

**Pompey Elliot Scholarship 2010 – Sergeant Luke McGregor – 8<sup>th</sup> / 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Royal Victorian Regiment**

The road to taking my Pompey Elliot Scholarship was a long one. A Corporal at the time, I was the recipient of the scholarship in 2010. There was no formal presentation, just a short conversation in a hallway at the Ranger Barracks in Ballarat with the XO at the time Major Neil Leckie stating that I was the recipient of the scholarship. A week later I began pre-deployment for the Solomon Islands.

On return from the Solomon Islands in December 2010, I started my new career with Victoria Police, not really returning to the Battalion in an active capacity until 2012. When I bought up the scholarship with Australian Regular Army carter staff, there was nothing official and no real knowledge of what the scholarship entailed. I had heard stories of previous recipients Peter Baird and David Crowe completing an exchange with The Staffordshire, unfortunately due to a few scoundrels finding their way onto unauthorised deployments with foreign units, the Australian Defence Force was resistant to any official / non-official exchange. After this talk of my scholarship became dormant.

After an audit in 2019, the Association identified some members who had not taken their scholarships. The Association reached out honouring my scholarship and after discussions with the Association and Battalion Commanders it was agreed that I would conduct a battlefield tour on the Western Front. Thank you to Peter Baird, Martin and the RVR Association.

**THEN COVID HIT**

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of April 2023, I was finally on a plane to France to begin my scholarship with Mat McLachlan Battlefield Tours – ANZAC Day on the Western Front Tour 2023.

The reason for choosing this tour was a rich family history of family members that had served during World War 1 and World War 2. Most family members were from Victoria and served in Battalions raised in Victoria, in particular the 22<sup>nd</sup> AIF and 37<sup>th</sup> AIF, all returning home with the exception of my Great Uncle PTE Charles Henry Hutchison who is believed to be resting in the soil in vicinity of Bulls Road near Flers, France. When his marked grave was exhumed on the 12<sup>th</sup> of February 1923, his body was not there. His name is now forever etched in the Australian National Memorial at Villers-Bretonneux.



*Photograph of direct line descendants that served during World War 1 and World War 2*



*Memorial Cross, Bulls Rd Cemetery - PTE Charles Henry Hutchison, 22<sup>nd</sup> AIF*

**Day 1** -The tour began with a meet and greet dinner followed by an early night due to an early morning bus on the 19<sup>th</sup> of April 2023, to the Australian National Memorial at Villers-Bretonneux.

**Day 2** of the tour started with a visit to the Australian National Memorial at Villers-Bretonneux including a tour of the Sir John Monash Centre, a new audio-visual museum, telling the stories of Australians on the Western Front via hundreds of interactive screens. After a quick squiz through the Sir John Monash Centre, I decided to spend the time paying my respects to my Great Uncle Charles Hutchison who with served with the 22<sup>nd</sup> AIF. After locating HUTCHISON. C. H. etched in the stone of the memorial the emotions and connection to the Western Front became real. These emotions would be experienced throughout the tour. After leaving the Australian National Memorial we toured battlefields where Pompey Elliot lead the counterattack at Villers-Bretonneux in April 1918 which was decisive in holding the German advance. We visited the Adelaide Cemetery observing the original resting place of the Unknown Soldier who is now laid to rest at the tomb of the Unknown Australian Soldier at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra. We then visited the Victoria School at Villers-Bretonneux where children who attend the school continue to honour the Australians who liberated their village. We then made our way to the medieval town of Ypres which became our base camp for the next 4 days.



*View from tower – Australian National Memorial – Villers-Bretonneux*



*Paying respects to my uncle PTE Charles Henry Hutchison*



*Original Grave of the Unknown Soldier – Adelaide Cemetery*



*Victoria School – Villers-Bretonneux*



**Day 3** was a walking tour of the medieval town of Ypres, visiting historic sites such as the Cloth Hall, St Georges Chapel, St Martin's Cathedral, Menin Gate and Ramparts Cemetery. The walking tour ended with a visit to the Flanders Fields Museum. I then spent the afternoon sampling some Belgium beers along with some local cuisine. The evening concluded with the Last Post Ceremony at Menin Gate. Menin Gate has the names of 54,000 missing Commonwealth Soldiers etched in the memorial. Although the memorial was under restoration at the time, the Last Post Ceremony which is conducted by the Ypres Fire Brigade went ahead and has done so in all weather, every day since 1927. The only exception to this was during 4 years of German occupation during World War 2. This was a true highlight of the trip for me.



*Menin Gate Memorial, Ypres*



*Last Post Ceremony – Menin Gate*

**Day 4** saw us at Hill 60, famous for the Australian Tunnelling Company firing the massive explosive charge in a mine under the hill which completely destroyed the German front line. The huge crater a significant landmark today. We then stopped in at Café De Dreve at Polygon Wood owned by a local Johan Vanderwalle who has dedicated his life to preserving the memory of Australians who fought in the area during WW1. Johan has established a Brothers In Arms Memorial to the rear of the café after 5 Australian soldiers were exhumed nearby when resurfacing a road. One of the soldiers exhumed is Jack Hunter who is now depicted in the bronze memorial slumped in his brother Jim's arms. A very moving and sacred place.

The afternoon moved to paying respects to the soldiers that lay in the cemeteries at Polygon Wood and Tyne Cot. Tyne Cot is the largest Commonwealth Cemetery in the world with 11,965 graves with 8,369 unnamed.



*Crater – Hill 60*



*Brothers In Arms Memorial*





*Buttes New British Cemetery - Polygon Wood*



*Tynes Cot Cemetery*

**Day 5** started with a non-scheduled add on, a visit to Pondfarm in the heart of Flanders Fields. Pondfarm was HQ to General Arthur Currie during WW1. The family farm now run by Stijin, is a relic museum of what has been located on the farm. Stijin has also dedicated his life to restoring a Mark IV Tank, Damon II, D29. The rest of the day was considered a rest day, spending the day in the picturesque medieval town of Bruges. A tourist town famous for chocolate and waffle shops, I found the crowds a bit overwhelming and settled at a pub sampling a few more Belgium beers. I concluded the day jumping on the bus with a small group who were paying respects to their family members at Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery. During WW1 this area was a Casualty Clearance Station. The Cemetery contains 9,901 Commonwealth burials with only 24 unidentified. There are also 883 war graves of other nationalities. This is where I located the grave of one of the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalions Victoria Cross recipients Major Frederick Harold Tubb.



*Pondfarm – Mark IV Tank, Damon II, D29*



*Grave - Maj Frederick Tubb VC*

**Day 6** started at Le Trou Aid Post Cemetery. This was HQ to Pompey Elliot during the battle of Fromelles. We then lined up in the vicinity of where the advance took place on the 19<sup>th</sup> of July 1916.

Over 5,500 soldiers from the 5<sup>th</sup> Australian Division became casualties, assaulting over open ground, over 2,000 were killed in action or died of wounds and over 400 were captured. Some consider Fromelles the most tragic event in Australian history. We then paid our respects at the nearby VC Corner Australian Cemetery. It is here that 410 Australian Soldiers are laid to rest in a mass grave.

A short stop via Cobbers memorial and then onto Pheasant Wood Cemetery. Pheasant Wood Cemetery is where 250 Australian and British soldiers were laid to rest in 2010 after being exhumed from a nearby mass grave in Pheasant Wood that lain undetected for 92 years. After the discovery in 2008, the remains were subject to forensic analysis, of which many were identified.

The afternoon saw us at Bullecourt. I had a fair understanding of what had occurred at Bullecourt after delivering a talk about it on my Subject One for Sergeant. The 2 battles at Bullecourt on the 11<sup>th</sup> of April 1917 and 3<sup>rd</sup> of May 1917, were a disaster where the AIF suffered 10,000 casualties. Looking at the ground the Germans would have had the Australians enveloped and any advance would have been near certain death. We then stopped at the Bullecourt digger and in the town itself where there are Australian flags on every building.

It was then my turn to conduct my pilgrimage at the Bulls Road Cemetery. Somewhere in the earth here it is believed that my uncle Charles Henry Hutchison is laid to rest. I paid my respects by placing a poppy in the soil and felt a real spiritual connection to the Western Front.



*Le Trou Aid Post Cemetery – Fromelles - Pompey Elliot HQ*



*Paying respects at VC Corner Cemetery - Fromelles*



*Cobbers Memorial – Fromelles*



*Bullecourt Battlefields*



*Bullecourt Digger*



*Bulls Rd Cemetery – Believed to be the final resting place of my uncle PTE Charles Henry Hutchison*



**Day 7**, First stop Vignacourt, a town that was situated behind enemy lines and used as a place of rest. A visit to the photographic museum. The photographs of the Lost Diggers of Vignacourt were located in an attic of the Farmhouse in 2010. The collection included nearly 4000 lithographs (glass plate negatives) of Australian and Indian soldiers.

We then made our way to another town for R&R, Naours. We visited the underground tunnels where Australian soldiers would seek refuge from the noise of war. Soldiers have left their mark with graffiti on the walls, becoming a self-made memorial. One of the members on the tour group with the assistance of staff was able to identify a family members graffiti as it had been recorded in a diary.



*Vignacourt – Photo Museum – Attic where lithographs were located*



*Caves, Naours*



*Graffiti by William Mervyn Lecky - Victoria*

**Day 8** – ANZAC Day 25<sup>th</sup> of April 2023, a very early morning start to make our way the Australian National Memorial at Villers-Bretonneux for the Dawn Service. The morning was cold and a light rain persisted throughout the service. I managed to catch up with my cousin Captain Samuel Howard who was attending the service in an official capacity. I felt honoured to be able to pay my respects to our 45,000 countryman who gave the ultimate sacrifice on the Western Front, in particular my Great Uncle Charles Hutchison. I was also notified the day prior that my wife had an uncle from the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Charles Blackley, who's name is also inscribed on the National Memorial. Charles Blackley died on the Sunken Road, Bullecourt, with no known grave. I paid my respects to Charles Blackley with a connection to the Royal Victorian Regiment in its current form today. The bagpipes and Last post being played from the top of the memorial a truly moving experience and one I will never forget.

Post the dawn service we made our way to the town of Hamel where we shared a longstanding tradition of breakfast with the townspeople followed by a service in the Australian Memorial Park in the town. We then paid our respects at the Beaumont-Hamel Newfoundland (Canadian) memorial and Thiepval (British) Memorial. A short visit to the Lochnagar Mine Crater which was detonated beneath the German lines on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the Battle of the Somme. Even today the imposing crater is more than 100m across and 30m deep. We then returned to the hotel in Amiens where I spent the rest of the day commemorating over beers with newfound friends and fellow veterans.



*ANZAC Day Dawn Service - Villers-Bretonneux*



*With my cousin Capt Samuel Howard*



*Breakfast with the townspeople at Hamel*



*Thiepval (British) Memorial      Lochnagar Mine Crater*

**Day 9**, Our final day on the battlefields, we paid our respects at Pozieres, the scene of the costliest battle in Australia's history where 23,000 Australian Soldiers were killed, wounded, or taken prisoner. We paid respects at Mouquet Farm the site of nine separate attacks by 3 Australian Divisions in 1916 and Mont St Quentin, often regarded as one of the finest achievements by the AIF. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September 1918, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Australian Division, after heavy exhausting fighting, established a stronghold on the area and forced the complete withdrawal of the Germans from Peronne. We also visited Australian Corps Memorial Park and historic sights of the Red Baron before returning to Paris for a farewell dinner on the Seine River.



*Pozieres Cemetery*



*Mouquet Farm*

The ANZAC Day on the Western Front Tour was a once in a lifetime experience. The Pompey Elliot Scholarship has given me a wonderful opportunity to explore the roots of a deep family military history from family members that had served in Victorian Battalions as well gaining a greater knowledge of the 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Battalions which I have a strong connection, having served 17 years in the 8<sup>th</sup> / 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Royal Victorian Regiment. April 2023 saw me discharging from the Australian Army on medical grounds after 23 years of Service in both the Australian Regular Army and the Army Reserve. Although the Pompey Elliot Scholarship was taken 13 years after it was awarded, it was a fitting end to my Australian Defence Force service. I thank all the members of the Royal Victorian Regiment Association for the amazing opportunity and am very humble to be a recipient of the Pompey Elliot Scholarship.