

Charles James Moore



By Lachlan Moore, 19 October 2017

Charles James Moore was an Australian soldier and my Great Great Grandfather's brother.

He was just 23 years old when he was killed in the Battle of Fromelles, on 19 July, 1916.⁵

Charles was just one of 1,917 Australian soldiers who were killed in this tragic conflict.¹

Sadly, the resting place of Charles Moore and so many other brave men remains unknown.

However, due to the determined efforts of the Commonwealth Graves Commission, there is great hope that the remains of Charles and other lost diggers will be recovered and identified.

Charles Moore was born in 1893 in Leichardt, Sydney to William George Moore (1859-1900) and Bessie Ellen Moore (nee Wescombe 1863-1940). Charles was just seven when heartbreak struck the Moore family. His newborn sister Eileen died in early February and just two weeks later his father died aged just forty, leaving a widowed Bessie unable to raise her five surviving children. Charles and each of his three brothers were raised separately, while Alma, the youngest surviving child, remained in her mother's care until entering boarding school. The surviving members of the Moore family do not know who raised Charles.

However, it is known that he was educated at Chatswood Public School and later employed as a warehouseman by Sargood Bros². It is evident that Charles remained in contact with

¹ Memorial, T. (2017). Battle of Fromelles | The Australian War Memorial. [online] Awm.gov.au. Available at: <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/fromelles> [Accessed January. 2017].

²Sargood Bros. Sydney Letter from AB Rope to Mr Moore of Cole's Book Arcade, George Street, 10th August 1916.

some of his nuclear family, through copies of letters that Charles wrote before leaving and during his time on active service abroad.³ These letters had been sent to his oldest brother, Guy Moore, and his cousin, Jack Paynter.³ Charles' military records (NAA:B2455, MOORE C J)⁴ include a will which names his sister, Alma, as the sole beneficiary to his estate. They also include letters from his mother Bessie, to the Australian Imperial Force Base Records Office enquiring about his welfare and whereabouts.⁴

Walter Eric Moore, my great great grandfather and brother to Charles, also enlisted in the Australian Imperial Forces. Despite attempting to enlist twice, on 15 November 1915 and 6 September 1918, on both occasions he was discharged from the AIF due to medical unfitness (NAA:B2455, MOORE W E)⁵.

Military records show that on 20 May 1915, Charles, at 21 years of age, enlisted in the Australian Military Forces at Liverpool, NSW and subsequently for service abroad on 28 May. He was appointed to the 1st battalion of the 7th reinforcements and given the service

³ Moore, C J, Copies of correspondence to Guy Moore and Jack Paynter kept by Moore family.

⁴ National Archives of Australia: Australian Imperial Force, Base Records Office CA 2001; B2455, First Australian Imperial Force Personnel Dossiers, 1914- ; MOORE W E, Moore Walter Eric : SERN 3891: POB Sydney NSW : POE Thirroul NSW : NOK W Moore Thelma Rose, 1915-1919. (NAA: B2455, MOORE W E)

⁵ National Archives of Australia: Australian Imperial Force, Base Records Office CA 2001; B2455, First Australian Imperial Force Personnel Dossiers, 1914- ; MOORE C J, Moore Charles James : SERN 2392 : POB Sydney NSW : POE Liverpool NSW : NOK M Moore Bessie Ellen, 1914-1923. (NAA: B2455, MOORE C J)

number 2392. On 7 July, exactly a week prior to embarking on the HMAT A67 Orsova⁵, bound for Alexandria, Egypt, Charles wrote to his brother, Guy, informing him that his battalion was ‘going away next week for certain but am not telling Mother or Alma, as it will upset them. ...Am now feeling very fit and will be glad to get away, and only wish you were coming with me’.⁶

On 18 October 1915, Charles and the 7th reinforcements boarded the HMT Borda in Alexandria for Gallipoli. On 20 October, Charles wrote to Jack Paynter, notifying him; ‘We push off tomorrow for God knows where – probably the Peninsula. Am very fit and looking forward to a scrap, and the sooner it comes the better I like it. Egypt is a rotten hole after you have been in it for 10 weeks.’⁷

He was evidently oblivious to the carnage he would experience on the Peninsula. On 4 November, his understanding of warfare changed forever. On this day he and so many other soldiers in the 7th Battalion began their military careers, commencing fighting on the Gallipoli Peninsula.⁵

⁶ Letter from Charles Moore to Guy Moore, dated 8th of July, 1915 (original in family archives)

⁷ Letter from Charles Moore to Jack Paynter, dated 18th of October, 1915 (original in family archives)

On 22 November, after having been in the trenches for almost three weeks, Charles wrote another letter to his brother Guy. In the letter, he reflects on his new understanding of warfare. While remaining uninjured, he reports that he had one or two near misses and described trench life as ‘not bad, but it’s not too good.’⁸ He remarked that shells were ‘a frequent, usual disruption to the day.’ ‘You hear a shell coming and somebody will sing out and down we all go then once again, resume your work as if nothing had happened.’⁸ The first few days ‘scared hell out of me but am now used to it.’⁸

Charles commended the work of Australian soldiers while minimising concerns for his own safety: ‘I wish you were here to see the ground our Boys had to get over at the start. They did wonderfully well. Don’t take too much notice of the gaudy pictures and stories you see and read about as they are very far-fetched ... (I) have not yet seen any Turks, as in trench warfare you do all your observing etc. through loop holes’⁸

In this same letter, Charles fondly acknowledged the news he had received of the birth of Guy’s son, and his own namesake, Charles William Kelso Moore (b. 16.8.1915)

⁸ Letter from Charles Moore to Jack Paynter, dated 22nd November 1915 (original in family archives)

‘...mighty pleased by the Honor conferred in me.... see that no thought of war enters his head as it did mine as war is Bloody Hell multiplied (sic) by Bloody Hell’⁸

Just over two weeks later, on the 10 December, Charles incurred a bullet wound to the head while fighting on the Gallipoli Peninsula.⁵ He was admitted to No 1 Casualty Clearing Station, but re-joined the 1st Battalion the next day, and just ten days before the Allies evacuated Gallipoli.⁴

After his embarkation on the H.M.T Huntsgreen at Gallipoli, occurring either in the late hours of the 19th of December or the early hours of 20 December 1915, Charles disembarked at Alexandria, Egypt on 28 December. Charles’ military record reveals that it was not until 8 January 1916 that Charles’ mother was informed of his injury by way of a telegram from Australian Imperial Force Base Records Office. These records bluntly stated; ‘Regret reported son Private XXX Charles J Moore wounded 10 December will promptly advise if anything further received.’⁴

Bessie replied the next day, requesting information relevant to the ‘nature of wounds and what hospital he is in...’⁴

From the 23 until 25 January, Charles Moore was absent without leave from a camp at Tel el Kabir, in Egypt.⁵ He consequently received seven days of Field Punishment and forfeited three days' pay. There is no indicative evidence to suggest why Charles was absent without leave. One might only hope that he enjoyed these days away from the camp, as he had little time remaining to enjoy his young life.

On 13 February 1916, Charles was transferred from the 1st Battalion to the 53rd Battalion⁵, which was one of a number of battalions created that month as an extension of the First Australian Imperial Force. It was formed from a combination of reinforcements sent from Australia and Gallipoli veterans from the 1st battalion such as Charles.⁹

Charles was taken on command at the School of Instruction in Zeitoun on the 4th of March.⁵ He was then taken on strength from the 53rd Battalion to the 14th Machine Gun Company on the 11th of March. Charles took the opportunity to write to his brother Guy delivered via the hand of a fellow soldier and friend, Joe Chisholm (service number 2434)¹³, who was being 'invalided back'¹⁰ to Australia. In this letter, dated 22 March 1916, he writes:

⁹ AwM.gov.au. (n.d.). 53rd Australian Infantry Battalion. [online] Available at: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/U51493> [Accessed 12 Jan. 2017].

‘... at present am in the School of Instruction going through the Machine Gun Course but by the time you get this will be with my unit and probably on my way to France as we are going there for sure. I am doing pretty well in my exams ... 97, 100 and 98 out of possible 100 in three exams. ...am trying to get good marks and so score an instructors certificate, which might bring me a couple of stripes. The wound which seems to have stirred up so much feeling has been healed up for months.’¹⁰

Despite his optimism, Charles requested that Guy convey regards to friends at home including his infant namesake, he also instructs him to ‘let the warehouse know I am not dead.’¹⁰ He reflected on soldiering as ‘a wonderful experience but a trifle monotonous’ and anticipated ‘things will liven up in France, in fact will probably get a little more than I want.’¹⁰

A letter delivered by hand perhaps provided Charles with the opportunity to relate his experiences without censorship, as he refers to the Machine Gun in brackets as the ‘Suicide Squad)’¹⁰ and reflects candidly on his experience at Gallipoli.

¹⁰ Letter from Charles Moore to Guy Moore, dated 22nd of March 1916 (original in family archives).

‘On the Peninsula things were pretty warm at times especially one night they threw bombs into me on an advanced post. The chap along side of me was killed’.¹⁰

Charles re-joined the 14th Machine Gun Company from the School of Instruction and on 26 April was promoted to Corporal.⁶ On 19 June, Charles embarked at Alexandria, Egypt to join the British Expeditionary Forces. He disembarked at Marseilles, France on 25 June.⁴

On 16 July 1916, Charles wrote again to Guy. Addressing his letter ‘Somewhere in France’, he explained that it was ‘Just a note to say something will be doing here shortly and yours truly will be in it. Will write again when the stunt is over, providing everything pans out OK.’¹¹

This ‘stunt’ would turn out to be the Battle of Fromelles. An attack designed to distract the attention of German forces away from the nearby Somme offensive. This attack lasted just 14 hours and resulted in an overwhelming victory for Germany. It was undoubtedly the worst day in Australian military history, with 5,533 casualties being incurred by the Australian Army¹⁵ including 1,917 deaths and 470 soldiers being captured as prisoners by the German forces. This ‘tactical abortion’¹⁵ as senior military officer General Harold Edward ‘Pompey’

¹¹ Letter from Charles Moore to Guy Moore, dated 16th of July 1916 (original in family archive).

Elliot described it, concluded with no land being gained, while Australia lost a quarter of the amount of soldiers killed in the eight-month Gallipoli campaign in 14 hours.

Heartbreakingly, this ill-fated campaign on 20 July 1916 cost Charles his young life.

The amount of information exchanged between those on the warfront, the war administration and the soldiers' kin is staggering. Lacking modern day communication technology, delay, error and confusion in the communications between these three parties was an inevitability.

Charles' service record reveals that it was not until 24 September 1916, over two months after Charles' death, that his mother Bessie received the news that her son had been killed in action. She replied immediately, requesting his personal possessions and updating her address.

As a result of an error in the formal notice of Charles' death, his uncle, Charles Ernest Moore wrote from Adelaide on the 24 October and 2 November to seek clarification.⁴ The military reply from an unsigned Major in the Defence Base Records confirmed that 'No. 2392 Private C. J. Moore, 14th Brigade Machine Gun Company (formerly 53rd and 1st battalions), is reported as having been killed in action on 20 July 1916. As you state that the official advice

received by next-of-kin quoted (the incorrect) regimental No. 2492, the telegram had evidently been mutilated in transmission.’⁴

Charles’ military records show that Bessie was yet to receive all of Charles’ Military medals until February 1923, almost seven years after his death.

Charles, at the time of writing, is commemorated at the Villers-Bretonneux Memorial.

However, communication with the Commonwealth Graves Commission has revealed that this was not the correct place to commemorate him and the other soldiers who fought and died in the Fromelles Campaign.¹² In late 2017, the VC Corner Australian Cemetery is scheduled to be redeveloped.¹² When the redevelopment is completed, the site dedicated to the commemoration of Charles Moore and several other soldiers will be relocated to this cemetery.

Charles fought amongst so many Australian heroes, so young, loyal and brave. None of these men deserved the pain, the torture and, in many cases, the fate they were dealt. While

¹² Email from enquiries@cwgc.org to ljmoore@lcs.tas.edu.au , dated 19th of November 2016

¹³ National Archives of Australia: Australian Imperial Force, Base Records Office CA 2001; B2455, First Australian Imperial Force Personnel Dossiers, 1914- ; CHISHOLM FJM, Chisholm Forester Joseph Millthorpe: SERN 2434 : POB Sydney NSW : POE Liverpool NSW : NOK M Chisholm Jeanette A, 1915-1929. (NAA: B2455, CHISHOLM F J M)

researching Charles, I feel as though I have adopted him as my friend and my hero. He had a great life ahead of him; he may have had a family of his own. He was just 23.

The First World War came at such a great financial and political cost to so many nations, but no financial, political or tangible cost from this war could come close to its monumental human cost. That cost can never be justified.

Charles Moore was just one man, one of the 17 million lives that the Great War stole, so in the scheme of things, when attempting to contemplate such colossal statistics, it may seem as though it matters little. The truth is it matters more than anything, for lives can never be valued nor repaid. No one can ever give Charles his life back, nor can those left behind ever see their son, brother, uncle, nephew again. What these men and women had to go through will never be vindicated nor redressed. What we can do, and what we must do, is tell the stories of the men and women who went through this pain. Empathise with, salute our military heroes, past, and present and most importantly, we must listen to their stories.

Crucially, we must take action to prevent anything like this happening again. We have failed with this several times in the past, but we cannot fail again. The price is too high and the memory of men like Charles too dear.

In my initial Frank MacDonald essay, I explained that Charles Moore was my great grandfather's uncle and one of roughly 2,000 Australians who were killed in the battle of Fromelles. I had vaguely known for some years that I was a distant relative of this brave soldier, but until recently, Charles was just a name to me. When I was fortunate enough to be one of the six entrants selected for the Frank MacDonald MM Memorial Prize, I was required to research an Australian soldier who fought in World War 1. While pondering whether to choose Charles, my cousin Elizabeth Moore contacted the War Graves Commission. Coincidentally, the commission was attempting to find a DNA sample from one of Charles' family members to clarify the possibility that he was buried in a recently uncovered mass grave in Pheasant Wood, France. When, in 2009, the remains of over 250 Australian and British soldiers buried by the Germans following the catastrophic Battle of Fromelles have been uncovered.¹⁴

Whilst writing this tribute, our family is currently waiting on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission to determine if the DNA sample that my grandfather Wayne Eric Moore submitted matches any of the remains of soldiers in that grave. Should the DNA prove that this was indeed Charles' final resting place; it will give finality to the story of Charles James Moore. It will also give the broader Moore family and I, a feeling of comfort, gratitude and

foremost certainty that this brave soldier would have his own place for us, to now and in the future, reflect on his life and sacrifice.

Lest we forget.

16/7/16

Somewhere in France

Dear Guy

Just a note to say something will be doing here shortly and you truly will be in it will write again when the stunt is over providing everything. I am out ok have not had a line from you for some time. I have I received any parcels. Tell Jim I have just received his letter dated May 2. but the parcel did not arrive. My address now is Corp. Moore Co. to Two three nine two Machine Gun Company, fourteenth Brigade. so if a parcel is sent to that address I ought to get it. all right now. Some good socks and cigarettes would come in. Well for the present good bye. Tell Phyllis you have heard from me. Don't forget to write soon.

Charlie

Above: Image of, ¹ Letter from Charles Moore to Guy Moore, dated 16th of July 1916 (original in family archive)



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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Above: Image of, HMAT Orsova A67, taken 6 December 1916, Port Melbourne, Victoria. Taken from: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/PB0776>