



In Memory of
Private
HAROLD JOHN KENNEDY DONALD

3932, 15TH BN Australian Infantry
who died age 24
on 11 April 1917

Son of Robert and Bessie Donald, of Laura, Queensland

Remembered with honour
VILLERS-BRETONNEUX MEMORIAL, FRANCE



PRIVATE

HAROLD JOHN KENNEDY DONALD

15TH BN, AUSTRALIAN INFANTRY SERVICE

NUMBER: 3932

Harold John Kennedy Donald was a North Queensland man who volunteered at Townsville on 27 September 1915. His parents were Robert and Bessie Donald described as the “general storekeepers, commission and forwarding agents” at Laura, “via Cooktown”. The family was well-settled in the town; Harold was born there in 1892, and in the 1920s the general store remained their address.

The family had connections with Toowoomba, however, as Harold was sent to the Toowoomba Grammar School (1909 – 1910) after his primary education at Cooktown State School. He graduated from TGS in 1910 and trained as a surveyor. He gave his occupation as “surveyor’s assistant” when he joined the AIF. He was almost 23 years of age, single, 5’7” tall and a slim 136 pounds. His complexion was fair, with blue eyes and dark brown hair; he listed his religion as Church of England. Harold had an older brother, Robert junior, who enlisted in August 1915.

After basic training at Enoggera Harold was posted to the 15th Battalion reinforcements and sailed from Sydney aboard A23 *Suffolk* on 30 November 1915. For the entire time he was overseas Harold suffered from a number of debilitating medical conditions apart from infections like bronchitis in Egypt and influenza in England. He was also afflicted with rheumatism and sciatica. The latter kept him in hospital in Egypt even after his unit sailed for England before deployment to France. While in hospital Harold wrote to his parents explaining his frustration; an extract from the letter was sent by his father to the historian in 1920 showing something of the character of the young man and his determination to “do his bit”. The letter was posted in May 1916: *For the past 6 weeks I have been in the hospital with Sciatica but can now say I am much improved and hope to rejoin the unit once again in France as the Battalion or I should say (the Brigade) leaves on the 7th inst. So you will see I am unable to rejoin here. I may state Major Chalmers the Dr whom is treating me was going to board me for Australia. I stated to him I never came here to malinge like some of the lads are doing, but to do my bit before returning home and kindly look(ed) over me and give me a fair trial to recover, which I am pleased to say he has done, and is quite pleased at the way I am recovering, and I hope soon to be able to rejoin Bob in France.*

Finally, Harold was able to proceed. He left Egypt on 6 August 1916 for England where he continued his training. He had more health problems and a short stint of disciplinary issues as he felt compelled to explore the sights of London without permission of the authorities. His ill-health had spared him the horrors of Pozieres; however, in February 1917 he crossed over to France where he would experience his first major battle at Bullecourt.

On 11 April 1917 the AIF 4th Division made its attack on the German position known as the Hindenburg Line. In a ferocious day of fighting the AIF suffered 3300 casualties taking front-line trenches and then having to give them up to counter-attacks. During the attack Harold was posted as “missing in action”. For many months there was no word although his parents did hear a rumour that he had been taken prisoner and was at a camp in Germany. The rumour was unconfirmed and in November a Court of Inquiry pronounced Harold as “killed in action on 11 April 1917”. His body was never recovered.

In July 1921 the AIF wrote to the Donald’s asking if they had received any news over the years from returning soldiers concerning Harold. Bessie wrote this amazing reply: *I am sorry to inform you that I have no letters . . . only information I received from a comrade of my sons, who saw him at Bullecourt in France on the morning of the 11th April 1917, he had been acting as stretcher bearer and had evidently been hit on the head by a shot as his head was bandaged up and he was following on behind, after that he was seen sitting down on the roadside, and it is surmised he must have been buried by the shell fire, as it was very heavy that day, and the*

road was completely ploughed up and made quite unrecognisable after the days battle, this I think accounts for his body never being found. Thanking you for the trouble taken

Harold's name was placed on the Memorial at Villers-Bretonneux. He died aged 24. His brother Robert was 12 years older and also served in the 15th Battalion (No. 3730); was twice wounded, lightly at Pozieres in 1916, and severely near Hamel in 1918. He received a decoration for bravery at Passchendaele. In August 1918 he set sail for Australia and was discharged on Christmas Eve 1918.

Toowoomba Grammar School Archive Records stated that he started at the school on 16th February 1909 and left on 16th December 1910. The School Magazine dated May 1918 states, '*DONALD, H. J. K.-Harry was the son of Mr. R. Donald of Laura, Cooktown and was a boarder 1909-10 to. He was reported missing on the 1st April, 1917 and later, as killed*'.

[National Archives of Australia Military Records](#)

[CWGC](#)

[War Memorial Honour Roll](#)

[AWM4 AIF unit war diaries 1914-18 War 23/32/25 15th BN April 1917](#)

[Australian Red Cross Society Wounded and Missing](#)