



Missing Soldiers of Fromelles Discussion Group

Fromelles Discussion Group has been contacted by Geoffrey Tully who is keenly interested in Australia's early military history due to his family connection with WWI serviceman Lieutenant Thomas Percival Hagan. Percy Hagan served with the 32nd Battalion AIF and was presumed by his family to have been lost in No-Man's-Land in front of the trenches from which the 8th Brigade was required to launch their attack on the German line during the Battle of Fromelles. Scrutiny of the Australian Red Cross and Missing Enquiry Bureau files however tell a more complete story. Having helped the 32nd Battalion, which was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel D. M. R. Coghill, temporarily secure the Australian's left flank by gaining possession of part of the opposing German position, Hagan fell in a hail of machine gun bullets while trying to extricate himself from territory previously held by the enemy. Lieutenant Hagan was never recovered, and although he is not listed among the dead recorded by the German burial party after the attack, it is possible he is buried in the mass grave at Pheasant Wood like many of his 5th Division comrades. Patrick Lindsay in *Fromelles: The Story of Australia's Darkest Day* lists 45 members of the 32nd Battalion in his Appendix II - The Missing Diggers of Fromelles. Not counting the 14th and 15th brigades, there are 19 from the 29th Battalion, 22 from the 30th Battalion and 16 from the 31st Battalion with 1 from the 8th Field Company Engineers, also listed for the 8th Brigade by the author.



PHOTOGRAPH—VC Corner Australian Cemetery and Memorial. [Courtesy, Geoff Tully].

Lieutenant Thomas Percival Hagan

(Background provided by Geoffrey Tully to supplement his Guest Book entries.)

Thomas Percival Hagan applied for a Commission in the AIF on 30-SEPT-1915 having previously been involved in the military. Hagan had already spent 4 Years in the Senior Cadets before undertaking 3 1/4 Years with the Citizen Force and his civil employment on application was recorded as 'Clerk'.

Born on 21-JUN-1894 and single, Hagan gave his postal address on enlistment as Woolnough Road, Exeter, Semaphore, South Australia. He described himself as being a native of Semaphore, his father being Thomas Page Hagan and his mother, Edith Alice Hagan. An extant Casualty Form - Active Service shows that Thomas

Percival joined 'B' Coy, 32nd Battalion, AIF, where he gained appointment as 2nd Lieutenant, having originally enlisted in the armed forces on 08-AUG-14.

Hagan was 21 years 3 months old when he applied for the commission.

2nd Lieutenant Hagan disembarked ex HMAT "Geelong", Suez on 18-DEC-15. According to Geoff Tully, Percy was promoted to Lieutenant before embarking to join the BEF in Alexandria on 17-JUN-16. He later disembarked ex "Transylvania" at Marseilles 23-JUN-16 before being reported MISSING on 20-JUL-16 - a fact which was reported to 2nd Army G.H.Q. on the following day.

Previously relegated Regimental No.: Z329, Hagan was said to have been killed re-crossing No-Man's Land during the retirement of his battalion. This event occurred about 0400 on the 20th-instant, according to the Adjutant, 32nd Battalion for Commanding Officer, and resulted from the inability of the 5th Division to make sufficient gains to hold newly-won ground which made the 32nd Battalion vulnerable to counter-attack by the Germans. It was suggested at the time that he became a casualty opposite Cellar Farm Avenue, near Fluerbaix.



PHOTOGRAPH: Lieutenant T. P. Hagan, of Semaphore, S.A., lost his life at Fromelles. Courtesy of Dr Roger Freeman, author of **Second To None: A Memorial History of the 32nd Battalion AIF, 1915-1919.**

There is no doubt Lieutenant Hagan reached the German line as documents contained in Percy's Australian Red Cross Society Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau file, [1DRL/0428] attest to this. Lieutenant C. B. Thomas, 32, C, 5th A.D.B.D. at Etaples on the 4th August 1916 reported, "I knew Lt Hagan, he was in 'B' Coy and I saw him fall on the morning of July 20th at Fleur Baix."

Lieutenant Thomas advised the authorities, "We had just made an extensive attack and I saw him as we were returning between the 2nd and 1st lines of German trenches." Hagan was "hit by a machine gun and by the way he fell I think it must have struck his heart as his legs absolutely collapsed." From what Thomas indicated after he looked at Hagan, one of Percy's men went over to see if he was still alive; but he did not stop, as the unit was "so hotly engaged."

1577 Private T. J. Thomas of the 32nd Battalion was also an Informant. He reported on the 12th August 1916 while convalescing at Harefield Hospital in the UK, that he saw Hagan in the third line of German trenches, having been wounded on the night of July 19. The unit had met strong resistance from the German defence and suffered many casualties when the enemy mounted a strong counter-attack on the remnants of the battalion which had taken positions in what Lindsay described as "the German support trenches in the area behind the old German front line."

472 Private J. F. Davis, 8 M.G.C. (formerly 32nd B. VIII) gave the following testimony on the 24th August, 1916. "I know Mr. Hagan; he was in B. VIII and his name was Percy . . . I saw him lying dead in No-Man's-Land, S. of Armentieres, on 20.7.16. I passed right by him and am quite sure that he was dead. He was hit in the left side of the head."



PHOTOGRAPH: Fortified block-houses, barbed wire, German artillery and knee-deep mud at Fromelles made the task of crossing No-Man's-Land almost impossible, especially in day light. [This image shows a German pill box photographed by Geoff Tully in 2000 after it had become part of Fromelles Memorial Park].

According to Private Davis this happened "as we retired and the Germans advanced right up to our lines. There was only one Mr. Hagan in the regiment and I knew his brother who is in the Naval Reserve in S. Australia." Enquiries were made but no trace of Percy Hagan was found in Germany so eventually Base Records, Victoria Barracks, Melbourne, Victoria, informed his mother and therefore his family about the circumstances of his demise and also wrote to F. A. Hagan, Naval Staff Office, Largs Bay, South Australia, who was officially and specifically notified of his brother's death.

From what Geoffrey Tully has found using the resources of the National Archives of Australia, Thomas Percival was awarded the 1914-15 Star, the British War Medal and Victory Medal.

Hagan had achieved Grade VI Class Standard when he submitted his Application for a Commission in the Australian Imperial Force and gained promotion to Lieutenant on 21-MAR-16 after qualifying for his first appointment as 2nd Lieutenant on the 2nd March, 1915.

Lieutenant Hagan was 5 feet 9 inches tall, 145 lbs. and declared fit upon gaining his commission. He died courageously in the field, and his mother who had been nominated as his Next-of-Kin, received his personal effects comprising a sealed valise containing a "Sam Browne" Belt aboard ex Transport "Seang Choon".



PHOTOGRAPH—Constructed after the Armistice, VC Corner Australian Cemetery and Memorial, is located 2 kilometres north-west of Fromelles on the road to Sailly. [Depicted at the entrance is contributor Geoff Tully during a tour of the Western Front].

Edith Alice Hagan was granted a pension of £1/10/- fortnightly from 20-SEPT-16. His certificate of report of death was despatched to The Actuary, The Mutual Life & Citizen's Assurance Society Ltd., Sydney, New South Wales, and his brother, F. A. Hagan, on the 30th October, 1916. Percy's father Thomas Page Hagan received the pamphlet "Where The Australians Rest", the Memorial Scroll and King's Message, Memorial Plaque and the medals which were issued to commemorate his son, Thomas Percival Hagan.

Geoff wonders whether Percy is in Pheasant Wood and thinks it would be marvellous if he could be identified because he fought so valiantly. The melée which resulted when the 15th Brigade attack failed was horrific. Having already reached the German support trenches the 31st and 32nd battalions found themselves besieged and at risk of encirclement. Indeed, it is quite likely that after having already survived strong counter-attacks by the enemy and defective artillery support, Lieutenant Hagan died trying to fight his way out of the German trenches in the early hours of the morning of the 20th, when the enemy began to infiltrate down their old front-line trenches behind the advanced trenches of the Australians.

Geoff Tully has long been interested in WWI. He is a Chartered Accountant retired from public practice, having formerly been a partner in the accounting firm Price Waterhouse (now PriceWaterhouseCoopers). In 1992, before the construction of the Memorial Park adjacent to VC Corner Australian Cemetery and again in 2000, Geoff visited a number of historic and significant battlefield sites on the Western Front, including Ieper, the beautiful Rue Petillon Cemetery, Le Trou Aid Post Cemetery adjacent to where "Pompey" Elliot had his HQ during the Battle of Fromelles and the Laies "river", which bisected No-Man's-Land near the Sugarloaf and contributed to the loss of so many of the 59th and 60th Battalion.



Le Trou Aid Post Cemetery contains the graves of men who fell at Le Maisnil (21 October 1914), the Battle of Aubers Ridge (9 May 1915), the Battle of Loos (25 September 1915) and the Battle of Fromelles (19-20 July 1916), including the remains of 56 diggers out of a total 358 burials.



PHOTOGRAPH: Drawn mainly from Victoria and commanded by Brigadier-General Harold 'Pompey' Elliot, the 15th Brigade was expected to traverse 350 metres to the German lines and deal with some formidable obstacles. Now tranquil, this watercourse euphemistically known as the Laies River, was one of these and the scene of many casualties for the 59th and 60th battalions. [Taken from the point where the "River" met the Australian front line, this image looks toward the site of the German frontline and the Sugarloaf salient]. *Private collection of amateur military historian Geoff Tully.*



Grave of Lt. Paterson, 32nd Battalion, First AIF, Le Trou Aid Post.



PHOTOGRAPH: RUE-PETILLON CEMETERY. Killed by a shell while apparently waiting in a trench beside his brother for the attack at Fromelles to begin, Lance Sergeant Edgar Emery, 32nd Battalion, then aged 19, now rests peacefully near Fleurbaix, Pas de Calais in northern France, where he has been memorialized. [Photograph taken by Geoff Tully during a tour of the Western Front in 2000].



PHOTOGRAPH: Rue Du Bois Cemetery—Grave of Major Geoff McCrae, CO, 60th Battalion, who fell in front of the Sugarloaf strongpoint, during the Battle of Fromelles. [Photograph courtesy of Geoff Tully].



During a visit to Fromelles and VC Corner Cemetery, Geoff Tully captured this image of Le Trou Aid Post Cemetery, situated on the old battlefield near Fromelles.