

JOHN DESMOND BENGER



SERVICE NUMBER: 2218

Jenique Howard

Enlisted: 25 May 1915, Hobart, Tasmania

Last Rank: Lance Corporal

Last Unit: 52nd Infantry Battalion

Born: Launceston, Tasmania, 1897

Hometown: Invermay, Launceston, Tasmania

Schooling: Convent School Launceston

Occupation: Labourer and Shop Assistant

Death: Died from wounds to the left thigh, France, 29 August 1917 (Age 21)

Cemetery: Trois Arbres Cemetery, Steenwerck, Nord Pas de Calais

Plot 1, Row Y, Grave 12. Headstone inscription reads:

“Of your charity pray for the soul of the above.”

Memorials: Australian War Memorial Roll of Honour & Hobart Roll of Honour



World War I Service:

25 May 1915: **Enlisted** AIF WWI, Private, 12th Infantry Battalion, enlisted in Hobart, Tas

26 June 1915: **Involvement** Private, 12th Infantry Battalion, Third Ypres

26 June 1915: **Embarked** Private, 12th Infantry Battalion, HMAT Wandilla, Fremantle

9 August 1915: **Wounded** AIF WWI, Private, 52nd Infantry Battalion, Third Ypres, shrapnel wound to the face, evacuated to Mudros

1 March 1916: **Transferred** AIF WWI, Private, 52nd Infantry Battalion, transferred from the 12th Battalion to the 52nd Battalion at Tel-el-Kebir Railhead

27 July 1917: **Promoted** AIF WWI, Lance Corporal, 52nd Infantry Battalion, in the field

29 August 1917: **Involvement** Lance Corporal, 52nd Infantry Battalion, Third Ypres

- Son of Jonathon W and Mary Elizabeth Benger of 29 De Witt Street, Battery Point, Hobart, Tas
- Medals - 1914-15 Star, British War Medal and Victory Medal
- Served in the citizen Military Forces and Cadets
- Next of Kin - Mother
- Age at embarkation - 18 years old
- Religion - Roman Catholic

Picture taken of my poppy by John's name, on the Roll of Honour



Jenique Howard

Location on the Roll of Honour:

John Desmond Benger's name is located at panel 154 in the commemorative area at the Australian War Memorial

"Word has been received in Launceston to the effect that Private J Desmond Benger was killed in action in France on August 31. The deceased saw service in Gallipoli where he was shot through the face. With his battalion he went through a good deal of the fighting in France until he was unfortunate enough to contract trench feet. On his recovery he returned to France and met his death. Prior to enlistment Pte Benger was employed at Rushton's Store, South Launceston." **The Weekly Courier** 20th September 1917

Locations visited by Lance Corporal Benger during service:

- **Egypt**- Tel-el-Kebir Military Camp, Cairo
- **Gallipoli**
- **France**
- **Belgium**– Ypres
- **Lemnos Island**- Mudros Bay



Muddy landscape from the Third Battle of Ypres

Third Battle of Ypres:

- The Third Battle of Ypres (also known as Passchendaele) was fought between July and November 1917. Both sides suffered heavy casualties and endured appalling conditions. The name Passchendaele has become synonymous with mud, blood, and futility.
- The battle began on 31 July 1917. On the first day, British and French forces made significant gains. As the day wore on, it began to rain heavily. The rain made it difficult for the artillery to support the advance. The German defensive system was designed to wear down attacking forces, before pushing them back with powerful counter attacks. Having advanced deep into this system, and lacking effective artillery support, the Allies were vulnerable to these counter attacks and lost much of the territory they had gained.
- Rain and mud defined the battle. The rain began on the first day of the battle, 31 July 1917. The battlefield had been churned up by the Allied artillery bombardment, destroying the ditches that acted as a drainage system. The rain continued for three weeks. Soldiers struggled through heavy, sticky mud that reached up to their waists. Men, horses, tanks, and other vehicles literally drowned in the mud. It was almost impossible to manoeuvre artillery into new positions, and aerial reconnaissance was grounded by poor visibility.
- The Third Battle of Ypres is perceived as muddy, bloody, and futile. The early stages of the battle largely conform to this image, but the middle stages were very successful. In September, General Herbert Plumer replaced General Hubert Gough as commander. He introduced a new approach. Instead of attacking along a wide front and setting ambitious objectives deep inside the German defensive system, Plumer favoured a 'bite and hold' strategy.

- Bite and Hold- A tactic where you seize a small bit of territory (bite) and then 'hold' onto it.
- Plumer's new approach was helped by improved weather conditions in September. Better weather meant more artillery and aerial reconnaissance to support the attack. Although they continued to suffer heavy casualties, the Allies made significant progress at Menin Road, Polygon Wood, and Broodseinde.
- Passchendaele was the final objective. The rain returned in October, and despite worsening conditions and exhausted troops, the offensive continued in order to capture Passchendaele Ridge.
- The Allies suffered over 250,000 casualties- soldiers killed, wounded, or missing – during the Third Battle of Ypres. Casualties among German forces were also in the region of 200,000. The Commonwealth War Graves commission commemorates over 76,000 soldiers who died during the battle.
- The German Army could not afford the losses it incurred at Ypres. Whilst the Allies would soon be reinforced by the Americans, the Germans could not replace that manpower.

IWM. (2022). *What you need to know about the third battle of ypres.*

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/what-you-need-to-know-about-the-third-battle-of-ypres-passchendaele#:~:text=The%20Third%20Battle%20of%20Ypres%20%2D%20also%20known%20as%20Passchendaele%20%2D%20has,with%20mud%2C%20blood%20and%20futility.>

Lemnos Island:

- On 4 March 1915, around 3,200 Australian soldiers landed on Lemnos. By 21 April around 200 ships had gathered at Mudros Harbour, the main port. They left the island on the evening of 24 April for the dawn Gallipoli landings
- Lemnos was the place where the troops practised the landings, the ANZACs disembarked for Gallipoli, Australian nurses and medical staff established their hospitals, and the place where sick and injured soldiers returned for treatment and periods of rest.
- It is also believed that Simpson's donkey, which carried the wounded from the Gallipoli battlefield back to medical services, came from Lemnos.
- During the nine-month campaign, more than 50,000 ANZACs passed through the island. It is also where 148 Australians and 76 New Zealanders are buried in the two military cemeteries on opposite ends of the island, at East Mudros and Portianou.
- Lemnos' role in history has been overshadowed by the carnage that happened in Gallipoli. With the eventual decision to abandon the Gallipoli campaign, troops were evacuated, and by early 1916, the last Australians departed Lemnos, with most then sent to Northern France.

Burfitt, J. (2018). *Few Aussies know what happened here, but we should.* News.com.au.

<https://www.news.com.au/travel/destinations/europe/few-aussies-know-what-happened-here-but-we-should/news-story/b9ac0dbe0f63a9532d3732a1e74eacc9>

To present my research to the Frank MacDonald group, I wrote a poem:

“We remember him, we remember them”

John Desmond Benger, born 1897 in Launceston, Tasmania

Residing in Invermay, working in a local store

To becoming a labourer, before opening the service door

Enlisting 24th May 1915 in Hobart,

Service number 2218, setting him apart

Having served in the citizen military forces and cadets,

John Desmond Benger readily takes the next step

His mother assigned as next of kin,

John aged 18, prepares for embarkation.

6th reinforcement, 12th Battalion

Boarding the ship to Wandilla, he was sure to feel nervous

Benger arrived at Gallipoli, the 6th of August, to start service.

Four days forward, a shrapnel wound to the face left him injured,

Being evacuated to Mudros in Lemnos, his service was hindered

Although it was thought that Simpson’s donkey came from Lemnos Island,

The significance comes from the hospitals established on this far land.

From there he was injured a further two times,

With gunshot wounds to his cheek and to his eye

Finally reaching September,

Private John Desmond Benger re-joined his unit in Gallipoli until they left for Cairo.

A new year, 1916, the 12th Battalion unit heads for a new scene

Disembarking at Alexandria, another Egyptian city

The home previously to an ANZAC camp community

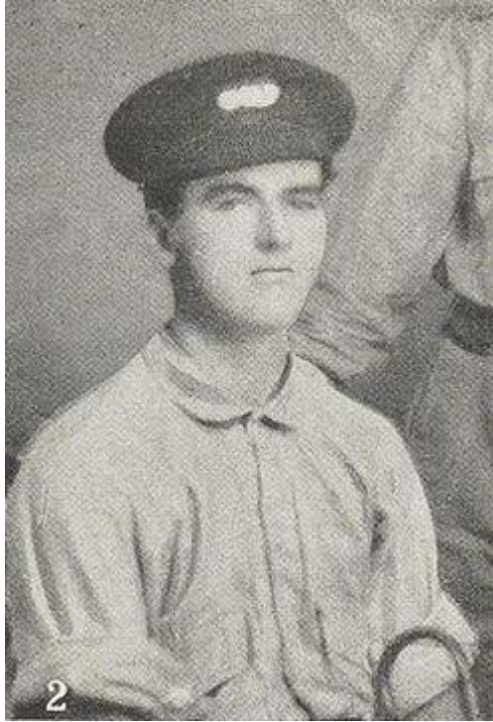
Two months later, the 12th Battalion collapses to form the 52nd, the 13th brigade

A unit by which Tasmanian pride is primarily displayed.

By June 5th, the unit joined the British Expeditionary Force

Fighting in France ‘til both trench foot and a disease begin to run their course.

*On leave to be treated, John was sent to Bulford in England,
78 days absent, feeling defeated
His time absent from duty brought him into the new year,
1917, it starts to go in a negative direction from here.
Marching in with his unit, from England to France
Once back on his feet, Benger returned to the advance
By the closing of July, Private Benger became a Lance Corporal.
That brings us to August 28th, almost the end of the month, fighting in Belgium
John suffers a fate that is certainly unwelcome
Admitted again due to being wounded in the field,
A shot wound to his left thigh, too late to be healed
He had been fighting in the Third Battle of Ypres, a five-month campaign
Now associated with blood, mud, futility, and everlasting pain.
On the 29th of August 1917,
We said goodbye to John Desmond Benger, a fate unforeseen
Buried in France at Three Trees Military Cemetery,
We shall always remember, what he did for his country.
April 25th, November 11th
ANZAC Day, Remembrance Day
We remember him, we remember them
With every poppy that catches the eye,
We remember him, we remember them
The soil holding memories of sacrifice in the name of us
We remember him, we remember them
In quiet moments, when all is nothing but silent
We remember him, we remember them all
At the going down of the sun, and in the morning
We will remember them
Lest we forget*



I read my poem beside John's tree at the
Soldiers Memorial Avenue, Hobart



Yellow River Cruise



Darwin Dawn Service



Soldier Presentation



Gunwarrdehwarre



Australian War Memorial – Roll of Honour

Jenique Howard