



Edward Piper  
7528  
40<sup>th</sup> Battalion

## The Lead up to action

Edward Piper was born to Robert and Dorothy Piper from Wesley Vale, just outside of Devonport in 1888. Edward attended school at Wesley Vale and spent much of his youth farming and playing sport which led to a successful stint of club football and cricket representing the respective Wesley Vale clubs. In September 1916, a single man at the age of 29, Edward heeded the call for reinforcements in Europe and left for the Great War after signing up with the 12<sup>th</sup> battalion/ 25<sup>th</sup> reinforcements. He passed all the fitness tests required but it was noted that he had decaying teeth – something that would have initially been enough of a reason to reject his application. The 12<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Battalion was one of the four battalions, along with the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>, which made up the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade. Half of the men in the battalion were Tasmanian, the other half South Australian and Western Australian. It was one of the first battalions established for the Australian Imperial Force in the First World War.

Edward and his mate John Smallbon, and the rest of the 12<sup>th</sup> Battalion 25<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements departed from Sydney on board HMAT A20 *Hororata* on 14 June 1917. They disembarked in Liverpool seven weeks later and then spent three months training with the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> training battalions in England. Two days after Christmas day, Edward was shipped to France where he had a 'transfer of service' (TOS) to the 40<sup>th</sup> Battalion where he served for the next eight months.

## The 40<sup>th</sup> Battalion

More than 1,000 of Tasmania's finest gentlemen formed the 40<sup>th</sup> Battalion. The Great War had been raging across Europe for two years and the dead were counted in the millions and the war was not going as the allies had planned, especially on the Western Front. The Tasmanian Government pledged to make a difference. The Premier, John Earl, declared he would assist by contributing a battalion made up of entirely Tasmanians. This group, the 40<sup>th</sup> Battalion was a group who drew attention from many areas of the armed forces. Even Sir John Monash expressed high words of praise for the all Tasmanian fighting squad

*"In no other unit was the pride of origin and sense of responsibility to the people it represented stronger than in the 40th."*

While many reinforcements were required for the battalion from back home, the fighting spirit of the 40<sup>th</sup> was a constant reminder of the Anzac spirit.

Edward joined the 40<sup>th</sup> after they had been through a number of challenging battles and conditions. These included:

- 'The Battle of Passchendaele' in which 79 of its members were killed, wounded or gassed. The wet weather and muddy conditions made the last stages of the third battle of Ypres one of the most terrible conflicts in the history of war.
- The Battle of Broodseinde (Oct 17) 50 killed
- Trench warfare, Flanders - 1916-1918. The Battalion spent most of 1917 bogged in bloody trench warfare with 470 casualties (66 killed)

Edward would go on to fight with the 40th through a number of well-documented battles including Morlancourt (28-30 March 1918) in which there were 214 casualties and 46 deaths. The fighting in the Somme in March 1918 saw the battalion face 493 casualties with 146 killed. In August and September, the battalion helped to drive the Germans back to the

Hindenburg Line which resulted in 475 killed, 1714 wounded (including gassed). Edward must have impressed with skill, bravery or leadership as after only four months with the battalion he was promoted to Lance Corporal. But all was not good for Edward during these months as he was sent to hospital on two occasions, the first time with gingivitis (most likely a direct result from his tooth decay discovered during enlisting). This gum infection was severe as he was kept in hospital for two weeks before being discharged back onto the front. The second time Edward was sent to hospital was for 'pyrexia' (raised body temperature and fever) but he was discharged after one day.

### Edward's last days

In his last month of fighting, Edward was involved in fighting in the Somme region, in particular, Reginald Wood. He was a part of the 40<sup>th</sup> Battalion who played a strong role in helping to recapture the town of Bray.

Following the Battle of Amiens in early August, the city of Amiens and its all-important railways had been retaken by Australian and Canadians (of the 40<sup>th</sup> Battalion). The allies had pushed the Germans back nearly 20 kilometres into a vital sector and the Germans had abandoned territory. This time is often referred to as 'the beginning of the end of the war'.

The 40<sup>th</sup> Battalion were then waiting in reserve in Reginald Wood. Much time was spent reorganising and equipping. Spirits were high, the summer weather was beautiful, there were occasional bombings from planes but generally little shell fire. On the 21 August, the order came to cross the Somme Valley to Saily Laurette that night –

*"We marched through a cloud of dust which hung permanently over all the roads as thick as a London fog and made figures invisible at 10 yards distance even in the light of a full moon"* (p. 59, Green).

The 40<sup>th</sup> arrived and set up in old trenches. The days were very hot and small groups were given permission to go to the river to bathe.

### 23 August

Verbal orders arrived instructing the 40<sup>th</sup> to capture the town of Bray the following morning. This morning was the opening of the main attack of the 'Battle of Bapuame' which lasted nearly 10 days and resulted in driving the Germans back from one side of the Somme battlefield to the other. It turned the line of the Somme. The first 24 hours of battle consisted of a series of strong assaults along the whole front. In order to take Bray, three battalions went into their assigned roles to encircle Bray. They were met with high explosives and gas

*"Respirators were put on but later removed as they proved a serious handicap in normal fighting but in the darkness, it reduced men to a state of helplessness"* (p.162, Green).

The three groups met with different levels of resistance, but all groups eventually took the small township of Bray. The Germans surrendered or cleared out but were obviously surprised by this attack as *"Many cellars contained burning candles and warm food on the tables"* (P.163).

As soon as daylight broke, the enemy in surrounding areas took in the situation and were seen making back over the hill in great numbers. The enemy then bombed the 40<sup>th</sup> heavily from the air.

Publicity was given in the official communiques that the capture of Bray was a Tasmanian affair, and the Battalion received a congratulatory cable a few days later from the Governor, Premier, and leader of the Opposition of the State

## 24 August

August 24th was spent in consolidating the position gained and making ready for a further advance, as orders were soon received that the 10th Brigade would continue the advance on the following morning (August 25), to capture the triangular piece of ground with Bray, Suzanne, and Cappy as the points. This meant a maximum advance of 3000 yards. The 40th Battalion was to be on the right of the Brigade front, with the task of advancing astride the Bray-Cappy road to Cappy. It was not expected that heavy resistance would be met with, as the enemy was not likely to risk a large force in that bend of the Somme.

At 2.45 a.m. the Battalion moved forward. Several machine-gun posts were captured, but no serious opposition was encountered, except by the left company, which was held up by a nest of machine guns directly in front. The situation was relieved by the company on their right sending a party across which bombed its way down the trench in which the enemy were, capturing four machine guns and 22 prisoners. The objective, which was reached at 4 a.m., was gained with 22 casualties, while the 40th captured 29 of the enemy with eight machine guns.

Sometime during this battle, it is likely that Edward Piper, the young farmer from Wesley Vale was killed. He was later buried in the nearby Bray Military Cemetery in Plot 1, Row B1, Grave no 8.

The loss of Edward the farmer, sportsman and beloved son from the small township of Wesley Vale was eloquently summed up by the beautiful memorial placed in the Examiner newspaper on the anniversary of his death in 1919 by his long-time friend John Smallbon from East Devonport.

PIPER.-In sad and loving memory of my dear comrade, Edward Piper, 40th Battalion, killed in action in France, 25 August 1918, after two years on active service.

*For God, King and Country.*

*Gone is the face I love so dear;*

*Silent is the voice I love to hear,*

*Too far away from sight or speech,*

*But not too far for my thoughts to reach.*

*A loving friend and faithful comrade;*

*forget him, no never will I,*

*I loved him as a brother; I love him still.*

*In a foreign land the dear one is sleeping his last long sleep.*

*Dear is the grave where the hero lies,  
Sweet is the memory that never will fade.*

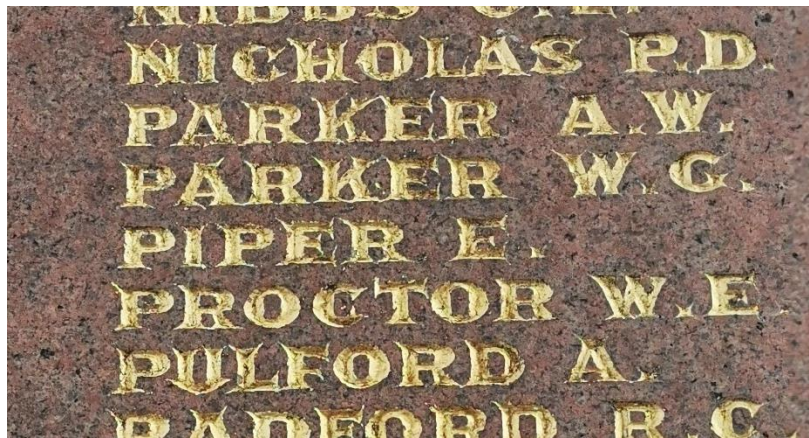
*Flowers may wither, leaves may die; if*

*others forget you, never will I.*

*-Inserted by his loving comrade,  
John Smallbon, East Devonport*

<b>Edward Piper's timeline of WW1 action</b>	
28 <sup>th</sup> Sept 1916	Enlisted
14 <sup>th</sup> June 1917	Departed on Hororato
26 <sup>th</sup> August 1917	Arrived Liverpool, England
27 <sup>th</sup> Dec 1917	Training in England
5 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1918	Arrived in France
5 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1918	Transferred to 40 <sup>th</sup> Battalion
6 <sup>th</sup> June 1918	Appointed Lance Corporal
27 <sup>th</sup> May 1918	Admitted to field hospital with gingivitis
1 <sup>st</sup> June 1918	Taken to hospital
15 <sup>th</sup> June 1918	Re-joined 40 <sup>th</sup> Battalion
9 <sup>th</sup> Aug 1918	Admitted to field hospital with Pyrexia
10 <sup>th</sup> August 1918	Sent to hospital
11 <sup>th</sup> August 1918	Discharged from hospital
17 <sup>th</sup> August 1918	Re-joined 40 <sup>th</sup> Battalion
25 <sup>th</sup> August 1918	Killed in action

Back row l-r Ptes A Baldock (Wesley Vale) ?  
Clarke (Wesley Vale) B.Burnie (East Devonport)  
In front Ptes J Smallhorn (East Devonport) E.  
Piper (Wesley Vale) L.Pierce (Wesley Vale)





The Latrobe Memorial bearing the name of Edward Piper.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

E03116

The village of Bray near where Edward Piper lost his life.

Bray was taken on the night of 23 August 1918, by a direct frontal surprise attack, of the 40th Battalion, assisted on the left flank by the 37th and 38th Battalions. The railway station is in the foreground and directly behind is the ruined church used as a hospital by the enemy. The structure on the right is a field telephone distribution small tower.