

## Private Harcourt Adams – Frankie Munro



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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Figure 1: Studio portrait of Private Harcourt Adams.

These are the stories of two brave Tasmanian men. The first of which, my friend's ancestor, a sailor from Swansea, killed at Pozieres in 1916. The second, a lost relative of mine that I discovered through the Frank MacDonald Memorial Prize, also killed at Pozieres in 1916.

Harcourt (Duke) Adams was born in Swansea on the 8 August 1890 to parents Frederick and Alice Adams. Prior to his enlistment, he was a fireman on board a steamship owned by the Mt. Lyell Co.

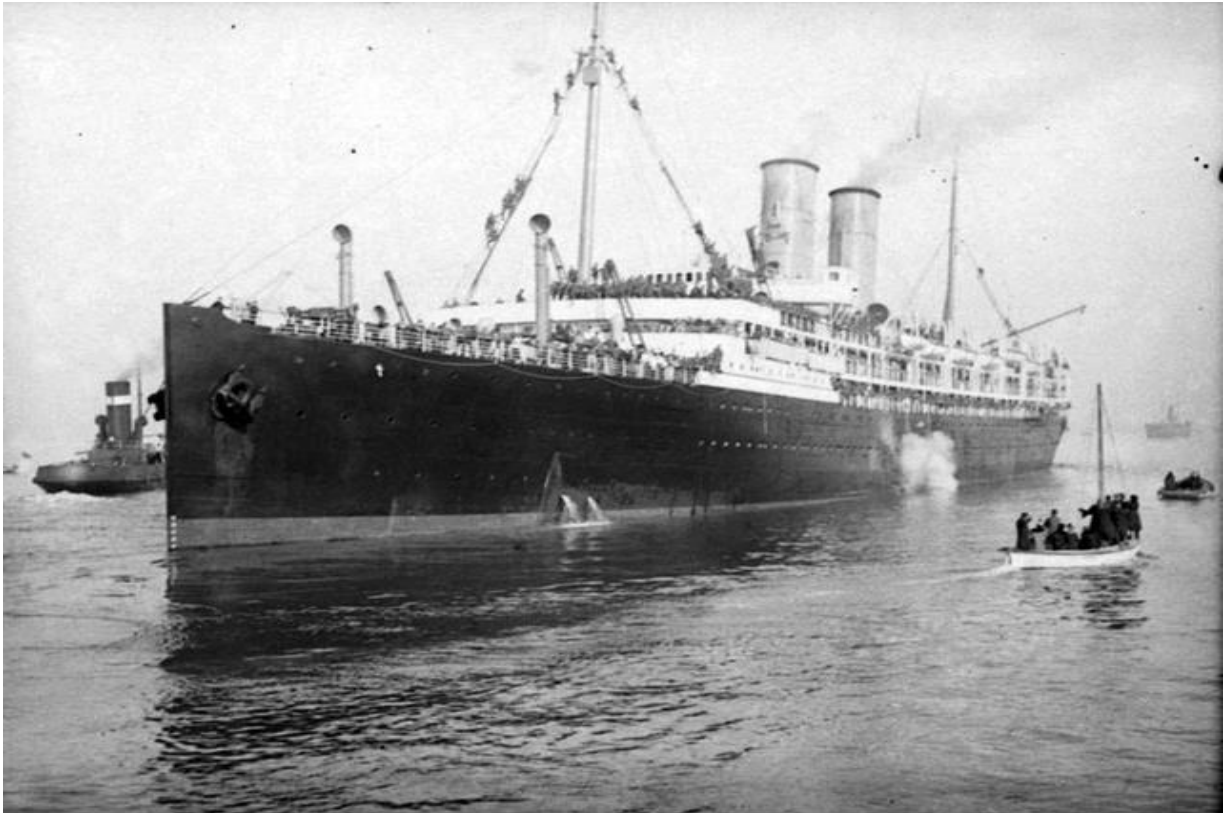
When his ship was in port in Hobart, he lived with his mother and younger sister, Ivy. His four other sisters, Minnie, Violet, Lilly and Ruby had married and lived elsewhere, and his father tragically passed away several years before the war, so Harcourt was providing the only income for them when he enlisted.

Harcourt enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) on the 11 June 1915, aged 24. He was given the service number 2496 and assigned to the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements.



Figure 2: 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion AIF colour patch.

On the 17 July 1915, Harcourt embarked from Melbourne on board the HMAT *Orsova* A67. Several photographs were taken of the ship as it left Port Melbourne, the soldiers can be seen lining the deck, bidding farewell to the crowd, some even climbed the rigging. There is the possibility that one of those men was Harcourt.



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Figure 3: HMAT *Orsova* A67 leaving Port Melbourne, 17.07.1915.



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Figure 4: A closeup shot of the *Orsova* showing the Australian soldiers on board, 17.07.1915.

Harcourt arrived in Egypt on the 31 October and then sailed to join the rest of 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion. The men of 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion at the time were on respite in Lemnos after heavy fighting at Gallipoli. They arrived back in Gallipoli in early November and took up positions in the quiet sector of Hay Valley. They stayed there until they were evacuated on the 13 December. In early 1916, after arriving back in Egypt, 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion was split up and some men were transferred to the new 47<sup>th</sup> Battalion. It was during this time that Harcourt was caught leaving the ranks without permission, he was punished with one day of detention.

The 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion was transferred to France in early June 1916. After landing at Marseilles, the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion moved to northern France via rail to Bailleul, moving into the line around Bois Grenier for a brief period on the 15<sup>th</sup> of June. Amidst the carnage of the Battle of the Somme which was launched in July, the following month, the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion was committed to fighting on the Western Front for the first time, entering the line around Pozières on the 5 August, as the 4<sup>th</sup> Division's orders were to relieve the shattered 2<sup>nd</sup>. They travelled up to Warloy in preparation to move into the line at Pozières however there was a delay caused by troops of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division being unable to capture their objectives due to uncut barbed wire.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Division began relieving the exhausted 2<sup>nd</sup> Division at 9:00 p.m. on the 6 August with 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion taking up positions in a trench known as Brinds Road, opposite the German-held Park Lane trench, that afternoon, German planes had been flying over Pozières, quite likely gathering intelligence for their artillery batteries. In the days that followed, the Battalion worked to improve their defensive line, digging saps towards the German trenches while patrols were sent out into no man's land.

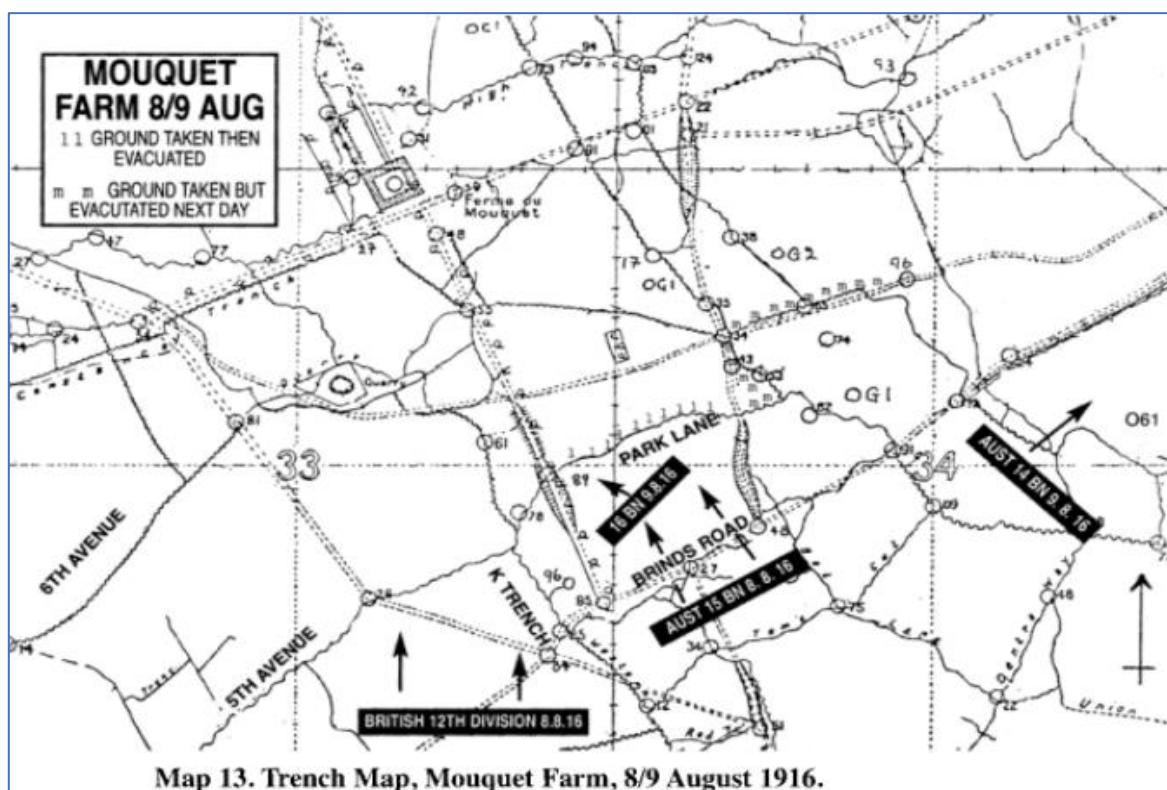


Figure 5: A map of Pozières showing Australian and British positions, 08/09.08.1916



Figure 6: Brinds Road today with Mouquet Farm to the left and Thiepval just in sight near the top left.

Massive artillery bombardment rained down on Australian positions and in the morning of the 7 August, the Germans began their final attempt to retake Pozzières. Large numbers of German troops were seen making their way across no-man's land. The Australians tried firing rockets to signal for help, but they were obscured by the morning fog. Eventually a messenger pigeon was sent out of desperation and reinforcements arrived. Men of the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion were especially caught up in the fighting, engaging in fierce hand-to-hand combat.



Figure 7: Bombardment of Pozzières, Frank Crozier, 1918

Sometime during the havoc, Harcourt was hit by a shell and was badly wounded in the body and legs. He was evacuated from the front line on the 7 August 1916 and was taken to No.12 Field Ambulance Dressing Station.

Another soldier with the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion, named Private Joseph Jesser recalled carrying Harcourt out of the trench.

*4534 Pte Joseph JESSER, 15th Bn (patient, No. 2 General Hospital, Havre – a New Zealander, living in Queensland), 23 November 1916:*

*'There was an Adams of C Co. who I helped to carry from the front line at Pozieres to the Dressing Station on the 7th or 8th August 1916. He was very badly wounded. I left him at the Dressing Station and I do not know what happened to him after.'*

*Second statement by JESSER, 5 December 1916:*

*'I carried him out of the trench on Aug. 7th., badly wounded in the legs and body by a shell. He got down to No. 12 Field Ambulance D/S, but I don't know what became of him afterwards.'*

After days of fierce fighting and constant shelling, the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion was relieved on the 9 August as the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade was withdrawn from the line and replaced by the 13<sup>th</sup>. Casualties during the Battalion's first battle on the Western Front were high: 90 killed and 370 wounded. Harcourt was declared Missing in Action on the 9 August.

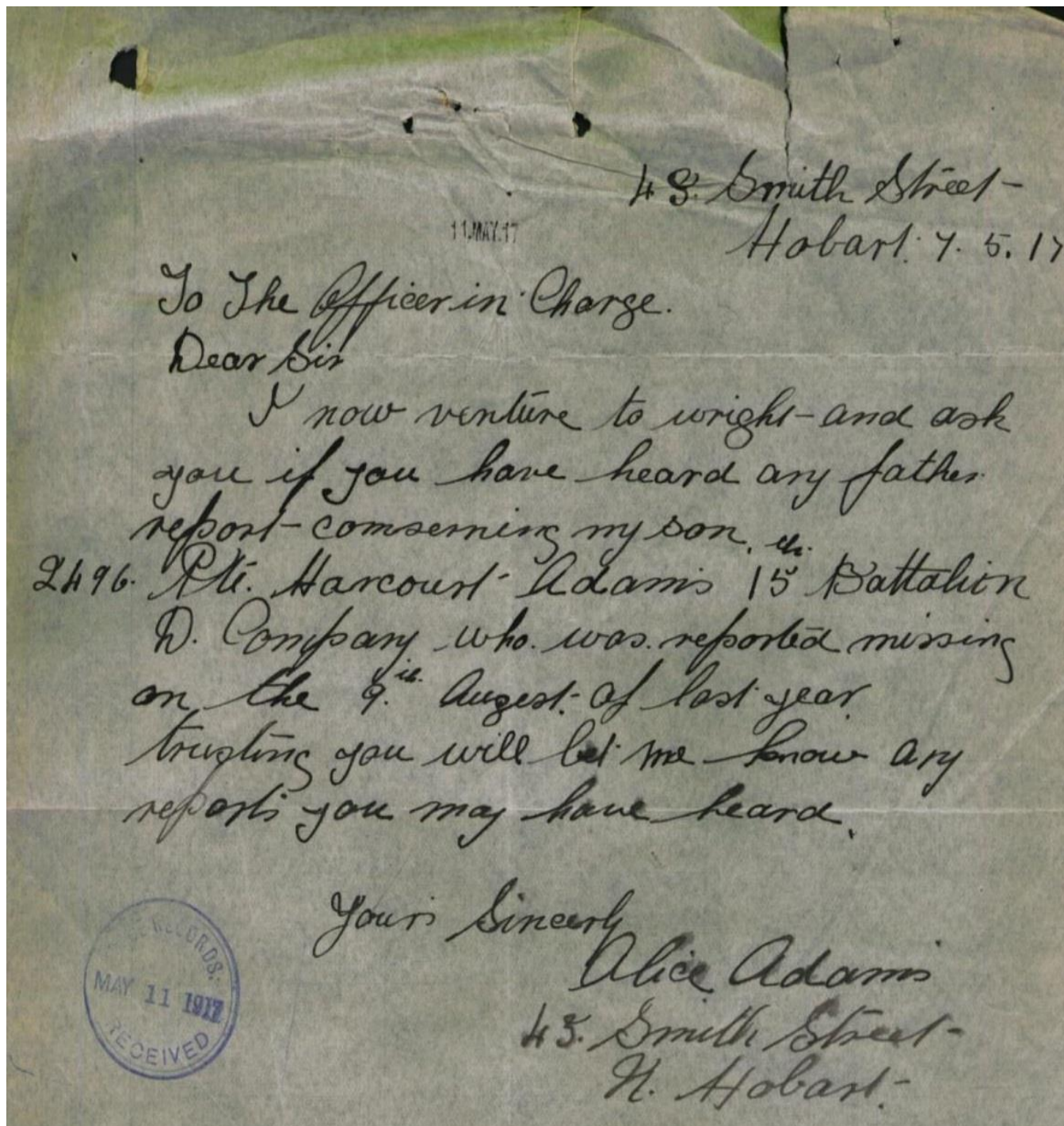
It was not until the 1 May 1917 that a second Court of Enquiry concluded that Harcourt had died on the 9 August 1916, although his remains had not been found.



Figure 8: A ward of No. 2 General Hospital

Harcourt's mother Alice, wrote to the Officer in Charge, during 1916 and 1917, seeking any information about Harcourt's belongings that may have come to hand.

The following letters are a series written by Alice Adams.



H. S. Smith St.  
Hobart. 20. 6. 17

To The Officer in Charge.

Dear Sir

I now apply to you for the  
certificate of my son's death  
No. 2496. Pte. Harcourt Adams  
4<sup>th</sup> Regt. 15<sup>th</sup> Batt. and has he  
has now been killed over  
ten months. I have business  
to straighten up concerning his  
death, and it is quite necessary  
for me to produce the certificate  
of death.

Trusting you will oblige as  
soon as possible.

I am Dear Sir your very  
Obedient -

Alice Adams



C. G. W. S. Morgan  
24/6

FORMAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT  
JUN 26 1917





43 Smith St-  
Hobart 23/17

The Officer in Charge.

Dear Sir

I now write to ask you if there has been any of my sons belonging came to hand for it is now fourteen months since he was killed and I have not received one thing has yet and I do not feel satisfied with the different reports I have received regarding my sons death  
Pte H. Adams 249699.

7<sup>th</sup> Reinf. 15<sup>th</sup> Batt  
A.P.T.

FORMAL ACKmt.

SENT 30/10/17 JTC

Trusting you will oblige  
Alice Adams

Alice continued to write to the Officer in Charge during September 1920, outlining her change of address from 43 Smith Street, North Hobart back to Swansea, Tasmania, and in May 1921 outlining that her address had changed from Swansea to Main Road Glenorchy. Unfortunately, Harcourt's remains were never found, and his belongings were never returned to his grieving mother.

To the Officer in Charge

Dear Sir

I wish to notify you that I have changed my address from 23 Smith Street Hobart to Swansea Tasmania. I am the next of kin of my late son Private Harcourt Adams 7 Reinforcement 15 Batt.

Your very obedient

Alice Adams  
Swansea  
Tas

3-9-20

*Copy noted  
9/9/20*



DECEASED SECTION  
SEP 8 1920  
RECEIVED

Ud 9/9

To the Officer in Charge

Dear Sir

I wish to have my address changed from Swansea Tas to Main Road Glenorchy. Should you have anything to communicate to me at any time regarding my late son Mon Lt 96 Pte Harcourt Adams 7 Reinforcement 15 Batt. Trusting I am not giving any trouble.

Remain your very obedient

Alice Adams  
Main Road Glenorchy  
Tasmania

1-5-21



DECEASED SECTION

MAY 6 1921  
RECEIVED

*11/7/21*

Harcourt is commemorated at tree number 112 on the Soldiers Memorial Avenue, Hobart. His name is on panel 74 at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, and his name also appears on the Australian National Memorial, Villers-Bretonneux. Although Harcourt has no officially marked grave, he is buried in one of the largest cemeteries of all, the cemetery that is Pozières.

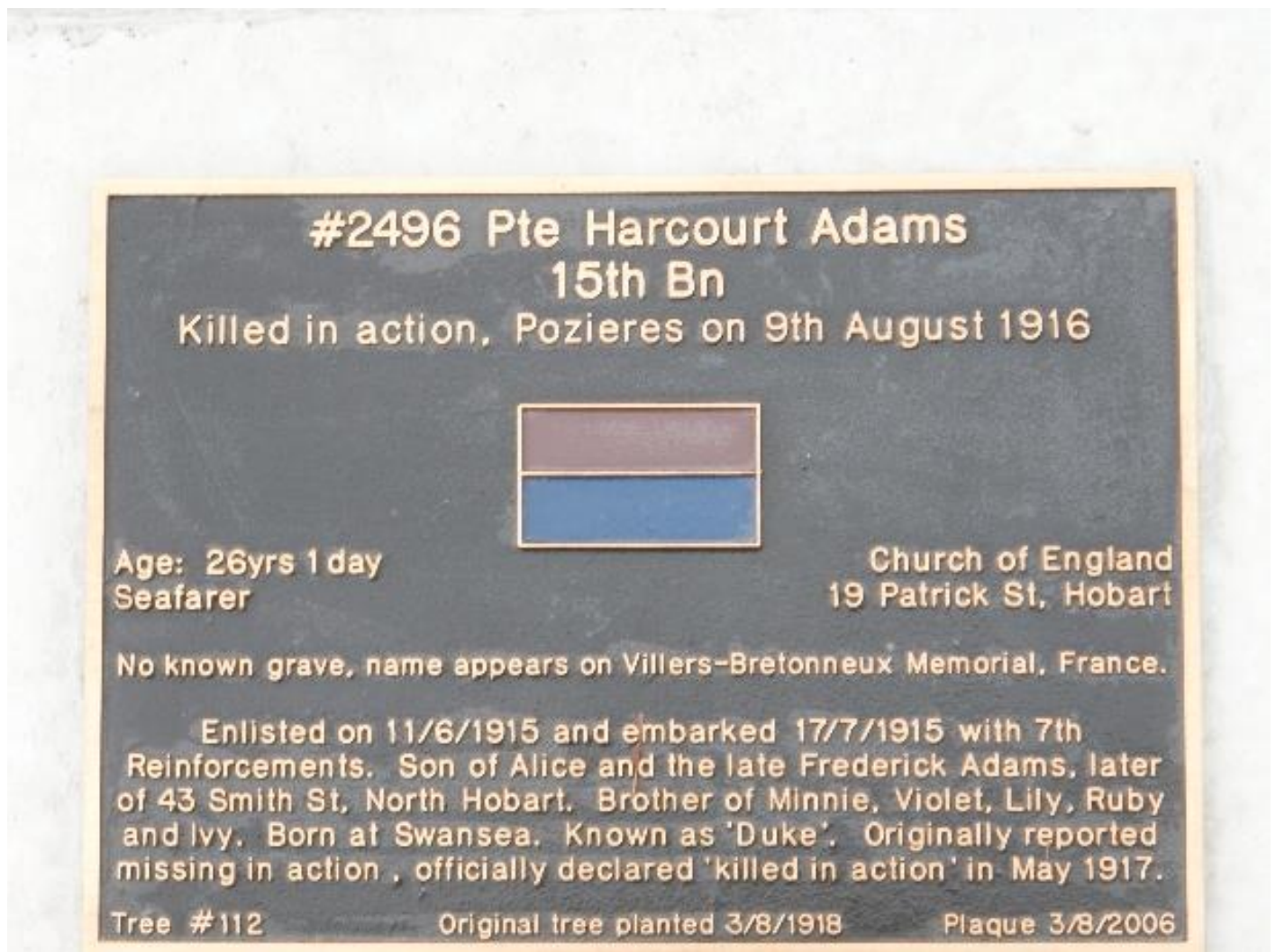


Figure 9: Harcourt's plaque on the Soldiers Memorial Avenue, Hobart; tree number 112



Figure 10: Me pointing to Harcourt's name at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra.



Figure 11: As Harcourt has no known grave, I decided to do my pilgrimage in a location nearby where he lost his life. This signpost is next to Brinds Road, the trench where Harcourt was fatally struck by a shell.



Figure 12: A closeup shot of Frank Bear and the memoirs I left in honour of Harcourt Adams.

## Private James William Levis – Frankie Munro



Figure 13: A photograph of James William Levis that was published in the Tasmanian Mail.

While researching Harcourt Adams, I developed an unexpected passion for the Battle of Pozières. At first it was its significance to my individual soldier that made me so interested, but then I learnt about its importance to Australia as a whole and I quickly found myself reading about the battle from many different points of view. One evening I was watching a video by Peter Pickering, commemorating the Hobart men of 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion. I had no idea how significant that video would be until a familiar name caught my attention, Levis, my mother's maiden name. I asked my family about the so-called James William Levis, but no one had ever heard of him, were we related to him or was it just a coincidence?

After rummaging through some ancestry files, I discovered that James William Levis was the cousin of my great-grandfather, John (Jack) Young Levis. From discovering this distant relative, I felt it were my duty to share his story, to ensure he would never be forgotten.

James was born on the 2 December 1889 to Irish parents Young and Mary Virginia Levis. He had an older brother, Robert, and two younger sisters, Violet and Eva. James was a carpenter (the Levis men are known for being magnificent craftsmen) and the family lived together in West Hobart.

On the 14 April 1913, Violet tragically passed away from tuberculosis aged only 21. She was unmarried and had no children. Slightly over a year later in 1914, their mother also passed away due to reasons unknown.

On the 26 July 1915, James enlisted in the AIF aged 25, he was given the service number 2500 and was assigned to 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion.

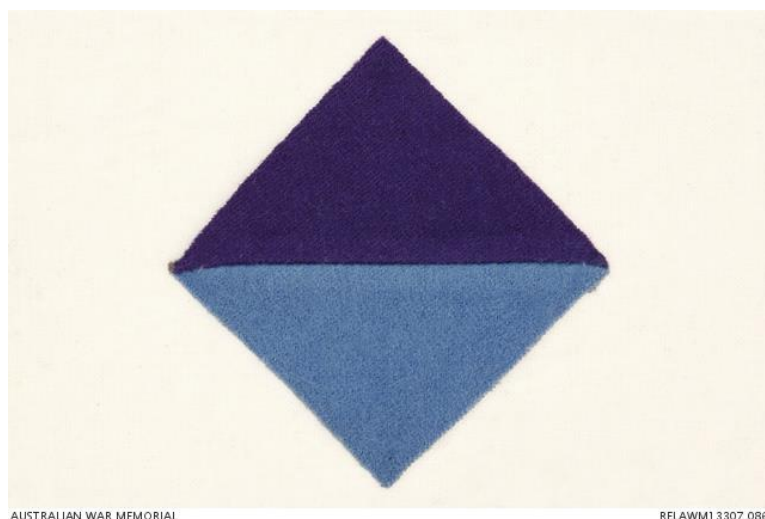


Figure 14: 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion AIF colour patch.

His brother Robert, who was two years older, was exempt from joining the AIF. James' Certificate of Medical Examination included a notable distinctive mark.

*"Tattoo female figures (nude) on both forearms, flags down left."*



Description of James William Lewis on Enlistment.

Age <u>35</u> years <u>7</u> months.	DISTINCTIVE MARKS. <u>Tattoo Female Figures (nude) on both forearms, flags down left</u>
Height <u>5</u> feet <u>4 1/2</u> inches.	
Weight <u>9</u> or <u>5</u> lbs.	
Chest Measurement <u>32</u> or <u>34 1/2</u> inches.	
Complexion <u>Brown</u>	
Eyes <u>D. B. R. D. G. L. Brown</u>	
Hair <u>Brown</u>	
Religious Denomination <u>C of E.</u>	

**CERTIFICATE OF MEDICAL EXAMINATION.**

I HAVE examined the above-named person, and find that he does not present any of the following conditions, viz. :-

Scrofula; phthisis; syphilis; impaired constitution; defective intelligence; defects of vision, voice, or hearing; hernia; hemorrhoids; varicose veins, beyond a limited extent; marked varicocele with unusually pendent testicle; inveterate cutaneous disease; chronic ulcers; traces of corporal punishment, or evidence of having been marked with the letters D. or B.C.; contracted or deformed chest; abnormal curvature of spine; or any other disease or physical defect calculated to unfit him for the duties of a soldier.

He can see the required distance with either eye; his heart and lungs are healthy; he has the free use of his joints and limbs; and he declares he is not subject to fits of any description.

I consider him fit for active service.

Date 22/7/15  
Place Toobank

*signed* James Stewart  
Signature of Examining Medical Officer.

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**CERTIFICATE OF COMMANDING OFFICER.**

I CERTIFY that this Attestation of the above-named person is correct, and that the required forms have been complied with. I accordingly approve, and appoint him to 26th Battalion

Date 7-9-15  
Place Mademont.

L. H. Murrells  
for 8/ Commanding Reinforcements

D. 3719.13. - 6-1915.

Figure 15: James' Medical Examination Record

He was also quite short, standing only 5ft 4½in and he would not have met the original requirement of 5ft 6in in August 1914. Lucky for him though, the minimum requirement was lowered to 5ft 2in in June 1915.

James embarked from Brisbane on the 5 October 1915 on board the HMAT *Warilda* A69 and sailed to Egypt.

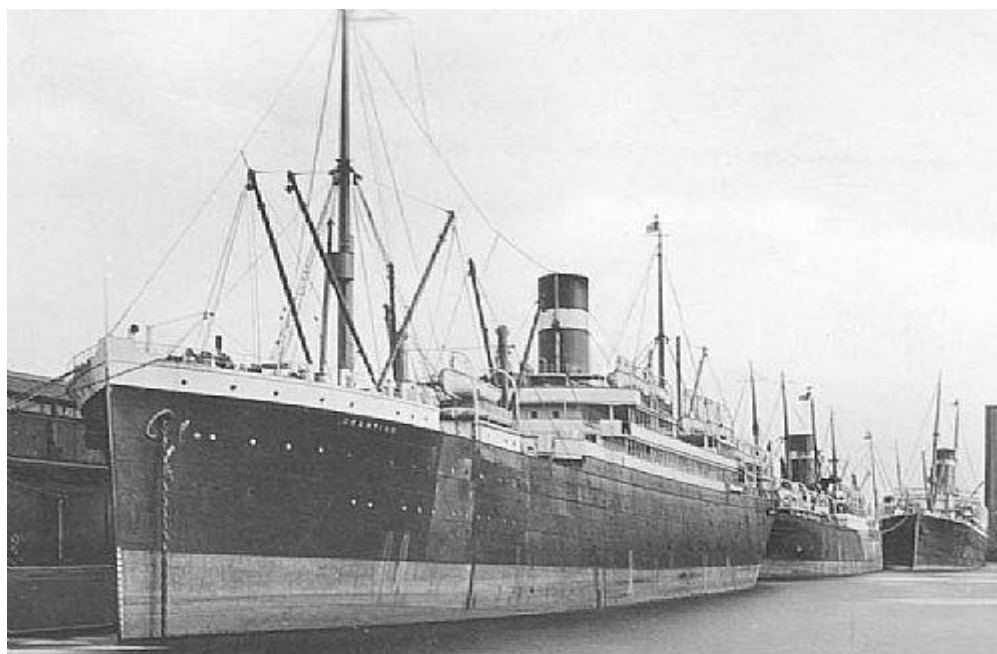


Figure 16: HMAT *Warilda* A69





AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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Figure 18: A view of the devastated area south of Tramway Trench, near Pozières, showing the hedge at the north east corner of the flattened village.

The attack was doomed to fail. The remorseless German bombardment made effective preparations virtually impossible. The dust raised by the shelling prevented the Australian artillery observers from directing their field guns which were tasked with cutting the barbed wire entanglements. German shelling had inflicted 1,521 casualties on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division before the attack even began.

An attack by the British 23rd Division on Munster Alley dragged in the Australian 5th Brigade — the ensuing bomb fight saw the British and Australian infantry expend over 15,000 grenades. The main attack went ahead, scheduled to start at 12:15 a.m. on the 29 July but the Australian 7th Brigade was late in reaching its start line. German troops had watched the Australians dig their jumping-off trenches and their movement was detected by the German defenders. When the attack commenced, the Australians were met by a hail of machine-gun fire.

The attack was a disaster and failed at a cost of 3,500 Australian casualties. None of the three battalions managed to capture their objectives. The short preparatory bombardment had left the masses of barbed wire in front of the OG Lines largely uncut and those who became stuck were quickly mowed down by

machine-gun fire. The few who managed to break through into the OG Lines were soon ordered to retreat as the positions were unable to be consolidated. Amid all the chaos and confusion, James was killed.

Back in Hobart a few days later, James' sister, Eva, also passed away from tuberculosis. She was only 19. Like her older sister, she was unmarried and had no children. In three years a family of six had been reduced to only a father and a son. But Young and Robert Levis did not know this, they did not know James had been killed. No one did.

James did not make it back to the Australian lines, but no one recalled seeing him fall. Corporal Patrick Sydney Dillon of 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion stated:

*"None of us know what happened, but he was a particularly fine chap. He would do any mortal thing for the men, always full of fun and good cheer, and was intensely popular."*

James was declared 'Missing in Action.'

Nearly two months later, James' remains were discovered by Private Andrew Graham of the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Canadians) Canadian Expeditionary Force. He wrote in a letter to James' father how he came across his son's remains.

*"I was digging in when I struck a corpse, and through circumstances I was forced to remove the body and bury it in a place more out of the way. I took possession of a diary and some letters which I found in the pockets."*

Private Graham then mentioned how he read the diary and letters the next morning.

*"I looked over them the next morning and read the request of the owner on the first page of the diary. I then thought it my duty to forward them to the mentioned address."*

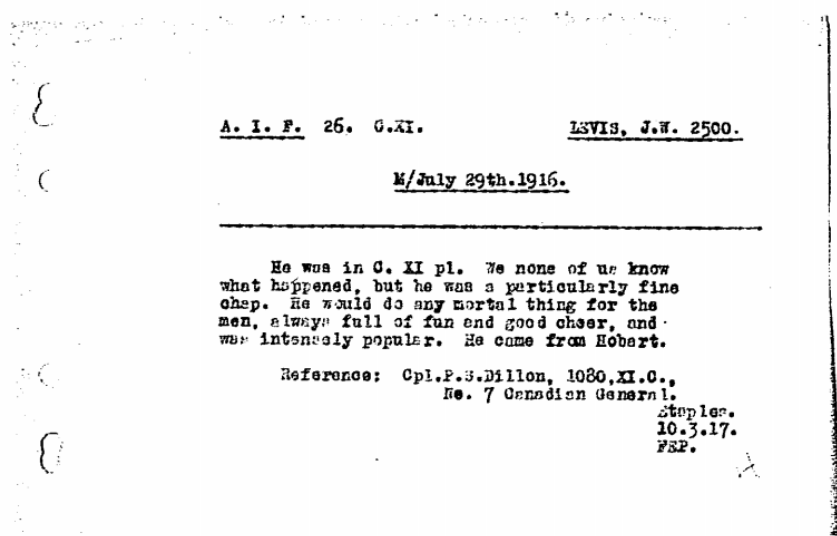


Figure 19: Corporal Patrick Sydney Dillon's statement regarding James William Levis, 10.03.1917.

From the Battle Field of the Somme Oct 12 1916.

Dear Sir,

By your fallen son's request, on the first page of this diary, I was find it my duty to forward his belongings to you. It was on the battle field of the Somme I found your fallen ~~son's~~ son's diary, near Poizieres - I am sorry that I cannot give you much information about your son because the

Australians had gone from the part of the country about a week before we came

I found his diary on his grave. I expect you will have got more information from his more fortunate comrades. I can only say we did our best to convey any information that was in our power to perform.

In truly  
P. G. A. Graham  
A. Coy. 10th Battalion  
Canadian Exped. Force  
121. Division.

Figure 20: Andrew Graham's, (Canadian Expeditionary Force) letter to Young Levis.

James' diary was returned to Young Levis but has since then gone missing.

James' father wanted more information however and the army tried to track the Canadian soldier – there were three soldiers by the name of Andrew Graham' in the vicinity at the time; one of whom had been killed. However, the Andrew Graham who had found and forwarded James' diary had been wounded and was tracked to the Military Convalescent Hospital, Surrey.

1st March, 1918.

81330 Pte. A. Graham,  
10th Canadian Battalion,  
Military Convalescent Hospital,  
Epsom, Surrey.

Dear Sir,

Attached you will find a copy of a letter written by you or by 455,308 L/Sgt. A.Graham, 10th Canadian Battalion who died 16-4-17 in France.

This letter was received by the Father of the soldier mentioned therein who lives in Tasmania. If you are the Canadian soldier who wrote the letter, can you now tell us what led you to believe that the grave was that of

2500 Pte. J.W. LEVIS, 26th Battalion, A.I.F.

His relatives are most anxious to know this. We are very sorry to trouble you again, when you have already been so very good in forwarding Pte. Levis's belongings, and writing to his father.

We are sorry to learn that you are in Hospital, and trust that you will soon be well again.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours faithfully,

SECRETARY.

Figure 21: Letter to Private Andrew Graham, from 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion AIF.

26th Battn.  
A.I.F.

LEVIS,  
J.W. 2500

"Killed in Action 29.7.16."

This morning I received a copy of my letter which I sent (enclosed with a diary belonging to 2500 Pte. J.W. Levis, 26th Battn A.I.F.) to Mr Y. Levis, 81 Lansdown Crescent, Hobart, Tasmania. Since it is the desire of Mr Levis to receive more information about his son, which I thought he would have received from his son's comrades. I will do my best to explain how it became of me getting his son's diary. On or about 22nd Sept. 1916, we (our unit) moved up to Pozieres which was the reserve of the line at that time, fighting had been very severe in that locality at that time and cover for troops was very poor. We had to dig ourselves in to protect ourselves and it was during that period that I discovered the diary of Pte. Levis. I was digging in when I struck a corpse, and through circumstances I was forced to remove the body to bury it in a place more out of the way. I took possession of a diary and some letters which I found in the pockets. It was too dark to examine them at the time, so I looked them over the next morning and read the request of the owner on the first page

26th Battn.  
A.I.F.

LEVIS,  
J.W. 2500

- 2 -

of the diary. I then thought it my duty to forward them to the mentioned address. I did not care to mention all this to Mr Levis, I only told him that I found the diary on his son's grave, but I will leave it in your power to forward this information to him.

Letter from:- A. Graham. 81330,  
10th Batt Canadians,  
4th Canadian C. Hpl.  
Basingstoke, Hants.

London.  
13.3.18.

Figure 22: Letter from Private Andrew Graham, (Canadian Expeditionary Force) to 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion AIF.

James was not the only Hobart man killed in the attack. On the night of the 28/29 July 1916, 11 other Hobart men of the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion lost their lives, including Private Alexander Neil McKendrick who before the war, lived just down the road from James. Of those 11 other Hobart men killed in the attack, seven remain missing.

James now lies at rest in the Bouzincourt Communal Cemetery Extension, not far from where he fell at Pozieres. Of the 484 soldiers buried there, he is one of five Australians, and the only Tasmanian. His name is on panel 108 at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, and he has a tree on the Soldiers Memorial Avenue, Hobart, tree number 462.



Figure 23: Private James William Levis' grave at Bouzincourt Communal Cemetery Extension.



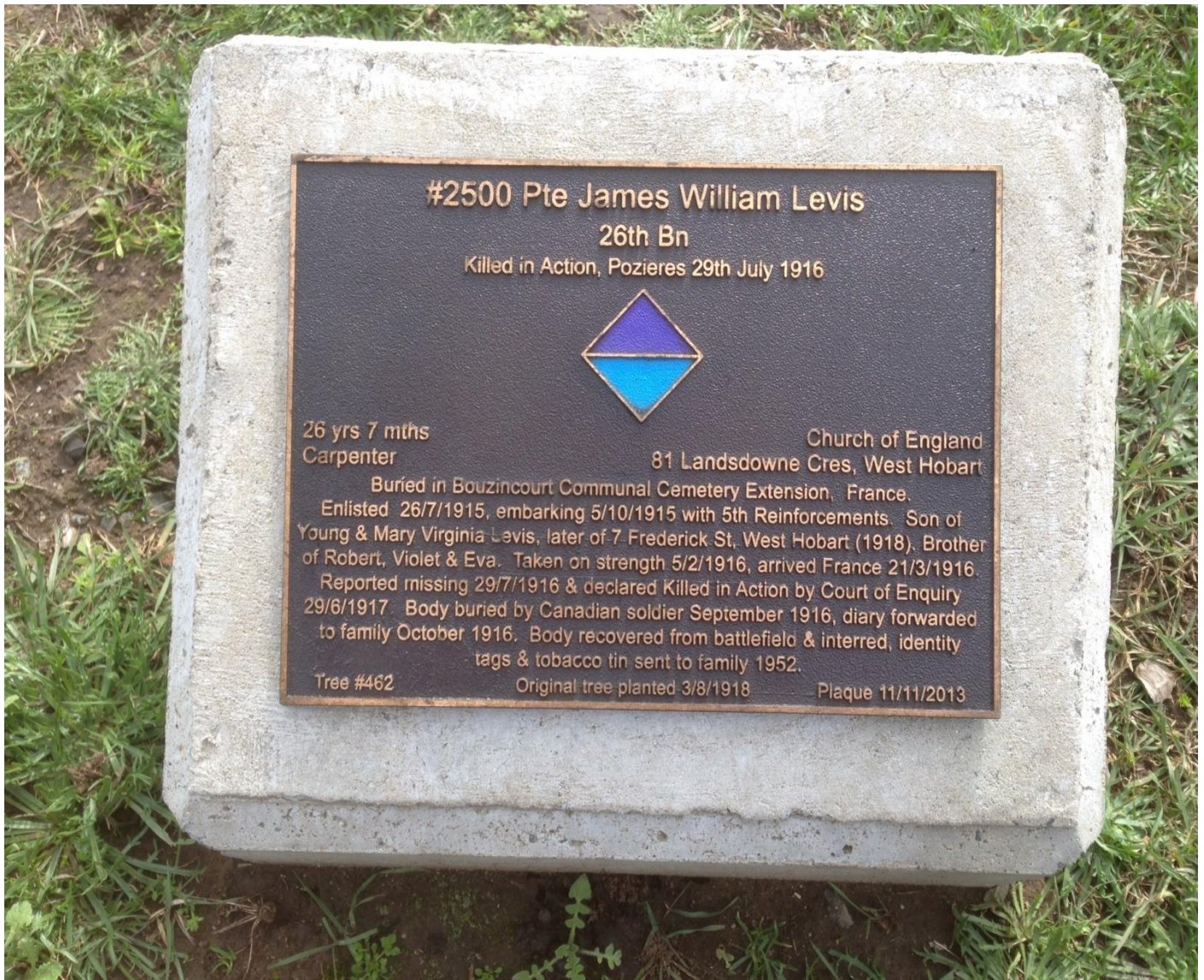


Figure 24: James' plaque on the Soldiers Memorial Avenue, Hobart; tree number 462.

I like to wonder if James ever met Harcourt Adams, because to me it seems inconceivable for two young men who both came from the same town, who both sailed to the other side of the world, who were both killed in the same French village only days apart, to have never crossed paths even once.