

My Soldier's Story

Henry James Owen

1892 - 1917



LEST WE FORGET

BY WILLIAM WATERS

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Basic Facts

Henry James Owen was born in 4th Feb 1895 in Wanganui.

He was a Bombardier (operated big guns and mortars) in the NZFA 23rd reinforcements **AND** a rifleman (at different times)

He died at age 25 on October 1917 in Ypres, Belgium and is buried at the White House Cemetery in Belgium.

His official soldier ID is 34348

Personal Background

Henry was 5 foot 11 1/2 inches tall and weighed 76 kg. He had a scar above his left knee. He had brown eyes and brown hair. His medical examination on enlistment showed that he was healthy.

He grew up in Palmerston North in two locations that I could find. His father's hotel - The Railway Hotel and also at 5 Douglas Street.



Henry was the eldest son of Mrs Annie Elizabeth Owen and Mr William Owen. His parents got married in 1892 and he was born 3 years later in 1895. He had a brother who was born in July 1896. His Dad ran the Railway Hotel in Palmerston North but through illness eventually had to file for bankruptcy. Sadly less than a year after Henry's death his father also died. (29/08/1918)



He had a younger brother called Valentine Joseph Owen (who was arrested for theft). He died age 69, 03/05/1966. Valentine was a WW1 army reserve.

SUPREME COURT THEFT OF BENZINE.'

(BY TELEGRAPH—PRESS ASSOCIATION.)
PALMERSTON N., Feb. 18.

At the Supreme Court, before Judge Salmond, Valentine Joseph Owen was sentenced to six months' imprisonment for theft of turpentine and benzine.



Henry J Owen



Education

Henry was likely a Sacred Heart College foundation pupil. (Based on dates and ages). As he was from Palmerston North he would have been a boarder at the school.

The New Zealand Tablet, 23 December 1909 edition, recounted the Sacred Heart College annual prize giving at St Benedict's hall. At the time SHC had only been running for 6 years, it stated that an H. Owen received a prize from Bishop Lenihan for his Christian Doctrine class.

He stayed at school to successfully complete his fourth educational standard at college.

After school he did compulsory military training back in his hometown of Palmerston North. (Like most young men at the time).



Work after College

After school, when he was 18, Henry was a Shepherd in Hinakura, Martinborough. He worked for the Cameron family, who were wealthy sheep farmers that owned massive stations in the Southern Wairarapa. Ernest Cameron, who was a similar age to Henry, also enlisted with the NZFA and also went to France but he did survive the war.



Enlistment in Army and War

Henry was enlisted 30/8/1916 in Wellington with his terms of service being 'Period of war'.

He did his training at Featherstone Camp near Wellington.



On the 02/04/17 Henry left NZ from Wellington on the Corinthic, for Devonport, Plymouth, England. During this journey he was promoted to Bombardier 02/05. He arrived 2 months later on the 10/06 and marched into Sling Camp, Salisbury the following day. At this time Henry was reverted back to a gunner. He then proceeded north to the camp at Chadderton. Here he was punished for overstaying his leave.



The Corinthic

On the 20/06 Henry left England for France. He entered Etaples Camp in the North on the 23/06. Whilst here, on the 15th of July, he once again was punished for taking leave without permission. He was then posted to the field in Belgium on the 25th September. Less than one month later he was killed in action.

Battle

The Allies were trying to take control of an area south and east of Ypres - the Passchendaele Ridge, which included a very strategically important railway junction that supplied the German army. Henry was part of the New Zealand division that were sent to provide flanking cover to an Australian assault on the Broodseinde Ridge. The objective was Gravenstafel Spur. The artillery is noted as an important part of the success of this attack. This success caused the British high command to think that the enemy were faltering. So the troops were pushed on immediately. The idea being to capture the Passchendaele Ridge.

The conditions were dreadful and there was not enough time for preparation. This resulted in about 3700 casualties 'The Blackest Day'. Henry survived all of this, only to die age 25 on October 18th, 1917. This was the same day the Canadians arrived to relieve the Anzac Corps. Only a month later General Haig closed the Battle Of Passchendaele, as he believed the attacks had achieved nothing.



Date and Place of Death



Henry was killed in action age 25 on the 18th October 1917 in Ypres, West Flanders, Belgium. He is now buried at the White House Cemetery in Belgium, grave reference 11. b. 25.

War Medals

Henry received 2 service medals; A British war medal and A Victory medal.



British war medal



Victory Medal

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