



## Missing Soldiers of Fromelles Discussion Group

Maggie Schwann has forwarded the following brief on 2050 Private Clarence Rhody Swan Hoffman, 32nd Battalion, KIA 20-JUL-16, FLEURBAIX. Clarence has been a major study focus for Meg who is conducting genealogical research. She is particularly interested in the background and heritage of the Hoffman family, including its German origins. According to this soldier's *Australian Red Cross Society Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau file*, Clarence fell on 19-JUL-16 near Fromelles, his name was contained in a German Death List and his identity disc was received by the AIF in London from Germany and apparently forwarded to his of Next-of-Kin on 20-JUN-17. The return of his personal effects is certified by a German Nachlass List dated 20-AUG-17.

Having registered as a relative with the Department of Defence, Meggie has been contacted by the Army and is hopeful her forebear will be found at Pheasant Wood, especially since he was included on the list of First AIF soldiers believed to be buried in the mass grave released by former Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, the Hon Warren Snowdon MP on 2 April 2009.



### **2050 PRIVATE CLARENCE RHODY SWAN HOFFMAN**

*(Background provided by Meg Swan)*

Clarence Rody Swan Hoffman was the son of Rody Schwan/Swan and Sarah Elizabeth Hoffman. He was born in Moonta South Australia on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1894. His parents weren't married and Rody left South Australia about 1896

and travelled to join his brothers in Kalgoorlie Western Australia, and died near Laverton in 1904.

Clarence, his sister Elizabeth Rhoda Schwan Hoffman born 1891 and stepsiblings were brought up by their mother, who later married a Mr. Briggs in Adelaide, SA. Clarence was educated at the Public School in Adelaide and became a saddler. He tried to enlist in the Citizen Military Forces but was rejected because he had a withered arm. Clarence was very small, being only 5 feet 2 inches in height and weighed 8 stone 4 lbs (118 pounds)

Despite his disability, he was able to enlist in the Army in Adelaide on 21<sup>st</sup> September 1915, regimental number 2050 in the 32rd Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Reinforcement; AWM Embarkation Roll number 23/49/2. His unit embarked for Egypt from Adelaide South Australia on HMAT Miltiades on 7<sup>th</sup> February 1916.

Private Clarence Rody Swan Hoffman was killed in the battle of Fromelles, France on 20<sup>th</sup> July 1916 at the age of 22 years 5 months. Clarence was one of 1,299 Australians who died in an abortive attack and was buried in a pit between the Australian and German front lines (known as Pheasant Wood) by a German burial party after the battle.

A list of the dead was compiled by the Germans as they buried the dead.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> April 1917 his mother Sarah Briggs wrote a letter to the Officer in Charge, asking for information about her son's death. She stated that 'he was reported missing in July and in December reported killed. It is very hard for a mother to take for granted she has lost her son just on the word of a cable. Could you let me know if they found him or his disc and if I am entitled to any private articles he may have had in his kit bag, as I have had no word relating anything about his deferred pay. I feel very anxious and would be very grateful to you if you could let me know anything at all about him so hoping you will oblige. I remain sincerely S.E. Briggs'

Author Maggie Schwann

Rody Schwan was killed by lightning in 1904 and, according to biographical notes provided by Meg, her great uncle is buried in Duketon near Laverton.

From what Meggie told us when she first made contact, Clarence resembles her grandfather, William Schwann, who is listed on the pre-First World War nominal roll for the Boer War, South Africa, 1899-1902, put together by the Australian War Memorial. 6 Sergeant William Bernard Schwann was posted with 1 Mounted Rifles Contingent, which departed Australia on 2-NOV-1899. William Schwann is named on the website known as **Australians Serving in the Boer War** with the 1st (South Australian Mounted Rifles). The 1st apparently returned 30-NOV-1900. The information on this website has been extracted by Rob Nelson from **Official Records of the Australian Military Contingents to the War in South Africa**, compiled and edited in 1911 by Lieutenant-Colonel P. L. Murray, R. A. A. (Ret.). It contains details of missing soldiers like 115 Private J. Forbes, 26 Private W. J. Foreman, 89 Private L. Gilbert, 113 Private A. E. Murch, 65 Private J. Pope—all from the First (South Australian Mounted Rifles) Contingent. [*Other states and intakes can be accessed through the Index displayed on the Home Page @ <http://members.iinet.net.au/~perthdps/military/> under the section titled 'Boer War Soldiers', as can a bibliography, glossary and other links to the military, including The Trafalgar Roll operated by UK and Ireland Genealogy, RAR Association, Royal Australian Navy, Royal Australian Air Force, etc].*

A useful general history of this period can be found in **Light Horse: A History of Australia's Mounted Arm** by Jean Bou, Cambridge University Press, Port Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, 2010.

Fromelles was described by Peter Pedersen in **The Anzacs: Gallipoli to the Western Front**, as a bloody halocaust. And it is because of this and the fact that Clarence was named in the Fromelles Australian Working List, that Meg and her extended family, have taken such an active interest in the history of the attack, and the archaeological dig and recovery project that has been occurring at Pheasant Wood.

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