



In Memory of
Private
VICTOR HARLEN

5347, 25th Bn Australian Infantry, A.I.F.
who died age 20
on 20 September 1917

Son of Walter George and Annie Harlen, of Old Sandgate Rd.,
Albion, Queensland.

Remembered with honour

YPRES (MENIN GATE) MEMORIAL, BELGIUM



PRIVATE
VICTOR HARLEN

25TH BN AUSTRALIAN INFANTRY SERVICE
NUMBER: 5347



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P03452.025

One of the youngest men on the Mothers' Memorial is **Victor Harlen**, an 18-year-old who signed up in Rockhampton on 18 February 1916. He may have been even younger, as birth certificates were not required on entry into the AIF. Victor came from Brisbane, but was educated at Toowoomba Grammar School (1912-1913), and here he may have made his career choice – to go on the land and become a grazier. When he volunteered he was a jackaroo in central and western Queensland.

Victor listed his mother, Mrs Annie Harlen of Old Sandgate Road, Albion, as his NOK. His father was still living, although he died in 1921. Victor was 5'8" tall and slightly built, at 120 pounds. He had a fair complexion, grey eyes and auburn hair, and was of the Church of England religion. After suffering a bout of rheumatism in the winter of 1916 at Enoggera he embarked for overseas on A50 *Itonus* leaving Brisbane on 8 August.

During his training in England the young Victor was also keen to see something of the world as well as serve his King and Country. He had a couple of incidents of breaking bounds and found himself in the army's justice system for a time. Finally, the cogs of the military bureaucracy turned and he was posted overseas; he departed for France on 23 July 1917. Victor reached his battalion on 9 August. He had arrived just in time for one of the biggest battles in the history of the AIF.

The 25th Battalion was one of the units to take part in the offensive near Ypres in Belgium, known as the Battle of Menin Road. It was part of the wider battle often called "Passchendaele". On 20 September the Australians attacked and took all their objectives. The battle was considered a success; but, there were casualties and the 25th lost about 45 men killed or missing. One of those officially reported killed was Victor Harlen, although his body was not recovered. His name appears on the Menin Gate Memorial.

On 23 November Mrs Harlen wrote to the army inquiring about Victor's possessions. Her letter mentions another Toowoomba connection: **Dear Sir, I shall feel much obliged if you will kindly forward the Certificate of Death & Personal effects of my son (details) killed in action in France (sic) on Sept 20th 1917. We have just received word from France that his C.O. the late Capt S. Bond made arrangements to forward our son's personal effects to Australia. Thanking you in anticipation**

Victor's company commander referred to by Mrs Harlen was Sydney Stanna Bond, another Brisbane boy and past student of Toowoomba Grammar School. He had a further Toowoomba connection being the grandson of Toowoomba's first mayor William Groom (see L.C. and C. Groom) and the nephew of the MHR for Darling Downs, Littleton Groom. He was killed in action about three weeks after Victor, as the battle rolled on towards Passchendaele. However, for reasons unknown, Sydney Bond's name was not submitted for the Mothers' Memorial.

In 1922 Mrs Harlen signed the receipts for Victor's medals and the commemorative scroll and plaque. In her response to the historian's request in the late 1920s for information about her son she indicated that Victor was 18 years and 3 months old when he died. He had put 18 years and 6 months on his attestation papers 19 months before he was killed. He was certainly one of the youngest men from Toowoomba to die in the Great War.

Toowoomba Grammar School Archive Records state that he started school on 1st July 1912 and left on 12th December 1913. The School Magazine of November 1917 states, 'HARLEN, VICTOR-Son of Mr. and Mrs. W. Harlen, of Albion, Brisbane-At School 1913-14-Age 18. Killed in France September 20th, 1917.

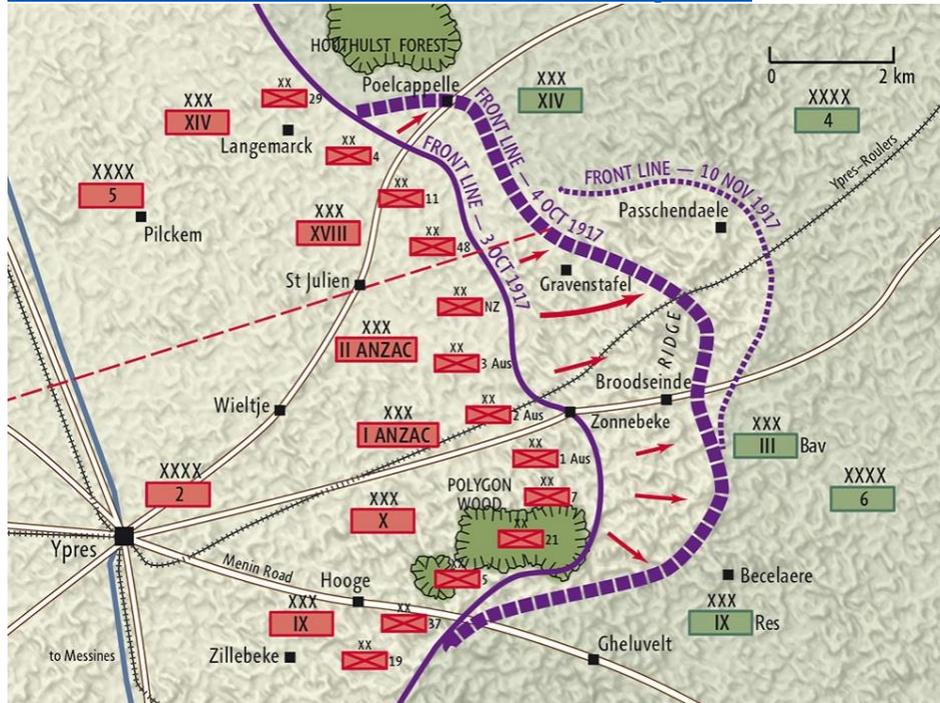
External Links:

[National Archives of Australia Military Records](#)

[CWGC](#)

[Australian War Memorial Honour Roll](#)

[AWM4 AIF unit war diaries 23/42/25 25th BN Sept 1917](#)



Battle of Broodseinde and Passchendaele, Belgium courtesy of NZ History online



Battle of Menin Road, Belgium , IWM