

4445 Company Sergeant Major Philip Bonhote MM DCM

Born: 22.11.1893, Forest, Circular Head

Killed in Action: 24.4.1918, Villers-Bretonneux, France



Above: Portrait of Philip Bonhote  
Right: Military description of Philip

Description of <u>Bonhote<sup>3</sup> Phil</u> on Enlistment.	
Age <u>21</u> years <u>    </u> months.	DISTINCTIVE MARKS.
Height <u>5</u> feet <u>8</u> inches.	
Weight <u>135</u> lbs.	
Chest Measurement <u>33/35</u> inches.	
Complexion <u>Dark</u>	
Eyes <u>Brown</u>	
Hair <u>Dark</u>	
Religious Denomination <u>648</u>	

Company Sergeant Major Philip Bonhote MM DCM was born in Forest, Circular Head, on 22 November 1893. The Bonhote family came from Neuchâtel, Switzerland, where Ernest Bonhote, father of Philip, was born and raised. At about age 20, Ernest moved from Switzerland to the North West coast of Tasmania and married Louisa Wilson. They had two children together, Philip and Fanny, before Louisa died of a stroke in October 1914. Ernest remarried to a woman named Emily Kate Conlon on 29 December 1915, and together they had five children: Noreen, Helene, Maguerite, Esme and Yvonne. As of 2019, Esme and Yvonne are alive and live in an aged care facility in Legana, Tasmania.



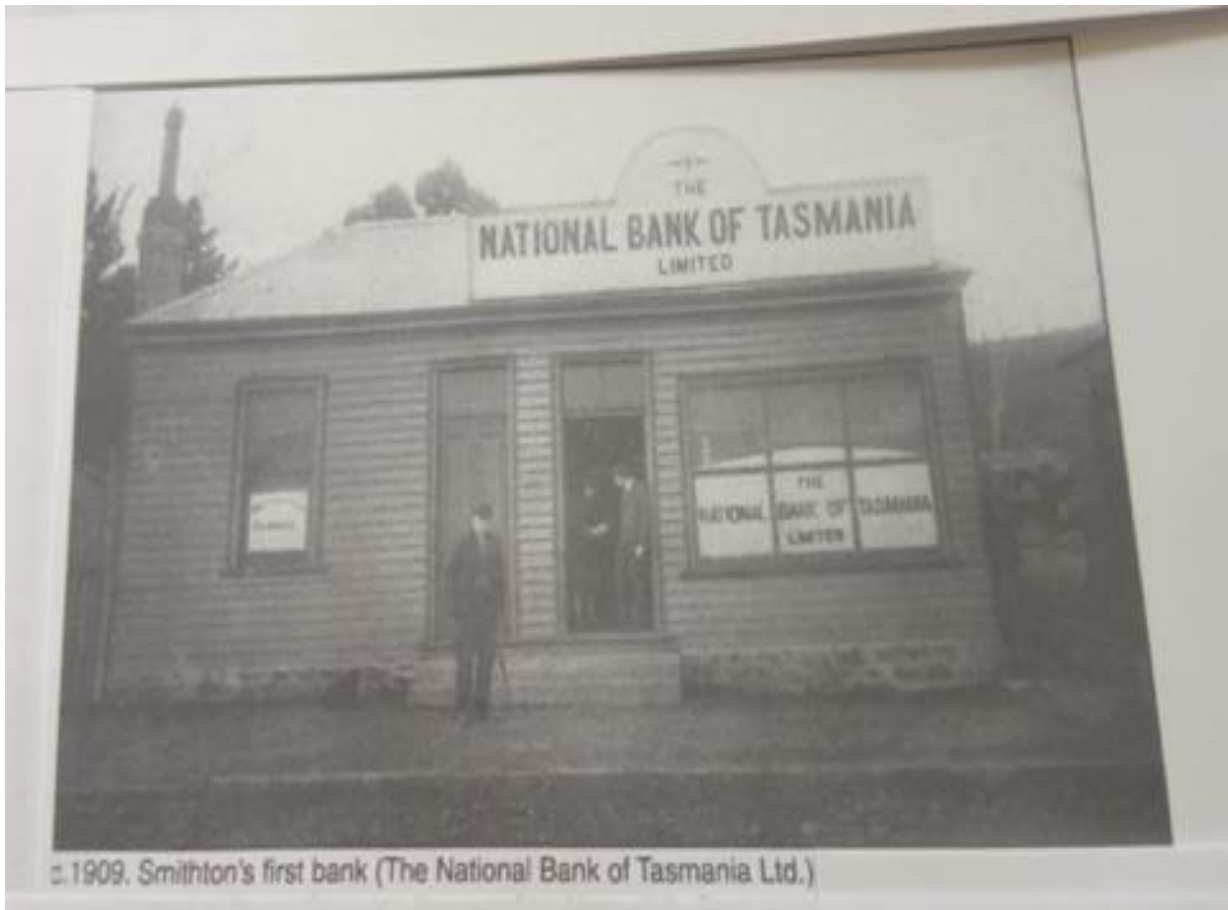
Bonhote family portrait





Philip in his first pair of long pants

Philip was privy to a comfortable lifestyle as a boy, due to his father's generous involvement in many of the Circular Head organisations. Ernest built the house at 10 King Street, Smithton, in 1906, which Philip and the family grew up in. As of 2019, this house acts as the office for the Circular Head Aboriginal Cooperation and sits next to the Circular Head Heritage Centre, where many photos and pieces of information on Philip and the Bonhote family are kept to this day. Philip worked as a bank clerk at the Smithton branch of the National Bank of Tasmania after finishing schooling at the Smithton State School. Philip enjoyed woodwork, and handmade a desk for a newly married couple at about 14 years old. The Bonhote Family were also keen, privileged travellers, visiting relatives in Switzerland for nine months in 1906 and Philip visiting Richmond, Melbourne, in 1910.



c.1909. Smithton's first bank (The National Bank of Tasmania Ltd.)

Above left: The bank Philip worked at in Smithton  
Above right: 10 King Street in 2018





The motivation for Philip to join the war is unknown, but it's likely that he felt it his duty to represent his town as one of the 72 men to enlist. Philip had tried to enlist once before, but had been denied due to viscous veins. Once the standards had been dropped for soldiers, Philip enlisted at Claremont on 19 October 1915, with regimental number 4445. Philip was allocated a spot in the 14<sup>th</sup> reinforcement of the 12<sup>th</sup> Battalion and began the journey to the Western Front via Melbourne and Egypt. Philip's journey to Egypt took him two months on the HMAT *Warilda*, arriving at Suez on 8 March 1915. Philip trained in Egypt with the 12<sup>th</sup> battalion, before reembarking on the HMAT *Ivernia* at Alexandria to arrive at Marseilles on 12 June 1916.



Philip training with his mates (above image 3 from right, below image bottom right) and Philip scribbling the correct spelling of his name on the right

Although war is a grim affair, Philip seemed to be rather positive about his experience. In the winter of 1917, Philip wrote to his sister in a letter detailing snow fights and ice skating with his mates and sharing pudding between them. His optimistic attitude shows through in his courage and leadership, mentioned in both of his medal recommendations. Philip was recommended for the Military Medal (MM) on 12 September 1916, for his efforts as a runner in Mouquet Farm. The recommendation states:

During the operations at Mouquet Farm he [Philip Bonhote] was acting as a runner and was most successful in getting messages through to the firing line despite the heavy barrages, which the enemy put across the intervening ground. He also led the relieving Company into position and guided the remainder of the old Company back.

Philip was originally recommended for another Military Medal on 12 April 1918, for his actions as part of the battle of Dernancourt. The official recommendation states:

For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. When a neighbouring company had lost all its officers and nearly all its non-commissioned officers, he reorganised the leaderless men and maintained the defence, inspiring them by his example of cheerful courage, while by fine leadership, he materially assisted to hold the line at a critical period.

Due to the impressive nature of the recommendation, Philip's recommendation was upgraded to the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM), which he was awarded on 10 May 1918. Philip was the first man in Smithton to be awarded the MM, and therefore it is equally as possible that he was the first to also receive the DCM, and the rare combination of the two.



L-R: Distinguished Conduct Medal, Military Medal, British War Medal, Victory Medal



Statement of Service of No. 4445 Name *Bonhote P.*

Unit in which served.	Promotions, Reductions, Casualties, &c.	Period of service in each rank.		Remarks.
		From—	To—	
<i>A Company Chesham 14th 1916</i>	<i>Private</i>	<i>19.10.15</i>	<i>9.12.15</i>	
			<i>10.12.15</i>	
<i>12BN, 14R PTE</i>	<i>L/Cpl Reverts to Ranks</i>		<i>2.11.16</i>	<i>BR 1/12 Appointed</i>
			<i>2.11.16</i>	
		<i>19.11.16</i>		<i>BR 9/1</i>
<i>52<sup>ND</sup> BATT</i>	<i>Private</i>	<i>19.11.16</i>		<i>Transf. to B.R. 6/14</i>
		<i>16.9.16</i>	<i>16.9.16</i>	<i>BR 4/11 Appointed</i>
		<i>16.9.16</i>	<i>16.9.16</i>	<i>BR 1/11 Promoted</i>
		<i>16.9.16</i>	<i>16.9.16</i>	<i>BR 1/11 Promoted</i>
	<i>Sergeant</i>		<i>2.11.16</i>	<i>Appointed</i>
	<i>Company Sergeant Major</i>		<i>14.3.17</i>	<i>Appointed</i>
	<i>Company Sergeant Major</i>		<i>14.3.17</i>	<i>Appointed</i>
	<i>Company Sergeant Major</i>		<i>14.3.17</i>	<i>Appointed</i>

I have examined the above details, and find them correct in every respect.

Philip's rank changes over the course of the war

BASE RECORDS OFFICE, A.I.F.,  
17th February, 1919.

87006

Dear Sir,

I have much pleasure in forwarding herewith copy of extract from Third Supplement, No. 30879, to the London Gazette, dated 3rd September, 1918, relating to the conspicuous services rendered by your son, the late No. 4442 Company Sergeant-Major P. Bonhote, M.M., 52nd Battalion.

x                    x                    x                    x

AWARDED THE DISTINGUISHED CONDUCT MEDAL

\* HIS MAJESTY THE KING has been graciously pleased to approve of the award of the Distinguished Conduct Medal to the undermentioned non-commissioned officer, for gallantry and distinguished service in the field: -

No. 4445 Company Sergeant-Major P. BONHOTE, M.M.

For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. When a neighbouring company had lost all its officers and nearly all its non-commissioned officers, he reorganized the leaderless men and maintained the defence, inspiring them by his example of cheerful courage, while, by fine leadership, he materially assisted to hold the line at a critical period. "

x                    x                    x                    x

The above has been promulgated in Commonwealth of Australia Gazette, No. 15, dated 4th February, 1919.

Yours faithfully,

Er. P. Bonhote,  
Smithton,  
TASMANIA.

Capt.  
for Officer i/c Base Records

Letter written to Ernest informing him of Philip's DCM awarding

In addition to Philip's battlefield achievements, he also undertook many different ranks over the course of the war. Philip was first appointed Lance Corporal and Acting Corporal without pay on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1916. He was reverted to Private 16 days later upon his transfer to the 52<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Battalion due to the losses during the Gallipoli Campaign and the resulting reshuffle. Philip was promoted once again to Lance Corporal and then Corporal, both on the 16 September 1916. On 6 March 1917, Philip was promoted to Sergeant, and was further promoted to Company Sergeant Major a year later on 14 March.

Whilst Philip had a relatively successful military career, he was put out of the field for a month in 1916 due to a case of the mumps. He spent late October and most of November in a French hospital, before re-joining his unit on the 25 November 1916.

France  
15/3/17

Nin was my grandmother.  
It was her nice name,  
real name Fanny - she  
was Uncle Phil's only full  
sibling

Dear little Nin

It is some time since you have had a letter from me, but of course you know it could not be helped. I received a letter from you a few days ago, thank you very much, I also received several others, including one from dad, & some chronicles which were very welcome. The little sheepskin vest came to light about a fortnight ago, & a couple of days after, the parcel with the pudding in it. The vest is a little bonza, I am wearing it now. I shared the pudding with a couple of my mates, & we enjoyed it very much indeed, it was a great treat to taste something home-made. The socks were just at the right time too, what I had were all dirty, & full of holes. I must thank you all very very much. I have had several letters from Switzerland lately as well. Little Roger is not so well, or at least was not when the last letter was written; & Jeanne is in England waiting for her fact to come home on leave, & they are to be married. Oh Nin dear, our Coy Commander has just been in & told us that tomorrow we are going to march to the place where I won my Military Medal, we are all quite pleased about it. I hope to be able to find the graves of some of my old mates. I don't think I ever told you I was

The only one out of the section I belonged to then, who came out of that engagement. I am very glad to be able to answer to you that I had been promoted to the rank of sergeant, & at the present time I am in command of a platoon. I had a grand time at the school I was at a few weeks ago, also did very well. I received congratulations from the General Commanding our division on the report I got. There was plenty of snow, & ice about at that time, we had some glorious snow fights, also did a bit of ice skating. Within the last few weeks I have seen Tommy of course, & Bob Jim Bennett, Ray, & Lord. They are all quite well. Dad has been recommended for the French War Cross, but has not received it yet. Well Nin you will have to excuse such a short note this time as I am in a great hurry. With very best love to dad & Mame, & same for yourself hoping you are all quite well.

Your affectionate brother  
Bonhote

A letter Philip sent home to his sister Fanny in 1917.

Company Sergeant Major Philip Bonhote MM DCM was Killed in Action on 24 April 1918 at The Second Battle of Villers-Bretonneux, Somme, France. Some sources indicate that Philip was 'sniped' after the attack on the day of 24 April, although this isn't confirmed. The Second Battle of Villers-Bretonneux, as a part of the defence from the German Spring Offensive, was an extensively planned night attack in which the Australian 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Brigades fought to push back the Germans, who had only captured the town of Villers-Bretonneux on 24 April, before an allied victory was secured on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

Philip is buried in Adelaide Cemetery, Villers-Bretonneux, his grave reference being III. R. 4. Philip's grave's inscription reads:

LOVED SON OF ERNEST & LOUISA AND BROTHER OF FANNY OF SMITHTON, TASMANIA "LEST WE FORGET"

Philip's grave has the phrase 'Believed to be' engraved on the top of it, indicating that there was reasonable evidence to suggest the body is his, but it was not confirmed.





Philip's grave in April, 2019.

After Philip's death in 1918, there is a rather long series of correspondence between his father Ernest and the officers in charge regarding Philip's awards and belongings. After many letters back and forth, Philip's decorations were given to his sister Fanny, as per his last will and testament. His medals and personal effects are now with his niece Rosemary Lincolne in Latrobe.

For my pilgrimage, I presented a poem for Philip. As the first member of his family to visit his grave, however distant, I felt a strong sense of pride and duty to the people in Tasmania who helped me gain such a connection to a man I never had the opportunity to meet. Thank you to those who helped me with my research, those on the trip who supported me in such an emotional experience, and thank you to those who fought, the ones who will never be forgotten.

By Mia Cooper, 2019



Photos of me visiting Philip's grave in Adelaide Cemetery in April 2019.





Dear Philip

the only survivor of your section  
you marched through their gravesite  
military medal hanging on your chest  
a symbol of your success  
and their demise

'respected by all'  
they described you as nothing less  
a mother's love shared,  
pudding split evenly between mates  
happiness spread  
in the darkest of times

i wonder how many times  
somebody spelt your name with a double 'L'  
how many times  
you had to laugh  
as a façade to your annoyance

i wonder if you ever had  
someone special;  
someone you didn't talk about much  
maybe they missed  
and admired you from afar  
or maybe there never was anyone  
at all  
for your sake,  
i hope not  
as it is easier  
to feel nothing,  
so as not to feel  
anything

war was not the best of times  
but i'm hoping that you  
found moments  
in which it was.  
snow fights in 1917  
where you and your mates forgot,  
at least for a minute,  
skated over the ice  
spread eagle

i wish i knew more.  
you lived for  
so many days  
so many moments  
so much impact  
you didn't even know you had

however  
i respect your privacy.  
some parts of your life  
i am not meant to know

i may know that you got the mumps in 1916  
and spent a month in a nurse's care  
or that you  
'obtained a very satisfactory report' in 1917  
but i'll never know  
or understand  
how you felt  
those winter days  
when the sun didn't rise  
and the guns didn't stop

i do not envy you  
but i do admire you

from your affectionate cousin,  
Mia x