



In Memory of

**Sergeant**

**JAMES McLEAN STAFFORD**

**2792, 47<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Australian Infantry**

**who died age 24**

**on 5<sup>th</sup> April 1918**

Son of James Malcolm Stafford and Jessie Wilson Stafford, of "Oonoraba",  
Ann St., Maryborough, Queensland.

Remembered with honour  
VILLERS-BRETONNEUX MEMORIAL, FRANCE



SERGEANT  
**JAMES MCLEAN STAFFORD**  
47<sup>TH</sup> BATTALION, AUSTRALIAN INFANTRY  
SERVICE No: 2792



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P03452.032

The connection between Toowoomba and **James McLean Stafford** came through his attendance at the Toowoomba Grammar School from which he graduated in 1910. The school maintained close links with past students and especially those who served in the war. The committee of mothers who organised the funding and construction of the Toowoomba Mothers' Memorial arranged for the Grammar School's Honour Roll to be included on the Memorial.

James Stafford was a Maryborough man, the son of James Malcolm and Jessie Wilson Stafford of Ann Street, Maryborough. He enlisted in Brisbane on 5 August 1915 at 22 years of age. He stated his occupation as clerk. He was "big-built" according to a friend, at 5'11" and 166 pounds. He had a fair complexion, blue eyes, light brown hair and wrote Presbyterian as his denomination.

James' enlistment coincided with the August offensive at Gallipoli. Reinforcements were badly needed and consequently his training was expedited. The 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion lost almost 400 men in August 1915; James was embarked on 1 September for the Middle East as part of the 9<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements of the Battalion. He departed Brisbane on A33 *Ayrshire* and arrived in Egypt about a month later.

The 9/15<sup>th</sup> men arrived on Gallipoli too late to alter the outcome, but James managed to stay safe until the withdrawal in December. He returned to Egypt just before Christmas and in the early months of 1916 became part of the general re-organisation of the AIF necessary for new battles in France and Palestine. James was promoted to corporal and transferred to the new 47<sup>th</sup> Battalion that sailed for France in June 1916.

James fought through the terrible battles at Pozieres; his battalion was particularly committed to the fighting at Mouquet Farm. During the battle he was promoted to sergeant. He remained healthy until November when he became too ill to continue. He went into hospital with scabies, and later tonsillitis, that kept him in England until the spring of 1917. He had a two-week furlough in March.

After the furlough James' career took an interesting turn: he was sent to Wareham as part of the new 6<sup>th</sup> Division of the AIF. He was officially transferred to the 69<sup>th</sup> Battalion. This division existed for about six months, never leaving England. Its deployment was cancelled when the losses of men at Messines and Ypres called for the troops to be sent as reinforcements to the existing units in France. In late September James returned to his 47<sup>th</sup> Battalion in Belgium.

There were two further brief interruptions to James' service in the 47<sup>th</sup>. He had some further health issues and had a short stint with the Australian Forestry Company; but apart from these breaks he was on the front-line. In April 1918 his brigade was defending the line at Dernancourt in the Somme Valley. On 5 April the Germans launched a massive attack against the Australian lines and succeeded in over-running part of their positions. They were driven back by a counter-attack later in the day. However, James was killed in action, most likely by machine gun fire as the Germans advanced.

Sgt Featherston stated in December after his release from a German POW camp, **We were retiring across open ground at Dernicourt (sic) on 5<sup>th</sup> April when Stafford was killed by M.G. fire. I went up to him after I was captured and found him dead. We were unable to bury him.** However, Pte Smith said, **At Dernancourt . . . at 10 am we were defending hard against Fritz's big attack. He was wounded in the body by a piece of shrapnel and was carried away by the Stretcher Bearers.**

These statements were made eight months after the event and refer to a fierce battle where losses on both sides were heavy. The memories of the soldiers would naturally differ on points of detail. What remained certain is that James died on the battlefield and that his grave could not be located after the war. He died aged 24 and is commemorated on the Villers-Bretonneux Memorial.

Toowoomba Grammar School Archive Records state that he started school on 9<sup>th</sup> February 1909 and left on 25<sup>th</sup> June 1909. The School Magazine dated November 198 stated, '*STAFFORD, J. M., Sergt. 47th Battalion-Son of Mrs. Stafford of Mar on Gallipoli and in France, where he was killed in action, April 5th, 1918.*'

External Links:

[CWGC](#)

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

[AWM4 AIF unit war diaries 23/64/23 4TH BN APRIL 1918](#)

[Australian War Memorial Honour Roll](#)

[Australian National Archives Military Records](#)