

# Private David Royden Seymour Howell- In World War One

**Service Number-854**

**By Tori Hall, Scottsdale High School**





## Dauids's life before war:

David Royden Seymour Howell was born on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December of 1892 in a town called Black Marsh in Tasmania. Growing up David was one of five children to parents Janet Wyllie (mother) also known as Jean, and Ernest Howell (father). The other four children of Jean and Ernest were Ivy who married a Carrington, Vera who married a Barnett, Mable who married a Groves and Harold David's brother. The Wyllie family migrated from Fyfe on the 27<sup>th</sup> of April 1853 on the immigration ship 294 on the 27<sup>th</sup> of April 1853.

David attended state school and was awarded the book 'Fun at The Circus' by Father Tuck in 1897 at age five for his good conduct. David then went on to become a baker's assistant and a labourer.

## Enlistment



On the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 1916 at age 23 ½ David made the decision to enlist and serve his country. He was deemed fit for service, being described with having dark features. He stood at 5 feet 5 inches (167.64 centimetres), weighted 148 pounds (67 kilograms) and had chest measurements of 37.40 inches (95 centimetres). David was a religious man who was Christian, always carrying a bible with him including when he was at war. Young men like David were influenced to enlist by the government. They put up cleverly thought-out posters to romanticise war. These posters used bright colours to draw men in, the posters felt personal as if it was meant for you and almost every time these posters worked.

## Before the First Battle

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of March 1916 the news had spread that the 40<sup>th</sup> battalion would be a fully Tasmanian unit that would join the 35<sup>th</sup> to the 41<sup>st</sup> battalions to create the 3<sup>rd</sup> division. By the 1<sup>st</sup> of April the unit had been complete, with reinforcements being raised. David and his fellow troops had to complete three months of systematic training before leaving Australia. The only catch was that the Lewis gun hadn't reached Australia yet, so the soldiers were limited to bombs.

Tasmania was proud to have formed the 40<sup>th</sup> battalion. The whole unit was invited to Hobart. Tasmanians were ecstatic to have a battalion that was full of their brothers, sons and fathers and they even gave them a nickname 'The Fighting 40<sup>th</sup>'.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 1916 the 40<sup>th</sup> battalion marched out of camp Claremont and entrained for Hobart. By the 4<sup>th</sup> of July they reached Melbourne. Leaving Australia via Port Phillip, the weather was rough, and most troops felt seasick but continuing they reached Cape Town by the 27<sup>th</sup> of July. After two days ashore the 40<sup>th</sup> battalion was off again in company with the transport 'Tahiti' and 'Maunganui' - both carrying New Zealand troops.

By the 13<sup>th</sup> of August they reached Dakar (the capital of Senegal). Fear and danger filled the air when they left Dakar and the chance of enemy submarines increased. Plymouth was the next stop officially reaching the United Kingdom on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August 1916.

There was no time to waste as on the same evening the troops were on a train. By the next morning, they reached Lark Hill. In Lark Hill the soldiers had one last bit of training. The 40<sup>th</sup> battalion wasn't as advanced as the others, so from 6am to 5pm they trained on their Lewis gun skills, doing bombing drills and group work all of which were done with extreme discipline. It was here that the boys learned the true meaning of the great art of 'making military returns.'

By November the news had come that they were to be deported to France. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November the 40<sup>th</sup> battalion travelled to Southampton embarking on a cross-channel transport on the same evening reaching La Havre that night. The following morning the soldiers disembarked and marched to a camp 11.27 kilometres away. This march came with no ease to the soldiers as it is recorded to be one of the worst marches in history.

## David's Service:

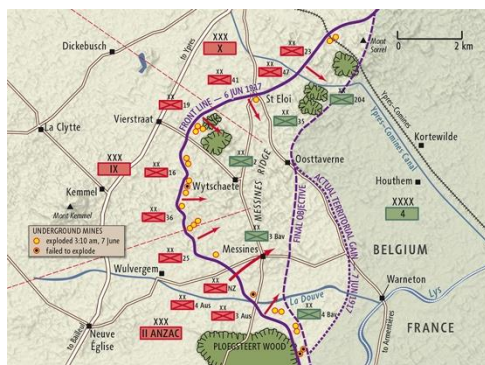
### December 1916

On the afternoon of the 9<sup>th</sup> of December 1916, the 40<sup>th</sup> battalion had not only joined the battle of Verdun but had taken over the front line in the trenches. Joining with only nine days left of the battle it ended on the 18<sup>th</sup> of December 1916.

### February 1917

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of February 1917 David paid his first visit to the hospital for sickness. Nine days later he rejoined the 40<sup>th</sup> battalion.

### June 1917



<sup>1</sup>G. (1917). *Battle of Messines map* [Photograph]. New Zealand History.  
<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/media/photo/battle-messines-map>

The battle of Messines was the 40<sup>th</sup> battalion's first major battle. On June 6<sup>th</sup> David was wounded and was once again in hospital missing the start of the battle. The battle of Messines had commenced a day after David's injury on the 7<sup>th</sup> of June 1917. After 3am the battle begun with powerful mines exploding under German trenches. David did eventually rejoin his battalion on the 11<sup>th</sup> of June five days into the battle. The battle of Messines ended on the 14<sup>th</sup> of June 1917. Inexperience showed among the 40<sup>th</sup> battalion as they lost 350 men either being killed or wounded.

## October 1917

The battle of Broodseinde Ridge was another major battle that the 40<sup>th</sup> battalion was a part of. The 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> divisions arranged a plan that on the 4<sup>th</sup> of October there would be a large attack in an effort to capture the ridge.

The preparation for the battle of Broodseinde Ridge began on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October by engineers and pioneers who were laying duckboard tracks, but this was unable to be completed due to the weather conditions worsening. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of October before dawn a yellow flare was set off by the Germans and it was time to fight.

The allies were off to a terrible start. Many thought that the attack had been compromised but the Australians forged on through. However, they were really struggling against German pillboxes as they were really difficult to defeat. Only lasting a day 5,153 Australian were wounded and 1,279 Australians had been killed.

What many don't know is that the battle of Broodseinde Ridge is remembered as one of the worst days in military history.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> of October 1917 David had been shot in his elbow and knee and on the 10<sup>th</sup> he was removed from England and the following morning was in the Pavilion General Hospital.

## December 1917

On the 5<sup>th</sup> of December David was transferred from the Pavilion General Hospital to the 3<sup>rd</sup> auxiliary hospital. Five days later on the 10<sup>th</sup> David was discharged to further his rehabilitation. Finishing his rehab on the 24<sup>th</sup> December he was released and ready to rejoin the 40<sup>th</sup> battalion.

David didn't want to go back to war and from 3:30pm on the 24<sup>th</sup> of December till 11:45pm on the 30<sup>th</sup> of December he went missing. He most likely was drinking in pubs and exploring. His punishment for this crime was twelve days confined to the barracks and he had to give up seven days of pay.

## February 1918

David didn't learn from his previous war crime, and he not only made a false statement but also neglected to obey orders and was given seven days of field punishment.

## March 1918

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of March, David proceeded overseas alongside a training brigade. After 10 days David rejoined the 40<sup>th</sup> battalion on the 12<sup>th</sup> of March.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of March 1918 Germany made their last attempt to defeat the Allies on the Western Front. At 4:20am the Germans began a devastating bombardment. 6,472 guns and 3,532 mortars were just the beginning of the German Spring Offensive. Germany was prepared for this battle having the best equipment, horses and the fittest men who had completed four weeks of special training. The Germans had learned from the past and came back determined to defeat the Allies.

## April 1918

By the 5<sup>th</sup> of April the Germans had taken 3,100 km and captured 90,000 prisoners, but this didn't matter. The Germans did not gain any valuable land and didn't destroy or split the British and France army.

Only 42 days after David rejoined the 40<sup>th</sup> battalion he was killed in action. Killed fighting for his country the best way to go if you were a man in the 1900s. If only he had survived six more months he could have passed on his story and his knowledge. The German Spring Offensive was indeed successful for the Germans.

# David's Death

WILL 12489

Name in full: David Royden Seymour HOWELL

Permanent Address: Formerly of Launceston, Tasmania.

Unit: 40th Bn. Regimental Number: 854 now serving in Fremont.

Name and Address of person or persons to whom it is to go: My Mother, Mrs. Howell, 19, Franklin Street, Launceston, Tasmania.

I, DEVID and REUCATH all my real and personal estate unto

IN WITNESS WHEREOF I have hereunto set my hand this 22nd day of March 1918.

Signed and acknowledged by the said Testator as his last Will and Testament the same having been read over and explained to him, in the presence of us both present at the same time who at his request and in his presence and in the presence of each other have subscribed our names as witnesses.

FIRST WITNESS: Signature of Witness J.P. Pibbin, Address and Occupation Major, 40th Bn. A.I.F.

SECOND WITNESS: Signature of Witness A.S.L. Ray, Address and Occupation Pte. 40th Bn. A.I.F.

Note.—1.—A witness or wife of witness must not be a person taking any interest under this Will.  
2.—If soldier has already made a Will he should state on this form where same is.  
3.—If he has a Will in his Pay Book he should make a new Will on this form.  
4.—If he does not want to make a Will he should state this fact on this form.

Certified to be a true copy of Will of No. 854 Pte. HOWELL David Royden Seymour, 40th Bn. (Deceased)

Checked [Signature] Opl. [Signature] States [Signature]

National Archives of Australia NAA: B2455, HOWELL D R S 854

Particulars Required for the Roll of Honour of Australia in the Memorial War Museum.

1. Name (in full) of Fallen Soldier: David Royden Seymour Howell

2. Unit and Number (if known): 854 40th Battalion

3. With what Town or District in Australia was he chiefly connected (under which his name ought to come on the Memorial)—  
Town (if any): Launceston District: State: Tasmania

4. What was his Birthplace: Black Harrel Kempton

5. Date of Death: 22/4/18

6. Place where killed or Wounded: Newaines, Pauchendale Killed: Tiller's Bretonne Bretonne

Particulars Required for the Nation's Histories.

1. What was his Calling: Baker's assistant

2. Age at time of Death: 25 years 4 months

3. What was his School: State School

4. What was his other Training:

5. If born in Britain or Abroad, at what age did he come to Australia:

6. Had he ever served in any Military or Naval Force before Enlisting in the A.I.F. (Please state particulars):

7. Any other biographical details likely to be of interest to the Historian of the A.I.F., or of his Regiment—

8. Was he connected with any other Member of the A.I.F. who died or who distinguished himself. (Please state Relationship):

9. Name and Address of the Parent or other person giving this information—  
Name: Mary Pibbin Howell  
Relationship to Soldier: Mother  
Address: 19, Franklin Street, Launceston, Tasmania

10. Name and Address of any other persons to whom reference could be made by the Historian for further information—  
Name: Archdeacon Beresford  
Address: Archdeacon, Launceston, Tasmania

NOTE.—This Folder is Addressed to the Secretary, Department of Defence, Melbourne. Please fold in four, and stick down gummed flap so that the Addressed portion is visible. The information is required urgently.

David's grave is located at Mericourt-L'Abbe Communal Cemetery Extension, Picardie, France and per his mother's request it is personally engraved with the words THO' DEATH DIVIDES FOND MEMORY CLINGS EVER REMEMBERED. The medals that David had received were the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

<sup>2</sup> (n.d.). HOWELL David Royden Seymour : Service Number - 854 : Place of Birth - Bothwell Tas : Place of Enlistment - Claremont Tas : Next of Kin - (Father) HOWELL Ernest. National Archives of Australia.

Retrieved March 16, 2024, from

<https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=6994368>

<sup>3</sup> (n.d.). HOWELL David Royden Seymour : Service Number - 854 : Place of Birth - Bothwell Tas : Place of Enlistment - Claremont Tas : Next of Kin - (Father) HOWELL Ernest. National Archives of Australia.

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(n.d.). *40th Australian Infantry Battalion*. The Australian War Memorial. Retrieved March 15, 2024, from <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/U51480>

(n.d.). *40th Australian Infantry*. Virtual War Memorial Australia. Retrieved March 15, 2024, from <https://vwma.org.au/explore/units/15>