

Shepparton and District War Memorial



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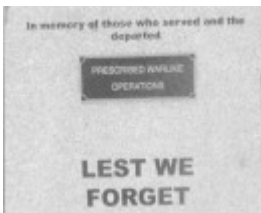
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Shep 1.jpg



Shep 2.jpg



Shep 3.jpg



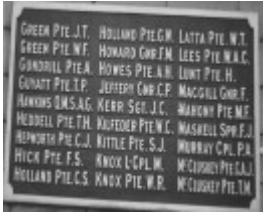
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Location

Marungi Street and Fryers Street SHEPPARTON, GREATER SHEPPARTON CITY

Municipality

GREATER SHEPPARTON CITY

Level of significance

-

Heritage Listing

Vic. War Heritage Inventory

Hermes Number 156579

Property Number

Veterans Description for Public

The Shepparton and District War Memorial is bordered by Marungi, Welsford and Fryers Streets. The site replaces the former memorial on Fryers Street and now comprises of a large area paved with flagstones, a cross made of lawn and two sculptures of infantrymen (including the original memorial's 1924 sculpture) set against angular white walls. The white wall of the memorial is dedicated to fallen servicemen and those who fought in the Boer War, First World War, Second World War, Korea, Malaya, Borneo, Vietnam, East Timor, Iraq and Afghanistan.

The 1924 sculpture, *Helping Hand* by Web Gilbert, depicts Pte. John Raws reaching his hand down to help his brother Robert from the trenches at St. Quentin during the First World War. Both were killed in action at Pozieres. The second sculpture, Bela Angyal's 2000 sculpture *Mateship*, was inspired by the famous war photographer Damian Parer and his image of a temporarily wounded and blinded Pte. Wally Johnson being helped by Sgt. Gordon Ayre, of Shepparton, across the Francisco River in Papua New Guinea.

Gordon Ayre, had joined the militia in 1938. He was he was called up for full-time duty in November 1941, aged 36. He transferred to the AIF in September 1942, and landed in New Guinea in March 1943. In May, the 58/59th was sent to take part in the offensive to capture Lae and Salamaua.

On 30 June, the 58th/59th attacked Bobdubi Ridge, which was heavily defended by the Japanese. In hard fighting over two day days, the battalion managed to secure a position on the ridge. At the end of July, the Old Vickers position was captured and the way opened to Salamaua. The Australians captured Salamaua on 11 September and Lae fell on 16 September.

Ayre was awarded an immediate Military Medal for his untiring and courageous work as a stretcher-bearer in the action on the bobdubi Ridge, at the Old Vickers and Coconuts positions in that month. In the citation, Sergeant Ayre is credited with saving the lives of three wounded comrades on 30 June when 'he unhesitatingly went forward under a hail of enemy fire' and remained with them until he was able to evacuate. The citation, in Ayre's service records, states that on 5 July he:

went forward with native carriers to locate a seriously wounded man. While evacuating him the party came under heavy fire from mortars and machine guns, and the carriers abandoned the stretcher. Sergeant Ayres displayed unflinching devotion to duty and outstanding paitence and courage and remained with the paitent until he was able to reassemble the carriers. He guided them back to safety under great difficulties, at one time moving breast deep 500 metres up the Francisco River. On 28 July he courageously managed the evacuation of a further 8 casualties under heavy shell fire.

The Francisco River was (and still is) a horrible malarial area, and Ayre contracted the first of a recurring series of bouts of malaria here. He served in New Guinea until July 1944, when, after periods in hospital, he was posted to the Murchison Prisoner of War Group in February 1945 - by now he was aged 43. His distinguished service ended when he was discharged in June 1947.

The First World War panels list the eighty-three men of the district who lost their lives. They include Richard Nicholls, who worked in a grocer's shop in Shepparton, and who enlisted aged 16 on 12 June 1916 in the 2nd Pioneer Battalion. He transferred to the 46th Battalion in February 1918, and was a battalion runner.

Private Nicholls was awarded the Military medal for gallantry as a runner on 6 April 1918 when he carried an important message over a kilometre of exposed ground before dawn, helping bring a wounded officer on the way. According to Red Cross records, he said 'my company commander will want me' and made his return journey in the daylight, crawling from shell hole to shell hole, exposed to snipers.

On August 8 1918, Nicholls contributed to Germany's 'Black Day' for the action in which he was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for exceptional bravery near Hamel. The citation records that during an attack he noticed a group of the enemy putting up a stiff fight in a gully, and, collecting a small party of men, led them across the gully to cut them off. Although the men with him were held up by the intense machine-gun fire, he kept on and succeeded with the help of an officer in taking several of the enemy prisoners. His daring and initiative were a fine example to his comrades. Ten days later he was mortally wounded by a shell at Lihons, and is now buried in the Villers-Bretonneux Military Cemetery. Nicholl's older brother, Ernest William Nicholls, enlisted in 1918 and served with the 58th Battalion, also serving in the Second World War.

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