Australian Red Cross Society Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau files, 1914-18 War
1DRL/0428

# 1734 Lance Corporal Robert Melville Sheppard

## 52nd Battalion



2480602M

A.I.F. 52nd Btn
D.Coy.

SHEPPARD
R.M. 1734

"K. in Action"

Killed on Action 29-3-17
Cert. by A.I.F.Hqrs 18-7-17.

P.I.

London
19-7-17

FRANCE

52nd BATT. A.I.F. SHEPPARD. R.M. 1734.

24.3
K. [illegible] 1917. Det D/B.

A Queenslander belonging to the 2nd reinforcements. He belonged to D.Coy and was a machine gun Lance-Corporal. That is why I know him for I was a machine gun Corporal then. But he was killed later than February; it would be about the end of March. The Germans were then retiring and we were at Legnicourt. You may have heard how General Holmes and a Staff Officer went out in daylight to one of our advanced posts. Sheppard was on this post; the Germans having perhaps spotted the General go to it, dropped a shell in it. Only one man of the eight escaped unhurt and Sheppard was killed. All were got in and buried. JNA

Ref ---Sgt White. 3312.
No 3 Gen. Hospital.

P.1.

Le Treport. Sept 1st.1917

52nd Battn
A.I.F. Da

Sheppard.
R.W. 1754

"Killed 29.3. 1917"

I saw him dead near St. Quintan. He was siting in his dugout when a shrapnel pellet hit him in the head killing him instantly. I saw his grave at place of casualty and it was marked by a cross bearing his identification particulars. Refer to Major Maxwell 52nd Battn who was close to him at the time of casualty, and who read the burial service.

Witness:-----

Pte. S. Mc Fetridge 1682
52nd Battn D. Coy., 15th Pltn.
3rd A.A. Hospitl,
Dartford.

W. Oman,
London
16.9.17.

P.I.

Written Major Maxwell 26.10.17

52nd Battn
A.I.F.

Sheppard
R.W. 1754

"Killed 29.3.17."

He was killed alongside me in a dugout in the sunken Road at the back of the village of Lagnicourt by a piece of shell which passed through the roof of the dugout and penetrated his forehead. He rolled over and died instantly. I helped to bury him on the opposite side of the road the same day. I don't remember the date but I think it was March (he was a brother who was with the Battn but not at that time) I knew him well. His name was Robert and he belonged to the 2nd Reinforcement A dark "muggetty" cleanshaven man about 24 or 25 We put a rough cross on his grave at the time made of an old box) but this has no doubt been replaced by the regulation cross. He belonged to D. Co. XII Pltn. We called him Bob.

Informant:-

Pte. H.E. Smith. 4582
D. Coy., 52 Bn

London.
22.9.17.

P.I.

52nd A.I.F.

Sheppard R.M. 1734,
D. Coy.

(K. 2/17 Det D/B) 29-3-17

"I knew Sheppaed by sight and happened to be in the same part of a sunken road as him when he was killed. I saw the body lying on the ground awaiting burial. Sheppard was struck in the top of the head by a piece of shell which pierced his tin helmet and death was instantaneous. Capt. Maxwell, M.C.D.S.O. read the burial service, the body being interred in the Sunken Rd. and a cross was put up with his name. This was in Lagnicourt".

Eye-witness: Yes

Description:

Informant: Pte. Bert Porter 3085,
52nd A.I.F. D. Coy., 16 Plt.,
3rd Western General Hospt.,
Cardiff.

P.1

Home address:
25/10/17, Post Office, Perth, W. Australia.
A.F. Bland.

52nd Battn. Shepherd.
D.Coy. R. M. - 1734
A.I.F.

"Killed 29.3.17."

I saw him killed at Lagnicourt by a shrapnal pellet which hit him on the head. He only lived about 5 minutes after being hit. He was buried at Lagnicourt, I saw his grave and it was not then marked, but it was sure to have been later. I knew him well, he was only quite a young man and came from Queensland and was theonly man of that name in the Coy.

Witness:-
Pte.P.C.Thornton 1985
52nd Battn.D.Coy.15th Platn.
3rd Aust.Aux.Hospital.
Dartford.

W.Oman.

London.
26.10.17.

P.I.

52. A.I.F.

Sheppard, R.M. 1734
D.Co.

(K. Feb. 1917.) 29-3-17

"This man was killed by a shell in the Sunken Road at Langecourt. He was buried in the shell hole on the spot and I saw a cross with his number and name erected by Sgt.Wicks.

Eye-witness: Of Grave.

Description:

P. 1
Ld
Buff

Informant:- Gordon Ernest Warner, 1766
52. A.I.F. D.Co.
Beaufort War Hospital, Bristol.

Home address: Minerva, Springsure, Queensland.

Oct. 31
F. Morris

Havre 1st November.1917.

52nd AUSTRALIANS SHEPPARD, R.H. 1734
D.Co.

K. Feb. 1917. Det. D/B. 29-3-17

I knew Pt. Sheppard of D.Co. slightly. He was about 27 years of age, medium height and build, dark and clean shaven. I saw his grave on the side of the road close to Lagnicourt by itself, and there was a temporary cross with his name in indelible pencil. I could point out the spot. I do not remember his initials or number.

Informant: Pt. H. E. Graham, 2178
52nd Australians, H.Q.
Australian Camp, Rouelles.

RDM.

RI
pd
Swift

52nd Battn.
A.I.F.

Shepherd.
R.H. 1734

"Killed in Action 29.3.17"

re 1734 R.H.Shepherd. I have sent your letter along to the Adjutant 52nd Battn.A.I.F. who no doubt will fix it up. If not will you write me to the Battalion in 6 weeks or 2 months time, when I expect to be back and I will do what I can. Although I remember Shepherd I cannot remember any particulars one way or the other.

Letter from:-
Captain A.M.Maxwell
Scotland. 2.12.17.

London.
17.12.17.

P.I.

Returned P.I

52nd Battn.
A.I.F.

Sheppard.
Pte. R.M. 1734

"Killed in Action 29.3.17"

The above named soldier was not buried in a Military Cemetery. A cross bearing his number, name and Battalion was erected over his grave which was made on the side of a sunken road leading off Lagnicourt. Map location - French Map - Sheet 57c N.W. C. 24.b.41 Description:- Height about 5'8", eyes blue, build, thick set, Hair dark, features - round. His brother No.1733 Pte.E.C.Sheppard is at present with Battalion.

Letter from:-
The Adjt.
H.Qrs. 52nd Battn.
22.12.17.

London.
30.1.18.

P.I.

A.I.F. 52nd Btn

SHEPPARD
R.M. 1734

"K/A. 29-3-17"

There was a Sheppard who was killed at Lagnacourt by shrapnel but I don't remember his number or initials, I can verify them when I rejoin my unit. This Sheppard was sitting in his dug-out in a sunken road, which ran into the east side of Lagnacourt, we were supporting Company and the front line was about 500 yds ahead of us. We had been in the front line and came back to supports for two days (if I remember rightly) and were getting shelled fairly heavily. Our position as a whole was uncomfortable because we were the first troops to hold right up against the Hindenburg line and the Hun had concentrated most of his artillery against us (We had relieved another Australian Division, who took Lagnacourt, we took over the night after they captured it and were getting the "backwash" that comes to any captured place). Pte Sheppard was hit through the head and killed practically instantaneously, the shell burst above his dugout in the air and the piece of high explosive shrapnel came through the dug-out roof, through his steel hat, and as I have said, he would'nt even know he was hit. It did not disfigure him at all, he just died while talking to the other men in the dug-out. As no Chaplain was able to get to us, I read the burial service over him myself and as many men as were allowed came and attended the service. He was one of the favourite men of his section and platoon and his Officers and N.C.O's all spoke very highly indeed of him.

A.I.F. 52nd Btn (2)

SHEPPARD
R.M. 1734

Personally he was one of the men whom I, as company Commander, had had brought to my notice as a born and energetic soldier. Some of the men made a cross and erected on his grave and the graves Commission was informed of where he was burial. He earned what to my mind is the finest epitaph any man can. That he did his work cheerfully, was a good soldier and gave his life for his convictions and doing his duty. This is rather long I am afraid, but he was one of my best men and I remember how sorry I was to lose him. That is all I know and as I say, I cannot remember exactly which number this Sheppard had, but this is an account of the one who was killed near Lagnacourt. (This was in beginning of April 1917)

Ref: letter recd. from - Capt.A.M.Maxwell
52nd Btn,
(C/O Tasmanian Officers,
56 Victoria Str.S.W.1.
11-12-17.

London
20-2-18

P.I.

Note: We regret we have been obliged to hold this report up on account of pressure of work and shortage of machines.

ENQUIRIES.

SHEPPARD. Pte R.H. No.1734 "D" Coy 52nd Batt.

Brother has heard from relatives in Australia that Pte R.H.Sheppard was killed.He last heard from his brother by a letter dated about the end of March. Has written to Horseferry Rd for confirmation of casualty report but has received no reply. Will you please forward any available information to Pte E.C.Sheppard, No.1733,"C" Coy 69th Batt., and place man enquired for on our Enquiry list.

25th June, 1917.
S.W.

No.4 Command Depot,
Codford.

584

Headquarters
52nd Battn
22/12/17

The Hon Secretary
Red Cross Society
54 Victoria St.
London Eng. 1.

(cd)

Your letter of 23/10/17 Reference

No 1734 PTE. K.M. SHEPPARD has been recommended by Capt. A.M. MAXWELL D.S.O, M.C. 52 Batt. K/A 29.3.17 P.I.;

The above named Soldier was reported buried in a Military Cemetery. A cross bearing his Number, Name, & Battalion was erected over his Grave, which was made on the side of a sunken road leading off of LAGNICOURT. Map. Location - French Map - Sheet 57c N.W. C.24.b.4.1.

Description. Height about 5'8", Eyes - blue, Build - thick set, Hair - dark, Features - Stout.

His brother No 1733 PTE. E.C. SHEPPARD is at present with Battalion.

[signature]
Major
a/CO 52nd Battn

19-1-18

Lt A. O. [redacted]ILSON.

A. Coy.

52 Infantry Battn

Aust Exp Force

B.E.F.

Dear Sir, We wish to thank you for your letter in answer to our enquiry addressed to Capt A. M. Maxwell D.S.O. R.N. Concerning

1734 Pte R. M SHEPPARD

of your unit

The information and details you have supplied will be of great assistance to us, & of value to our enquiries.

Yours faithfully

OS

24.10.17

Major MAXWELL / 52 Batt AIF

B & F

abt 1/3H R.M. SHEPPARD

52 Batt AIF

K. 29. 3. 17

L

L.S. 10.17

A.I.B.

GOR
FM.
12.12.17

Kilburn.
Fairlie.
11. 12. 17.

1734 R. M. SHEPPARD
52 Bde A.I.F

To
Secretary.
A.R.L.S.

JA. 29-3-17
p. 4.
2

Dear Madam,

Reference 1734 R. M. SHEPPARD
52. 8th A.I.F.

There was a Sheppard who was killed at Lagnacourt by shrapnel, but I dont remember his number or initals, I can verify when I rejoin my unit.

This Sheppard was sitting in his dugout in a sunken road which ran into the East side of Lagnacourt, we were supporting Company and the front line was about 500 yds. ahead of us. We had been in the front line and come back to Support for 2 days (if I remember rightly) and were getting shelled fairly heavily. Our position as a whole was uncomfotable because

We were the first troops to hold right up against the Hindenburg line and the Hun had concentrated most of his artillery against us. (We had relieved another Australian Division who took Lagnicourt, we took over the night after they captured it and were getting the 'backwash' that comes to any captured place)

Pte Sheppard was hit through the head and killed practically instantaneously. The shell burst above his dugout in the air and the piece of High explosive that killed came through the dugout roof, through his steel hat and as I have said, he wouldn't even know he was hit. It did not disfigure him at all. He just died while talking to the three men in the dugout.

As no Chaplain was able to get to us I read the Burial Service over him myself and as many men as were allowed

came and attended this service.

He was one of the favourite men of his Section & Platoon & his Officers and N.C.Os all spoke very highly indeed of him.

Personally he was one of the men whom I, as Company Commander, had had brought to my notice as a keen and energetic soldier.

Some of the men made a cross and erected on his grave and the Graves Commission was informed of where he was buried.

He earned what to my mind is the finest epitaph any man can. That he did his work cheerfully, was a good soldier and gave his life for his country & doing his duty.

This is rather long I'm afraid but he was one of my best men and I remember how sorry I was to loose him.

4/ That is all I know and as I say I cannot remember exactly which number this Shepherd had, but this is an account of the one who was killed near Hagnacourt.

I am

yours faithfully

Ashmead-Bartlett. Capt. 52 Bde

(c/o Tasmanian H.Q. Hobart

56 Victoria Street

S.W. 1.

This was in beginning of April 1917.

3rd October 1917.

1733 Pte E.C.Sheppard,
69th Btn, A.I.F.
c/o Mr. Whitmee,
Aust: Red Cross,
No. 4 Command Depot,
Codford, Wilts,

Dear Sir,

We have received your inquiry through Mr. Whitmee for details of the death of your brother - 1737 Pte R.H.Sheppard, 52nd Btn, A.I.F., and we sincerely hope that it will be some comfort to you to know that he died instantly.

1682 Pte S.McFetridge, who is at the 3rd Australian Auxiliary Hospital, Dartford, stated that he saw your brother lying dead near St Quentin, which is near the place of his death, his grave being marked by a cross with his name and regimental particulars. He was killed instantly by a shrapnel pellet, which pierced him in the head, killing him instantly, while sitting in his dug-out.

4582 Pte H.E.Smith, said that your brother was killed beside him in a dugout in the sunken road, behind the village of Lagnicourt. A piece of shell passed through the roof of his dugout wounding him in the forehead and killing him instantly., and informant helped to bury him on the opposite side of the sunken road. A temporary cross was erected over his grave, which he thinks has probably been replaced by a regulation wooden cross. He knew your brother well, calling him "Bob" and describing him as dark, cleanshaven, about 24 or 25 years of age and of nuggety build.

3312 Sgt White, when in hospital in France, gave similar evidence. He stated that your brother was a Queenslander and was on Machine gun L/Cpl. During the German retirement at the end of March, General Holmes and a staff/Officer, went out to visit an advance post at Lagnicourt, where your brother and several other men were on duty and while he was there the Germans shelled it, your brother being

killed instantly and his body being recovered and buried.

We are still continuing our inquiries as we hope to obtain a more definite account of the casualty and as soon as we receive further information you may rest assured that we shall advise you immediately.

Assuring you of our sincere sympathy in your great loss,

Yours faithfully,

H. D

Secretary

November 3rd, 1917.

1753 Pte.E.C.Sheppard,
C.Coy, 69th Battalion
A.I.F., C/o S.Whitmee, Esq,
Red Cross Searcher,
No 4 Command Depot,
Codford.

Dear Sir,

In further reply to your enquiry concerning the death of 1734 Pte.R.M.Sheppard,
52nd Battalion,
A.I.F.

we beg to forward the following unofficial report that has come to hand. 1985 Pte.P.C.Thornton, states that he saw Sheppard killed.at Lagnicourt, by a shrapnel pellet which hit him on the head. He only lived about 5 minutes after being hit. He was buried at Lagnicourt. when informant saw his grave it was not then Marked but he says it was sure to have been later. He knew him well, and said he was only quite a young man, came from Queensland and was the only man of that name in the company.

We trust it will be some consolation to know that your brother 's death was practically instantaneous. We shall advise you as soon as other particulars come to hand.

With every good wish for yourself. Yours faithfully

pma SECRETARY

C&P
F.M.
6.12.17

1734 Scotland

R.M. SHEPPARD 2.12.17.

52 Batt
JTA 29.8.17

To Secretary

A/G & M. Dept.

H.B.B.R.C.S.

54 Victoria Street.

Your letter rec. 1734 R.M. Sheppard 52nd Australians, was forwarded to me here. I have sent it along to the Adjutant 52nd Australians, who no doubt will fix it up. If not will you write me to the Battalion in 6 weeks or 2 mos. time, when I expect to be back & will do what I can. Although I remember the Sheppard I cannot remember any particulars one way or the other.

I am yrs. etc.

A Maxwell (Captain)

OC

December 8th, 1917.

Capt.A.H.Maxwell, M.C.,
52nd Aust. Infantry Bttn,
A.I.F., B.E.F.

Dear Sir,

We have to thank you very much for your letter in answer to our enquiry concerning

1734 R.M.SHEPPARD,
52nd Battalion,
A.I.F.

We had written to you on the unofficial information given by a man of your unit to the British Red Cross Searchers in Hospitals that you were an eyewitness of the casualty, (Pte.Sheppard was said to have been sitting in his dugout when a shrapnel pellet hit him in the head killing him instantly) and that you had read the burial service. Possibly our informant was not correct in his statement; but for the sake of the relatives we are always anxious to collect the eyewitness details that help so much to soften the bare official annoucements.

We thank you for having forwarded our request to the Adjutant; but as we have now collected sufficient information concerning Pte.Sheppard to cancel the case, we shall not trouble you further in the matter.

We regret that we are obliged to address this letter C/o the Battalion and it will therefore be somewhat delayed in reaching you.

Yours faithfully,

V.D

SECRETARY.

Hu.

GC

December 14th, 1917.

Capt.A.M.Maxwell,
52nd Bttn, A.I.F.,
C/o Tas.Govt.Offices,
56, Victoria Street, S.W.1.

Dear Sir,

We have to thank you very much for your letter in answer to ours concerning

1734 R.M.SHEPPARD, 52nd Battalion, A.I.F.

The detailed information you have sent will be of greatest value to the relatives, to whom it is our custom to forward extracts from the letters received in answer to our enquiries. They will be much comforted in their loss to learn, through you, that death was absolutely instantaneous; while they will greatly prize what you have said in appreciation of Pte.Sheppards qualties.

We have today applied to the Graves Registration and Enquiries for a photograph of the grave to be sent to the next of kin, his Mother.

With repeated thanks.

Yours faithfully,
V. D

SECRETARY.

1733 Pte.E.C.Sheppard,
69th Battalion, A.I.F.
C/o S. Whitnee, Esq,
Australian Red Cross,
No 4 Command Depot,
CODFORD.

2nd March, 1918.

Dear Pte. Sheppard,

We have received a report concerning you brother :-

1734 Pte. R.H.SHEPPARD, 52nd Battalion, A.I.F.

from Capt. A.H.Maxwell, of the same Battalion, he writes in such an appreciative manner of your brother who he evidently very highly esteemed, and the report is altogether of such a personal nature we feel you may value it a good deal.

It reads as follows:-

"There was a Sheppard who was killed at Lagnicourt by shrapnel but I don't remember his number or initials. I can verify them when I rejoin my unit. This Sheppard was sitting in his dugout in a sunken road, which ran into the east side of Lagnicourt, we were supporting Company and the front line was about 500 yards ahead of us. We had been in the front line and came back to supports for two days (if I remember rightly) and were getting shelled fairly heavily. Our position as a whole was uncomfortable because we were the first troops to hold right up against the Hindenburg line and the Hun had concentrated most of his artillery against us (We had relieved another Australian Division)(who took Lagnicourt, we took over the night after they captured it and were getting the "backwash" that comes to any captured place) Pte. Sheppard was hit through the head and killed practically instantaneously, the shell burst above his dugout in the air and the piece of high explosive shrapnel came through the dugout roof through his steel hat, and as I have said, he would'nt even know he was hit. It did not disfigure him at all he just died while talking to the other men in the dugout. As him myself and as many men as were allowed came and attended the service. He was one of the favourite men of his section and platoon and his officers and N.C.O's all spoke highly indeed of him.

"Personally he was one of the men whom I, as company Commander, had had brought to my notice as a born and energetic soldier. Some of the men made a cross and erected on his grave and the graves Commission was informed of where he was buried. He earned what to my mind is the finest epitaph any man can. That he did his work cheerfully, was a good soldier and gave his life for his convictions and doing his duty. This is rather long I am afraid, but he was one of my best men and I remember how sorry I was to lose him. That is all I know and as I say, I cannot remember exactly which number this Sheppard had, but this is an account of the one who was killed near Lagnicourt. (This was in ge beginning of April 1917).

With a further assurance of our sympathy and with every good wish to you yourself.

Yours faithfully,

J. H. C. C.

SECRETARY.