweise Abschrift,
aus H.N. 684.

Nachrichtenoﬃzier beim A.H. O. den 2.8.16.
A.O.K. 6.

An das
Kgl. Preuss. Kriegsministerium Medicinal Abtlg.
Zentralstelle für Nachlassachen.
B e r l i n .

austr. Sold. W a s s , W. H.C.S. 54. A.I. Nr. 239.
am 19.7.16. in Gegend Fromelles gefallen.

Hauptmann und Nachrichtenoﬃzier
Unterschrift .
Beglaubigt Berlin den 11.10.19.
Fuchs!
Ltn. d. Res.

The Sun of Sydney, NSW on Thursday 17th August 1916, page 6 had the following heading:

1602 CASUALTIES

POZIERES AND ARMENTIERES DEAD NUMBER 207

OVER 1200 WOUNDED

Part of Australia's cost in the great offensive on the Somme is revealed by two big casualty lists issued to-day. The greatest number of casualties made known on any one day of the war is contained in them. The total is 1602. Nearly all are direct battle losses, and, as indicated by the dates opposite the classification "killed in action,"

occurred between July 19 and July 25, when the offensive was in its initial stages. In the greatest number of cases the significantly imprecise date 19-20/7/16 is given. It was on July 20 that Captain Bean, the Australian press representative with the Commonwealth forces, cabled from British headquarters that on the previous evening an Australian force, after a bombardment, had attacked the German trenches south of Armentieres. Captain Bean stated that the Germans had managed to save a number of machine guns from the bombardment. In spite of very brave efforts the troops on the right flank were unable to cross the ground between the trenches. The portions of the trenches that were captured were subjected to a very severe fire from all sorts of artillery, and the Australians had to endure this for eleven hours, until they were ordered to retire. The losses were very severe. It was on July 23 that the Anzacs captured Pozieres. On that occasion "The Times" correspondent reported that their casualties were slight, and Reuter's representative at the press camp on the western front sent a similar message. The lists show that no fewer than two officers and 135 men were killed in action. Three officers and 67 men died of wounds, and three men from other causes. The wounded numbered 36 officers and 1243 men, and the missing two officers and 87 men. One officer and 23 men were listed as ill. Details: — NEW SOUTH WALES KILLED IN ACTION Sgt. W. WASS, England.

An article in the Daily Telegraph of Sydney on Friday 18th August 1916, page 4 read:

NEW SOUTH WALES.

KILLED IN ACTION.

Sgt, W. WASS, England.

Base Records in Melbourne sent a letter to Mr G Wass of Chellaston Derbyshire England on 24th May 1917. It said "I have much pleasure in forwarding hereunder copy of extract from Fourth Supplement No. 29644 to the London Gazette of 11th July, 1916, relating to the conspicuous services rendered by your son, the late No. 239, Sergeant W. Wass, 54th Battalion. MENTIONED IN DESPATCHES "With reference to the despatch published on the 10th April, the following are mentioned for distinguished and gallant services rendered during the period of General Sir Charles Munro's Command of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force: — No. 230 W. Wass WILLIAM WASS". Also copy of extract from Second Supplement No. 29794 to the London Gazette of 20th October, 1916. AWARDED THE MILITARY MEDAL "HIS MAJESTY THE KING has been graciously pleased to award the Military Medal for bravery in the Field to the undermentioned non-commissioned officer: — No. 239, Sergeant WILLIAM WASS." His service record notes another letter to his father, and a reply, but neither are included in his records.

On 28th August 1917, Public Trustee asked Records for two death certificates and a note beside it says "Add prior to Enlistment". A booklet regarding graves was despatched on 22nd December 1919.

A note in his service records refers to him being killed in action in France on 19-20 July 1916 as noted in "Cable No. C.I.B.L. 238, from the Commandant, A.I.F. Headquarters, dated London, 4th August 1916, confirmed by Mail, from the Commandant A.I.F. Headquarters, dated London, 7th August 1916, and Army Form B. 2090A." It was dated 1st September 1917.

William's Mention in Despatches certificate was sent on 7th July 1921. Germain was sent a copy of "Where the Australians Rest", Memorial Scroll and Memorial Plaque in 1922. His 1914 -15 Star was issued in England. A stamp states that the Victory medal was issued and inscribed by Australia House and a large oak leaf was issued with it.

The Sydney Mail of Wednesday 10th January 1917 on page 34 had the following article and picture:

"Sergt. Will Wass, D.C.M., WHO was lately killed in France. He was the first to enlist from Pelaw Main (near Newcastle). Me was in the historic landing at Gaba Tepe, and was wounded at Lone Pine, where he gained the D.C.M. He served in the South African campaign." They incorrectly record him as being awarded the DCM in the text and with the picture below, when he was actually awarded the MM.



Sergt. Will Wass, D.C.M.,

William has a Medal Index Card in the British medal records for “WASS, W. Sergeant No. 239 2nd Battalion (New South Wales) Australian Infantry M.I.D. London Gazette 13.7.16. page 6955”.

In the Honours and Awards area of the AWM, William Wass has two entries: –

Service number 239

Final Rank Sergeant

Unit 54th Australian Infantry Battalion

Service Australian Imperial Force

Conflict/Operation First World War, 1914-1918

Award Military Medal

Commonwealth of Australia Gazette 19 April 1917 on page 920 at position 28

London Gazette 27 October 1916 on page 10488 at position 30

Service number 239

Final Rank Sergeant

Unit 2nd Australian Infantry Battalion

Service Australian Imperial Force

Conflict/Operation First World War, 1914-1918

Award Mention in despatches

Commonwealth of Australia Gazette 30 November 1916 on page 3234 at position 2

William is recorded on V.C. Corner Australian Cemetery Memorial. His details are recorded as:

Birth: unknown
Derby
Derby Unitary Authority
Derbyshire, England
Death: July, 1916, France

Son of Germain Wass of Chellaston, Derbyshire, England. William was killed in action, aged 35 years.

Mentioned In Despatches.

Awarded the Military Medal.

54th Australian Infantry Battalion, Australian Army – Service No. 239

Note: Sergeant, 54th Battalion, A.I.F. Died 19-20 July 1916.



There is also a note added to the picture: "Plot: Thought to be buried in a mass grave at Pheasant Wood, near Fromelles." An article online reads: "This is the list of the persons believed to be buried in a mass grave at Fromelles in France. The Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, Warren Snowdon, said the Government had contacted relatives of about 40 per cent of those on the list and invited the public to come forward with information about others.

LIST OF SOLDIERS (includes)

239 Sergeant Wass William 54th Battalion.”

Probate for William reads “WASS William of Moor End Farm Chellaston Derbyshire sergeant of the Australian Imperial Force who was killed in action on 19 July 1916 in France Administration Derby 7 September to German Wass farmer. Effects £50 4s. 2d.”

His name is located at panel 160 in the Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial. In the WW1 Nominal Roll, he is listed as “239 Sgt WASS William “MM” 54th Battalion 17.8.14 K.I.A. 19-20.7.16”

The site <https://anzacday.org.au/home> has an article on William, which reads as a semi-autobiographical and maybe fictional story on his life and army involvement.

With his family-

Germain died on 24th October 1930 in Shardlow, Derbyshire.

Harriet died in June 1933 in Shardlow, Derbyshire.

Eliza Wass was the first child born to them, around April 1870 in Wirksworth, Derbyshire. In the 1881 census, she is listed as a scholar and was living with the family. On 17th November 1889, she married Will Bickerton at St. Andrew’s, Derby. She is in the 1901 census, with her family, but no husband in Derby. She married Hugh Gray MacDonald at St. James, Derby on 13th October 1923. More records are needed to confirm when she died.

George Wass was born in early 1873 in Wirksworth, Derbyshire. In the 1881 census, he was living with the family and was a scholar. In the 1901 census, he was living with Eliza as a boarder and was a railway engine stoker. He married Laura Elizabeth Apperley in mid-1904 in Derby. In the 1911 census, they were living at 26 Shaftsbury Crescent Derby and he was a railway engine fireman. They had no children listed, and one had died. He died on 18th June 1953 in Derby.

Herbert Wass was born on 4th December 1877 in Windley Derbyshire. He was 4 years old on the 1881 census, living with his parents. Herbert was living with his parents in the 1891 census, but had no occupation. The 1901 census has him as a boarder, working as a carriage and wagon fitter. In the 1911 census, he was living with his parents, single and working as a wagon fitter at the railway carriage works. In the 1939 Register, he was still single, a farmer in partnership with his brother Arthur on Moor End Farm and Louisa was living there as well.

Margaret was born in mid-1884 in Ambaston, Derbyshire. She was a scholar in the 1891 census and an at home domestic in the 1901 census. In the 1911 census, her name is written as Margriet and she was a single 26-year old farmer’s daughter dairy worker, still with her parents. Nothing else is known of her.

Louisa was born on 13th October 1894. In the 1911 census, her name is written as Louie and she was a single 16-year old farmer’s daughter dairy worker. She died in September 1984 in Derby.

Lizzie was born in 1889 in Ambaston Derbyshire. She has no occupation recorded in the 1901 census and in the 1911 census, she was still living with her parents and was an engraver in the carriage department car motor works. She was living as a boarder, also with her brother Arthur at the house of their sister Eliza and her husband and family at 59 Alingdon Street Derby. William Bickerton was a lawyer for the Midland Carriage Department, and they had been married for 21 years and had 5 living children from a total of 11 born. Lizzie married Percy Thomas (born 1889) on 29th May 1915 at Chellaston, Derbyshire. No other records are confirmed for them afterwards.

Arthur Wass was born on 22nd April 1882 in Belper, Derbyshire. In 1911, he was living as noted above and was a labourer at the motor works. He died on 10th December 1948 in Derby, with his address as Moor End Farm Chellaston, Derbyshire. Probate on 12th April 1949 to Herbert Wass farmer and Louisa Wass spinster of £1858 16.s 9d.

Ellen Wass was born about 1887 in Ambaston Derbyshire. In the 1891 census, she was living with her parents. She died in early 1895 in Shardlaw, Derbyshire.

His medals are Military Medal, Queens South Africa Medal with clasps Cape Colony, Orange Free State and Transvaal, Kings South Africa medal with clasps South African 1901 and South Africa 1902, 1914-15 Star, British War Medal and Victory Medal with oak leaf.



The QSA medal is a replacement.



ANZAC Biographies

On our website you will find the biographical details of ANZAC (as well as British) servicemen & women whose medals or other memorabilia form part of the collection on display at the

Maryborough Military & Colonial Museum,

Maryborough, Queensland, Australia.