

### **Sergeant Harold Ernest ARGUS (service no. 1134)**

Harold Ernest Argus was the youngest son of William Bassett Argus and Mary Anne Argus (nee Trewin). He was born at Tallygaroopna, Victoria, in February 1887. At the outbreak of World War I, he was in Adelaide where he was training to become a minister of religion.

On 28<sup>th</sup> December 1915, he enlisted in the 43<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Battalion which was South Australia's contribution to the formation of the AIF's 3<sup>rd</sup> Division. After showing outstanding ability in training, he quickly rose from his enlistment rank of Private to that of Sergeant. He was reputed to be so good at training that his superior officers had wanted him to stay in Australia and assist in training new recruits. He believed that it was his duty, however, to go overseas with the Battalion and "do his bit".

On 9<sup>th</sup> June 1916, he embarked at Adelaide with the rest of D Company of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Battalion on *HMAT Afric*. On this troop transport ship, they travelled to Marseilles in southern France via Albany, Colombo and the Suez Canal. After landing at Marseilles on 19<sup>th</sup> July, they travelled by train to the French port city of Havre on the English Channel. From here they crossed the Channel to England to undertake further intensive training on the Salisbury Plain.

On 25<sup>th</sup> November 1916 they were back in France, fit and ready for action. The Battalion spent four months engaging the enemy in trench warfare around the French village of Armentieres, not far from the border with Belgium. Between 29<sup>th</sup> April and 21<sup>st</sup> May 1917, they were withdrawn from the front line to billets in the village of Journy where days were filled with further intensive training. On 21<sup>st</sup> May, they marched back to Armentieres where the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division was preparing for what would become the historic Battle of Messines, planned to start on 7<sup>th</sup> June.

In preparation for the battle, one of the three artillery corps would undertake a practice barrage for ten minutes each day. Using the artillery barrage as cover, daylight raiding parties would emerge from the Australian front line trenches and proceed across No Man's Land to identify the enemy positions, engage the enemy and, if possible, take prisoners from whom further strategic information could be gleaned.

On 4<sup>th</sup> June, Sergeant Harold Argus was assigned to a raiding party of thirty led by young Lieutenant Fred Colman. The party was to leave their position at Armentieres in lorry transport, cross the Belgian border and, under cover of an artillery barrage, raid the enemy positions at Ploegsteert Wood. Due to the short notice given to the raiders, previous reconnaissance and preparation had not been possible.<sup>1</sup> This was further complicated by the lorries carrying the diggers being blocked for a time at a road junction known to the soldiers as Hyde Park Corner. After dismounting from the lorries, the members of the raiding party made their way along communication trenches to the front line. By the time they arrived there, the practice barrage had been completed.<sup>2</sup>

Lieutenant Colman decided that they would proceed without artillery cover and, at 2.00 p.m., led his men over the parapet and towards the enemy positions in Ploegsteert Wood. They had barely gone one hundred yards (approx. 91 metres) when the staccato action of enemy machine guns, accompanied by rifle fire, barked out across the flat space of No Man's Land. The result was the immediate loss of Lieutenant Colman and Sergeant Harold Argus, both of whom lay dying, and eleven others who were wounded. The ground was flat and featureless

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1 Colliver, E.J. et al page 34

2 Bean, C.E.W. page 586

and any attempt to recover the dead and wounded was met by a hail of bullets. Some took cover in shell-holes until nightfall made evacuation possible.<sup>3</sup>

Senior officers of Harold Argus later described him in the following way: *“He acted as Platoon Sergeant, and did splendid work in the trench warfare around Armentieres and Ploegsteert Wood. For two or three days before the opening of the great battle of Messines practice barrages were put down, under cover of which daylight raiders issued from our front lines and “put it across” Fritz. The idea was to secure identification, discover if the Boche were changing his order of battle and to destroy the morale of his front line troops. Going over in daylight, even under a barrage, was no child’s play, but required great nerve.*

*It was in one of these daylight raids that Sergeant Argus was killed. He was a fine type of man, splendidly built, whose courage seemed to rise as the danger increased. A born leader, he inspired confidence in his men and ever was in the place where the work was hottest and a leader most needed.”<sup>4</sup>*

Sergeant Harold Ernest Argus lies in the Strand Military Cemetery at Ploegsteert, Belgium. The grave reference is III. D.11. His name is recorded at position 136 in the Commemorative Area of the Australian War Museum in Canberra.

## REFERENCES

*Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918: Volume IV – The Australian Imperial Force in France, 1917.* Bean, C.E.W.

*The Forty-Third: The Story and Official History of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Battalion AIF.* Colliver, E.J.; Richardson B.H. (1920) Adelaide, South Australia. Rigby Limited.

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3 Colliver et al page 34

4 Colliver et al page 235

**PHOTOGRAPHS – Harold Ernest ARGUS.**



H E Argus headstone

Strand Military Cemetery at Ploegsteert, Belgium.