



SWEENEYS' WAR

A TASMANIAN FAMILY'S EXPERIENCES DURING WW1

by Tony Sweeney

additional family research by Diane Munro (nee Sweeney)

additional text and photos supplied by Alison McCallum

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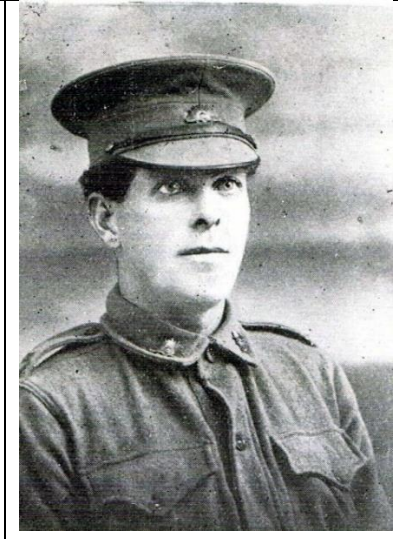
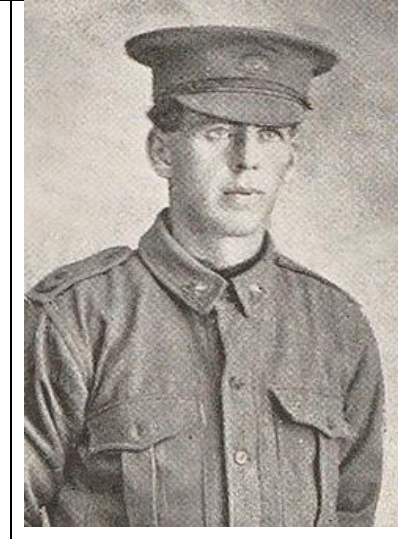
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Chapter 1

Discovering Tasmanian Diggers: The Sweeney Brothers of Zeehan

		
<p style="text-align: center;">SYDNEY FRANCIS SWEENEY (SYD) 1916 1896 – 1961 <i>Service number 6854</i> 12th BATTALION, 3rd BRIGADE, 1st DIVISION, AIF</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">EDWARD JOHN SWEENEY (TED) 1915 1886 - 1955 <i>Service number 2564</i> 14th FIELD AMBULANCE AIF</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">DANIEL BERNARD SWEENEY (DAN) 1915 1883 – 1916 <i>Service number 1279</i> “D’ COMPANY, 26th BATTALION, 7th BRIGADE, AIF</p>

Like many of their fellow servicemen these three Diggers divulged very little of their wartime experiences. My journey of discovery to unearth more details of my father and his two brothers has been an interesting one, involving a paper chase through newspaper articles and archives and travel to Europe to retrace their footsteps.

What I would like to share with you here is how I managed to give voice to some of what my father and his brothers found almost impossible to speak about, using three key sources. Firstly, by reading battalion unit diaries I gained a more in-depth picture of their experiences than was available from the list of dates and places in their service files. Secondly by accessing local, interstate and national newspapers I further expanded their stories with previously unknown first-hand contemporary accounts. Thirdly, by close analysis of photographic archives, I gleaned some totally unexpected new insights.

Sydney Francis Sweeney was my father. He was born at in Launceston, Tasmania on 15 February 1896. His family were Tasmanian pioneers; builders, farmers. miners and bushmen. At the time of Syd’s birth, his father, my grandfather, Daniel Sweeney, was Northern Roads and Works Inspector. A position he held for 20 years until he was forced to retire due to failing eyesight. Daniel had previously been a farmer, builder, contractor, and publican. Mainly on the north-west coast.

The family moved from Launceston to the west coast port of Kelly Basin and then to the North Lyell Company smelter town of Crotty. They built and established businesses in both towns. On the closure of the Crotty smelters in 1903, they moved to the booming mining town of Zeehan.

Daniel became a prospector and took up two sections, on Pyke's Creek on the Heemskirk Range in 1904. Syd's two older brothers, Dan and Ted, worked with their father. Dan junior took up a further two sections on Pyke's Creek. Their lease then totalled 80 acres. Sweeney's mine won fair returns of tin in the "boom" days. Daniel Sweeney senior became ill in 1909 and Dan junior took over management of the mine. He and Ted continued working the mine until they enlisted in the AIF. My grandfather's brother, James Sweeney, took over the mine.

Syd worked as a sawmill hand in Zeehan. At the age of 18 he had joined the part-time militia, the Tasmanian Rangers, 91st Infantry. The Great War had commenced that year and Syd had really wanted to join the AIF like his two brothers, Ted and Dan; but his mother, Sarah, made him promise he would not enlist. She had already sent two sons to war. However, he persisted, and he finally persuaded her to let him sign up aged 20 years and 6 months. He completed his Attestation form on 14 August 1916 and was enlisted in the AIF from 15 August. He underwent training at Claremont Camp, and in September, before leaving for the front, was granted special leave and was home when his mother died.

<p>2 Oct 1916 Zeehan and Dundas Herald <i>Obituary</i> <i>The death occurred on Saturday morning of Mrs. D. Sweeney, of Zeehan, after a long illness. The deceased, who was a native of the North-West Coast, was for many years a resident of Launceston, but when her husband relinquished the position of Northern road inspector, the family moved to the West Coast, which was then booming. After being in business at Kelly Basin and Crotty, Mr. and Mrs. Sweeney settled down in Zeehan on the closing down of the North Lyell Company's smelting town. Deceased was noted for her gentleness and kindness of heart, to be unfortunate was to at once enlist her sympathy and ready aid and in consequence her demise will be regretted by a wide circle of friends on the West Coast and in the Northern capital, who had valued her for her great personal worth. A large family and her husband are left to mourn her loss. The eldest son (Sergeant Daniel Sweeney) is at the front in France. Another son (Ted) is also in war service, with the A.M.C., either in England or France, and Private Sydney Sweeney is home on special leave prior to going to the front.</i></p>	<p>4 Oct 1916 Zeehan and Dundas Herald <i>Private Sydney Sweeney, who recently enlisted, leaves Zeehan today for Claremont camp, having completed the term of his final leave. He speaks in the very best terms of Claremont and camp life in general, and the young soldier makes it evident that he would not miss the great adventure for anything.</i></p>
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Dan and Ted trained in Egypt and served in Gallipoli and France. Syd fought in France and Belgium. Although Syd had enlisted as an infantryman, he eventually became a signaller until his repatriation back to Australia, where he was discharged on 19 September 1919. All three brothers received serious gunshot wounds, Dan, the eldest, during the Battle of Flers in the Somme Valley. He succumbed to his abdominal injuries on 8 November 1916 and was buried in Heilly Station Cemetery, Mericourt-L'Abbe, France. Eight months later, Syd first joined the 12th Battalion in France at Ribemont camp. Dan's grave was only a mile up the road from Ribemont.

Syd was wounded in the chest and right side, in Belgium, at the commencement of the Battle of Menin Road on 20 September 1917. The next day, in France, Ted was wounded in the right thigh and sustained a compound fracture of the right, femur. They were both sent to England for treatment and ended up convalescing at the same hospital. Their injuries had detrimental effects on their health for the rest of their lives. Ted was finally repatriated to Australia, returning with a shattered hip, whilst Syd returned to the front for the duration of the war.

18 Oct 1917 Weekly Courier

Personal Pars

Mr. Sweeney and family received word from the Base Records Office that **Private Syd. F. Sweeney** had been wounded in the chest whilst fighting in Flanders. Another brother, **Private E.G. Sweeney, of the Ambulance corps**, has also been wounded. In the case of the first-named, the injury is described as mild, but in the latter, no information is yet to hand as to the extent of the hurt. About a year ago, **Sergeant Dan Sweeney** gave his life for the great cause. **The Sweeney brothers** have evidently been in the thick of the fray. While we honour them for their efforts on behalf of the Empire, all hearts go out in sympathy to their relatives.



N^o 1033. QUALIS PHOTO CO.
FULHAM S.W.

THE OPERATING THEATRE.
3rd SOUTHERN GENERAL HOSPITAL
OXFORD.

AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P05969.003

3rd Southern General Hospital, Oxford The operating theatre. AWM P05969.003
Syd Sweeney admitted to this Hospital 25 September 1917, 5 days after receiving gunshot wound and shrapnel in chest and right side.

Most compelling, in terms of the story it tells, is the photograph, on the next page, of Ted Sweeney whilst convalescent in England in 1917. It was taken whilst he was recovering from surgery and treatment for a severe gunshot wound in the right thigh, with compound fracture to the right femur. It shows crutches within easy reach and a stiff right leg, possibly still in a plaster cast. The mask-like facial expression and “thousand-yard stare” is today recognised as classic signs of post-traumatic stress.



Ted Sweeney convalescing in England 1917

Ted received a serious GSW Right Thigh and Compound Fracture to Right Femur on 21 September 1917, admitted that day to 10th Casualty Clearing Station, then 16th General Hospital on 22 Sept, then transferred per "Essiquibo" to England on 16 Dec 1917 and admitted 19 Dec to No 2 London General Hospital Chelsea. On 9 May 1918 admitted to 1st Australian Auxiliary Hospital Harefield. Furlough from 16-30 May 1918 then reported to No 2 Command Depot Weymouth.

Syd and his brother Ted recuperated together in the same hospital in England. Whilst there, they both became engaged to the Buckland sisters. They were nursing sisters working in their family home which was being used as a hospital. Syd broke off his engagement as he did not feel that he could support his fiancé in the manner to which she was accustomed. Ted married Louisa Mary Buckland in Weymouth in July 1918 and brought her back to Tasmania in 1919.

In terms of Syd Sweeney and his reluctance to speak of what he did during the war, it was significant that it was only long after his death, when his family obtained copies of his service records, that they learned that he had been shot in the chest. Anytime he was questioned about his scars, his response had simply been to describe the wounds as the result of "a bit of shrapnel". That this is somewhat of an understatement can only be properly comprehended by close reading of his service record.

It was recorded he was "wounded in action in France 19-20 September 1917". This indicated he was injured at the commencement of the Battle of Menin Road, between late in the night of 19 September and early in the morning of 20 September 1917. When he embarked for England on the hospital ship "Grantully Castle" on 24 September 1917 the description of his injuries was given as "gunshot wounds to the chest wall and right side". On 25 September Syd is admitted to the 3rd Southern General Hospital, Oxford with his condition noted as "slight" GSW to the Chest. Yet, it was more complicated than that, as "shrapnel wound right chest" is noted when transferred on 4 October 1917 to 3rd Auxiliary Hospital, Dartford. He was discharged from there for furlough from 7-21 November 1917, after which he was to report to Sutton Veny.

His record shows a long period of recuperation and training to reach the required level of fitness for active service, as the next note is not until 3 January 1918 when he re-joins his Battalion to proceed to France via Southampton. He re-joins them from the Overseas Training Brigade at Longbridge. (From mid-1917, those deemed fit enough to resume active service were sent from the Command Depots to the Overseas Training Brigade to harden them up for life back in the trenches. The Overseas Training Brigade for the AIF was formed in Perham Down in June 1917 and then moved to Longbridge Deverill, Warminster, near Sutton Veny in October 1917).

Syd was an expert with a rifle, yet his family knew nothing of this until 1991, some thirty years after his death, when purely by chance (whilst searching the Tasmanian Archives for other images), the photograph on the next page was found in a 1917 issue of the "Tasmanian Mail". It shows Syd and other members of the 22nd Reinforcements, celebrating their victory as the Championship Rifle Exercises Team at Durrington, England. It is now believed that he remained part of the team throughout his service in France and Belgium.



Winners of the Championship Rifle Exercises. This Team was drawn from 22nd Reinforcements to 12th Battalion. All States were represented. Names (left to right).—Back Row: Privates Collis, A. E.; Owen, A. W.; Kerslake, W. E.; (Instructor, Sergeant A. M. Triffett); Lane, B. V.; Bird, H. O.; Sweeney, S. Front Row: Downer, L.; Owen, H. E. R.; Martin, W. J.; Cooper, W. V.; Davis, A. C.; Meekle, H.

Durrington, England 1917

Syd Sweeney, back row, far right.

1917 issue of the "Tasmanian Mail" held by the Tasmanian Archives

His few conversations about his wartime experiences were limited to when he was billeted post-Armistice in Châtelet in Belgium, and the happy times he enjoyed there. Syd was in one of the four Australian infantry divisions settled down for the winter, from late December 1918, in and around the Entre-Sambre-et-Meuse region of recently occupied Belgium. Arrangements saw troops billeted amongst the local population. In Belgian villages and towns soldiers were able to distance themselves from their war experiences and reflect on their lives.

Spending time with Belgian families, many who had young children, helped remind the Diggers of what awaited them back home and eased their readjustment from military to civilian roles. Therefore, it was not surprising that Syd felt moved to remark how Marie-Louise, a little Belgium girl, became a firm favourite of the troops billeted in Châtelet. He also chose to mention his pride in being on duty as a member of the honour guard which greeted HRH Edward the Prince of Wales. He was very proud to be selected and told his family that he remembered photos being taken, but never saw a copy. So, it was wonderful to find following picture in the AWM archives in 2001, forty years after his death.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

E04035

27 Dec 1918. Oret, Namur, Wallonie, Belgium AWM E04035
HRH Edward The Prince of Wales inspecting 1st Australian Divisional troops accompanied by Major General Sir J J Talbot Hobbs, the Australian Corps Commander (behind right).
Syd Sweeney was in this honour guard.
Photographer: Young, Sydney Harry Edward

In 1919, precedence rolls for repatriation of troops to Australia were prepared. The order of repatriation depended on length of service, family responsibilities and promised employment in Australia. Non-military employment pending embarkation was being encouraged resulting in a deluge of applications for employment in England.

It was a cold and snowy winter in Châtelet with milder weather in February. Routine parades and work continued. There was plenty of training available: military, educational and trades. Many sporting events were organised, including, three football codes, skating, tug-of-war, boxing and cross-country running. The troops enjoyed socialising with the local friendly people.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P05182.119

Châtelet Hainaut, Wallonie, Belgium, March 1919 AWM P05182.119
"Obstacle race at sports day." Many Belgian locals are in the crowd of onlookers.
Photographer Boese, Robert Otto

There was plenty of opportunity for leave in Namur, Paris, Brussels and in the United Kingdom. Syd particularly enjoyed leave at Glebe House, Oxford, England from 10-24 January. He re-joined the Battalion on 1 February and celebrated his 23rd birthday on 15 February with mates.

Finally, Syd was to be repatriated to Australia. He marched out to the Australian General Base Depot on 29 March 1919 and on April transferred into the No 1 Group in England. He embarked on HT "Ormonde" on 16 June to sail home to Australia and arrived on 1 August 1919. Syd was demobilised and discharged at Hobart, Tasmania, on 19 September (three years and one month after enlisting).

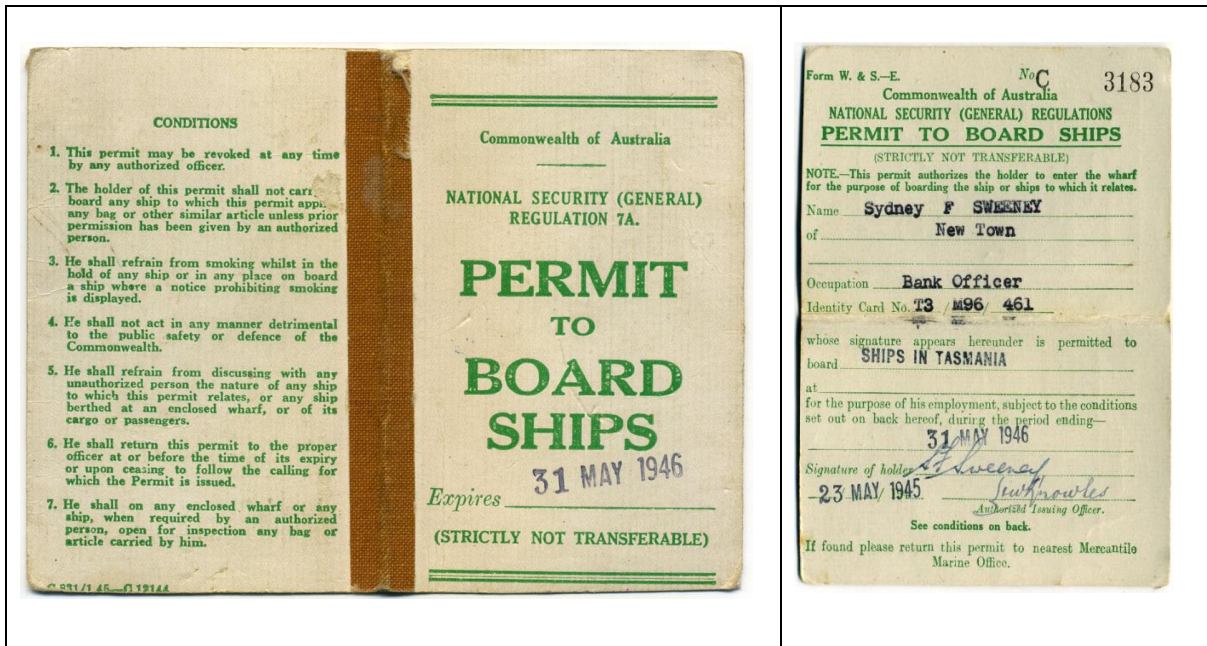


***Portrait of Sydney Francis Sweeney
wearing Returned Services League badge.
1920***



***Author Tony Sweeney
and partner, Val Manwaring.
Hill 60, Belgium 2005.
Photo: Claire Dujardin.***

Like many other servicemen, Syd found it difficult to obtain work on his return home. He eventually became a clothing manufacturer's agent. In 1938 he was employed as a Commonwealth Police Officer, performing customs inspections of ships in port, as well as security duties for the Commonwealth Bank of Australia. He was honoured to be selected to train the bank staff in firearm usage, and when his daughter Pauline asked why, he replied "Because I was the best shot in the army." At the time the family thought he was joking, but thirty years after his death the discovery of the photo of Syd with the Battalion sharpshooters proved otherwise.



Syd maintained a pride in civic duty and military service, and in 1935 joined the AMF 6th Military District Militia Forces at Hobart's Anglesea Barracks, in time being promoted to sergeant. He later served with the Returned Soldiers Civil Patrol for the duration of the 2nd World War.

In 1943, he married Hilary Jean Adams who was raised by her parents, Jack and Grace Adams, on the family farm on the Sledge Track near Scottsdale. Jean was a teacher, later promoted to senior headmistress with the Tasmanian Education Department.

In 1945 Syd was permanently appointed to the staff of the bank.


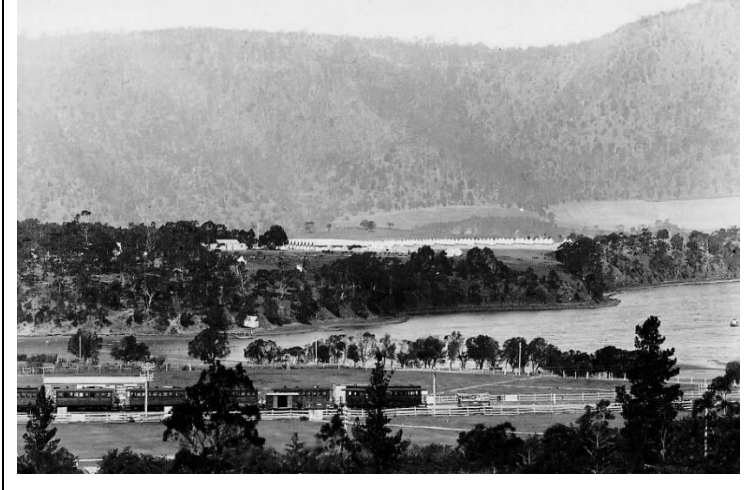
In his leisure time, Syd greatly enjoyed calligraphy, pen and ink drawing, and singing. He had a fine baritone voice and gave several public performances.

Sydney Francis Sweeney died suddenly in Hobart, Tasmania on 15 March 1961, only one month after he retired from the Commonwealth Bank of Australia aged 65 years. He had just taken delivery of his longed for first car. He was survived by his wife Jean, who passed away in 2004, daughters Pauline, Diane, Julie and son Tony.

Chapter 2

In My Father's Footsteps: On the Memory Trail 1916-17

The Story of One Tasmanian on the Western Front (Part 1 of 2)

	
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Sydney Francis SWEENEY (Syd) 1896 – 1961 ca 1914 in his Tasmanian Rangers Infantry Militia Forces uniform</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Claremont Camp Tasmania 1916.</i></p>

In 2005, spurred by a desire to connect with a father who never talked about the war, my partner Val and I set off along the First World War memory trail of the Western Front. Along the way I learnt much about the undoubted strength of character of my father and his powers of sheer physical endurance.

From preliminary research, I knew when my father Sydney Sweeney enlisted on 7 August 1916, he was living with his parents in Zeehan, Tasmania. A small town far removed from the hell that awaited him in France and Flanders. Like many other young men, in towns and cities around the vastness of Australia, he answered the call of Empire and went dutifully off to war. No doubt confident his training at Claremont Camp and his previous experience with the 91st Infantry (Tasmanian Rangers) would stand him in good stead. The Zeehan & Dundas Herald reported that, "He speaks in the very best terms of Claremont and camp life in general and the young soldier makes evident that **he would not miss the great adventure for anything.**"

Bearing Regimental Number 6854 Syd joined the ranks of the 22nd Reinforcements, 12 Infantry Battalion, 3rd Brigade, 1st Division as it boarded A38 HMAT Ulysses at Melbourne on 25 October 1916.



www.awm.gov.au

P00394.019

***HMAT Ulysses Port Melbourne
25 October 1916***



www.awm.gov.au

P00394.021

***HMAT Ulysses Port Melbourne
25 October 1916***



www.awm.gov.au

P00743.001

HMAT Ulysses. Sing-along November 1916



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P00743.004

HMAT Ulysses. Two-up game November 1916



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HMAT Ulysses, November 1916



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P003

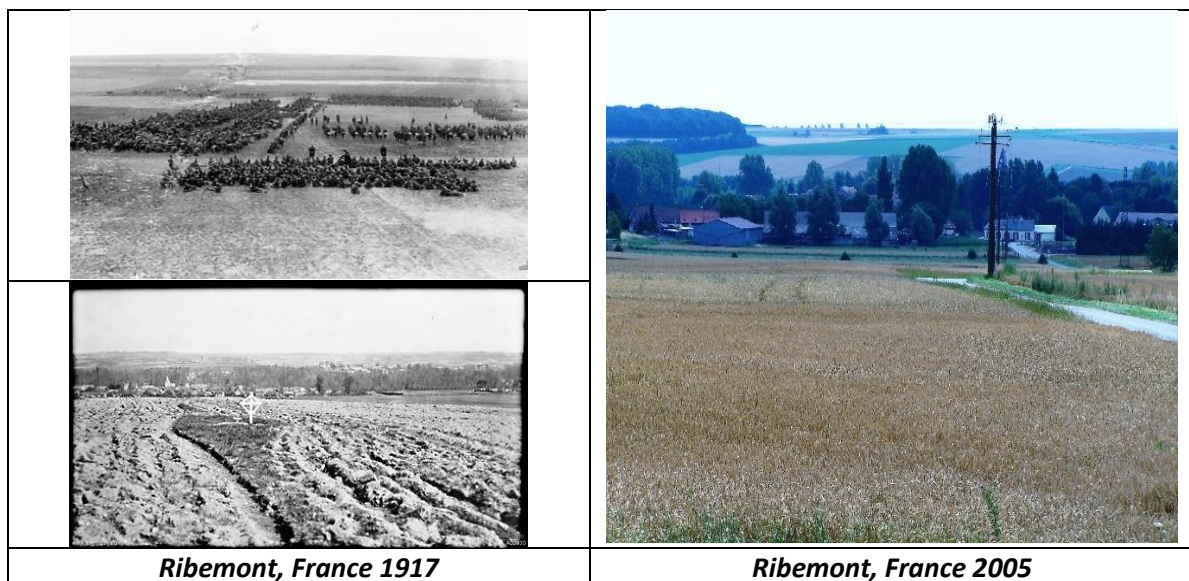
HMAT Ulysses. Cape Town, November 1916

On 20 September 1917 during the Battle of Menin Road in Belgium, Syd was wounded. He received a gunshot wound to the chest and shrapnel in the right side. Syd returned to Australia, duty done, on 16 June 1919 and was discharged on 19 September 1919.

I had never heard any details to flesh out these bare bones of his military service, so I was determined to learn more. His service naturally falls into two periods 1916-17 and 1918-19, the two distinct periods set apart by his wounding during the Battle of Menin Road and his evacuation to England. In this chapter I will focus on just 1916-17.

According to his service records and other sources consulted, Syd disembarked at Plymouth, England on 28 December 1916 and on 31 December, marched into the 3rd Training Battalion, Durrington, and whilst there, earned a position in the Battalion's championship rifle team. On his 21st birthday on 15 February, he contracted mumps and was promptly sent off to Hospital. He proceeded overseas to France via Southampton on 14 June 1917 and the next day marched into the 1st Australian Division Base Depot at Le Havre, France.

On 28 June he proceeded from Le Havre with his unit, and on 7 July was taken on strength at Ribemont, France by the 12th Battalion AIF from the 22nd reinforcements. Tragically, only one mile away from the camp at Ribemont lay the body of Syd's brother Dan, buried eight-months previously in a grave at Heilly Station Cemetery.



On 16 July the Brigade marched out of Ribemont via Treux, Ville-sur-Ancre and Meaulte to a hatted camp at Bronfay Farm, on the Bray-Carnoy road. The villagers at Ribemont appeared to be genuinely sorry to see the Australians leave, as the troops had made themselves very popular. The march was made under extremely hot conditions and a considerable number fell out. The comfortable camp at Bronfay Farm, near Bray-sur-Somme was utilised for a week. Syd would have been excited that the YMCA had converted a barn into a picture theatre. This was a first, movies were yet to become routine. In his youth, Syd provided sound effects at the Gaiety Theatre in Zeehan.

The troops practised open warfare on villages and route marches were carried out to Bray in the Mametz area. On 24 July the Brigade moved to Forked Tree Camp, on the Albert-Bray road, and over 27-28 July the entire 1st Australian Division moved north.

The Brigade marched to Albert where Syd and his fellows were loaded onto the train which then carried them through Dernancourt, Buire and Ribemont, en-route to Amiens. From Steenbecque Station, near Hazebrouck, the Division marched for two hours to the billets at Longue Croix, in the Staple area, and the Brigade Headquarters was established at Staple.

Orders were received on 2 August for another move. The Brigade Headquarters was moved to Lumbres. Syd's Battalion travelled by motor lorries and after an hour's route march arrived at Nielles-les-Blequin, near St Omer. It was an attractive village in a steep wooded valley.

Despite the circumstances, no doubt a seasoned mill hand like Syd would have cast an appreciative eye over the qualities of the local timbers. For the next few days it rained unceasingly until 4 Aug, so training exercises were cancelled due to the state of the ground. This period spent in the training area was wasted except for one day of fine weather. This same deluge was responsible for stopping the British offensive on the Ypres front.

On 6 August the Battalion returned to Longue Croix to continue training. Three days later they marched to Steent-Je, a tiny village about a mile from Bailleul. A detour had to be made to the south-west of the town of Hazebrouck due to enemy shelling. They then prepared for the "Battle of the Ridges" the attack on Polygon Wood.

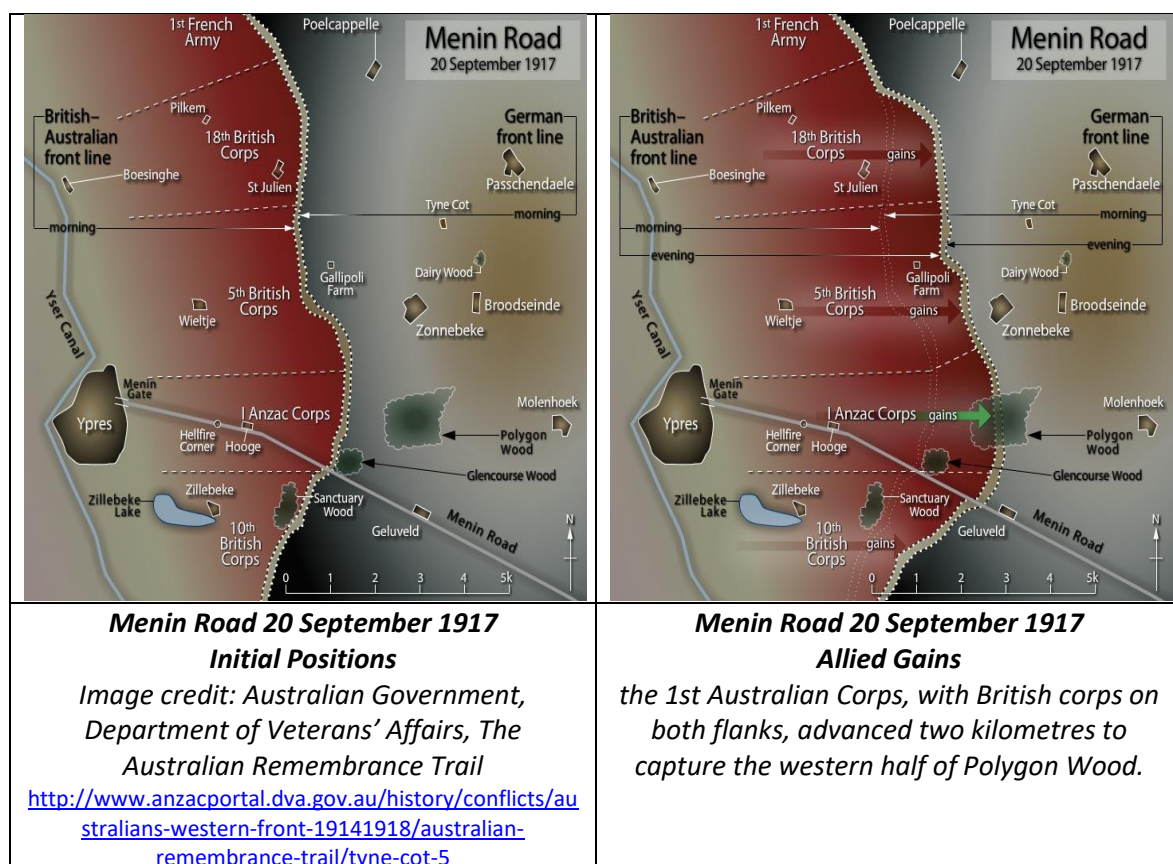
The time was employed in training and keeping the men physically fit. The Battalion was kept busy with route marches, football, company and Battalion sports. As part of their instruction a landscape model had been constructed, showing all the details of the country in miniature. All hands were shown this, so they could grasp the three-dimensional realities of their two-dimensional maps, with their various objectives clearly explained, and close attention drawn to "pill-boxes" and other enemy strong points.

In early September 1917, amongst all this activity, Syd endeavoured to keep in touch with his loved ones, and keep alive thoughts that he would hopefully survive the carnage and return to his family.

	
<p style="text-align: center;">Thoughts of Home A postcard sent by Syd Sweeney to his sister, Mary, in New Zealand. It was posted on 9 September 1917</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Somewhere in France Sunday 9 September 1917 To Dear Mary and Will With love from Syd</p>

On 13-14 September the Brigade undertook route marches via Outtersteene, Merris, Strazeele and Caestre to “Scottish Lines” in the Thieushouk area. Then on 16 September they moved to Micmac Camp, near Reninghelst to relieve the 47th Division on the front line; and on September 18 moved to bivouacs at Chateau Belge, near Ypres. The next day they moved to Halfway House, into underground dug-outs close behind the front line, whilst the Brigade headquarters relocated from Dickebusch to Hooge on the Menin Road.

Thus, began the preliminaries to the Battle of Menin Road. “Jumping-off” tapes were laid out and the Australian 1st and 2nd Divisions moved to form up on the tapes. Consistent torrential rain had been falling for hours creating a sea of mud. This slowed the column. There were frequent halts. Companies at the rear had difficulty in maintaining contact and only two companies reached the “jumping-off” tapes on time. The troops were finally organised by “zero hour”, 5.40 am. The enemy seemed to be aware of the impending attack and fired heavy barrages just before “zero hour”. The muddy ground proved a godsend as it caused the shell bursts to go straight up in the air. Few casualties were received at this stage. The lines at the rear crowded forward to escape the barrage and it looked as if disaster was pending. However, at 5am a tremendous barrage was fired on the enemy and the Brigade swept forward. Enemy resistance was overcome and the 12th Battalion reached their objective, 80 yards short of the western edge of Polygon Wood.





Hellfire Corner, Menin Road 1917



Hellfire Corner, Menin Road 2005



**Menin Road, Hoge Crater, 20 Sept 1917
opening of Australian attack**



Menin Road, Hoge Crater, 2005



**Wounded awaiting collection on the Menin Road 20 Sept 1917. Syd may have been amongst this group of wounded.
Frank Hurley Photo
Colourised by Royston Leonard UK**



**Menin Road 20 Sept 1917
dressing station Halfway House.
Frank Hurley Photo
Colourised by Royston Leonard UK**



**Collection station for the wounded.
Menin Road 20 Sept 1917.**



Menin Road 2005

On 20 September 1917, at the commencement of the Battle of Menin Road, Syd received gunshot and shrapnel wounds to the right-hand side of his chest. This was reported in the local newspaper on 15 October 1917:

Zeehan and Dundas Herald

*Two more Zeehan soldiers have received wounds of honour and scars which testify to their patriotism and devotion in a great cause. Word was received on Saturday from the Base Records Office, Melbourne, that **Private Syd. F. Sweeney**, who has been fighting for some months in the great battles in Flanders, had received a gunshot wound in the chest. Word was also received that Private Sweeney's brother, **Private E. J. Sweeney, of the Ambulance Corps**, had been wounded. In the case of "**Syd**", as he was familiarly termed, the wound is described as mild, but in "**Ted's**" case there is no description of his injuries. It is just eleven months ago since their brother. **Sergeant Dan Sweeney**, made the supreme sacrifice at the front, fighting for all the ideals of the Empire, civilisation and humanity. It is pathetic to recall that Sergeant Sweeney had a premonition that he would not return from the war, and that he was killed on the anniversary of his birthday. Much sympathy will be felt for the aged father of the brave boys who have just been wounded and also for their widowed sister, Mrs. Frank Gorey, of Zeehan, and an elder sister Mrs. Geo. Reilly, also of Zeehan.*

Syd was admitted on 21 September 1917 to the 6th Field Ambulance, Belgium. Then transferred to the number 10 General Hospital via 6th Australian Field Ambulance, Rouen. Three days later, on 24 September, he was transferred to England on HS "Grantully Castle". The day after Syd was wounded, his brother, Ted, was shot in the hip, in France. They recuperated together in England.

After a period of over three months for hospitalisation, recuperation and training in England to toughen up for active service, Syd was returned to France via Southampton on 3 January 1918. He continued to serve in France and Belgium, enduring severe fighting and heavy bombardments, attacks and counterattacks in numerous battles, in various sectors including Ypres, Hazebrouck, Meteren, Strazeele, then post Armistice was billeted at Chatelet in Belgium.

Chapter 3

In My Father's Footsteps: On the Memory Trail 1918-19

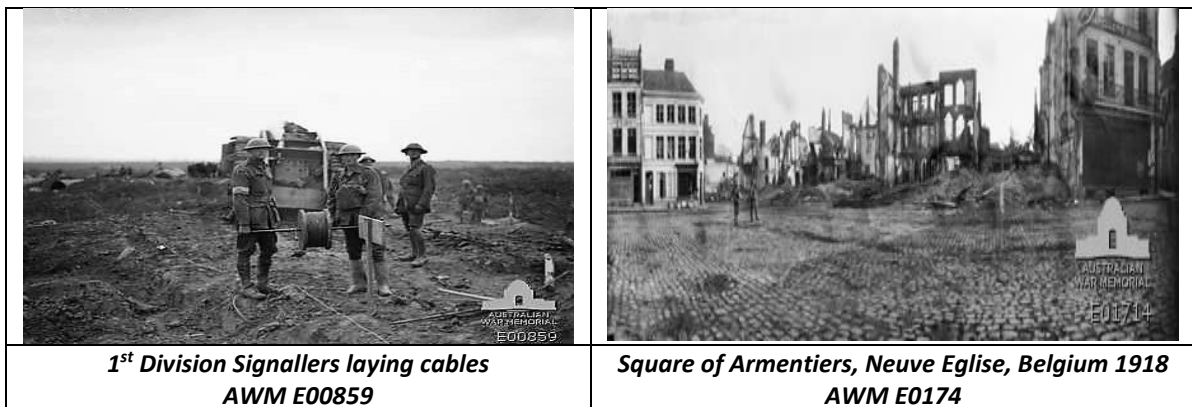
The Story of One Tasmanian on the Western Front (Part 2 of 2)



This chapter takes up the second part of the journey my partner Val and I made in 2005, along the First World War memory trail of the Western Front. My purpose was to better know and understand my father's experiences in France and Belgium. Our European travels retraced his movements during two periods, 1916-17 and 1918-19, interrupted by his transfer as a casualty to England. Like most of his contemporaries he had shared very little of his memories, thoughts or feelings of these times. As we went from place to place, my constant companions were thoughts of my father and the voices of the 12th Battalion and 3rd Brigade war diarists.

On 20 September 1917 during the Battle of Menin Road, Sydney Francis (Syd) Sweeney had received a gunshot wound to the chest and shrapnel to the right chest wall. After emergency treatment he was transferred to England for hospitalisation, recuperation and then training to toughen up for return to active service. Over three months elapsed before he was back serving in France and Belgium.

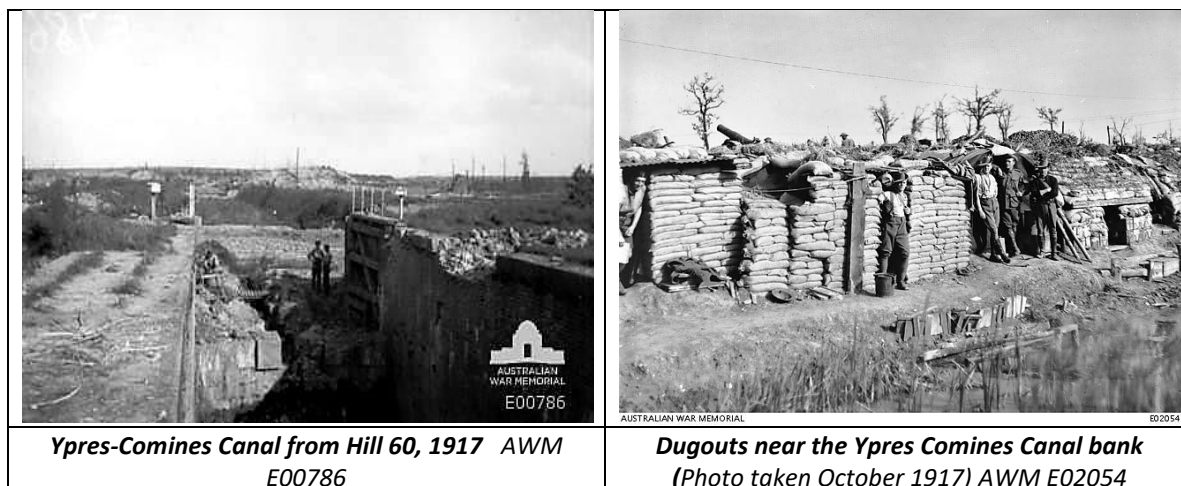
Following a period at the Overseas Training Brigade at Longbridge Deverill, Warminster, near Sutton Veny, on 3 January 1918 Syd left England for France via Southampton. The following day he marched into the 1st Australian Division Base Depot, Le Havre, France, and on 7 January he proceeded to his unit from Le Havre. A mere four days later, on 11 January he re-joined the 12th Battalion at the front line on Messines Ridge near Stinking Farm, on the banks of the Douvre River. The battalion had been on the front line since Christmas, braving bitterly cold weather and suffering many casualties from continued shelling and aerial bombing. After heavy overnight rain, on 15 January many trenches had collapsed and those remaining were knee deep in mud. The river was also in high flood. The only consolation was that the Germans were also suffering from the awful conditions. The following day, without having time to repair all the damage, Syd's battalion was relieved by the 8th Battalion. The 12th Battalion returned to their old camp at Wulverghem. Syd and his fellows in the Divisional Signalling Company were accommodated in the Liffey House Dugouts at the rear of Messines Ridge, from where they worked on burying cables under trying conditions.



On 23 January the 12th Battalion, having suffered severe diarrhoea from a suspect water supply had to leave many behind when they went back to the front line to relieve the 8th Battalion. The depleted 12th Battalion was doubly thankful the 8th Battalion had made good progress in improving the front line, and the enemy remained quiet. Three days later the weather improved to mild and dry with some fog. Syd and his fellows attended the 3rd Brigade Signal Class, held in the field. On 31 January the 12th Battalion, having suffered no casualties, was relieved by the 30th Battalion, 5th Division and moved back to a very fine Nissan Hut camp at Neuve Eglise, known as Shankill Huts. Divisional competitions in Soccer, Rugby and Australian Rules football were organised to keep the men fit. On 15 February the day dawned on Syd's 22nd birthday. The next day he re-joined his unit, the 3rd Australian Field Artillery, in the field, and a Divisional rifle competition was held - with the 12th Battalion outscoring all the others.

A holiday was declared on 19 February 1918 so the men - who had missed out on the 1917 Christmas festivities whilst on the front line - could partake of some jollity, with gift boxes from the Australian Comfort Fund being handed out. Their belated celebrations included organised sports and a performance by the 3rd Brigade concert party. On 28 February, as a further diversion, a game of football was organised against comrades from the all-Tasmanian 40th Battalion. The 12th scored a narrow win in an exciting, hotly contested game.

On 2 March the Battalion was again bussed back towards the line in the Ypres sector. They were positioned on the high ground of the Messines-Passchendaele ridges, with their left flank on the famous Hill 60. The 12th was acting as support Battalion. Many who had not served with the battalion in September 1916 applied for permission to visit the historic battlefield. The Battalion was quartered in the Canal Dugouts, a long set of catacombs beside the Ypres-Comines Canal. Electric light had been installed and there was ample accommodation for many hundreds of troops. For the first time, the Battalion canteen was brought into the forward area.



The 12th Battalion relieved the 10th Battalion in the right sector of the front line without incident, on 10-11 March and again on March 13. The following day the Battalion was subjected to heavy artillery fire with many gas-filled shells. On 17-18 March there was a violent gas shell bombardment from 10 am until 1 am along the whole front line. Fortunately, the 12th Battalion was free of casualties. For the first time, the small box respirators were used continuously for a long period. They proved effective but were irritating and painful to wear. The respirators restricted night vision to the extent that many soldiers took them off and just used the nose clips and breathing tubes. Again, on 21 March there were intense gas shell bombardments, along with HE shells. The following day the Germans launched their major spring offensive. Tragically, 16,000 allied prisoners were taken, and the enemy recaptured many of the towns they had lost in the spring of 1917.

Over 24-25 March the Battalion was moved back to Crater Dugouts, Gasper Cliff, Canal Dugouts and White Chateau. The men suffered from colds and scabies whilst living in the confines of the dugouts. Baths were improvised to help prevent the spreading of scabies. Raids on enemy positions were cancelled because of the bad weather. The enemy seemed to be held at about Albert in the south. During 3-4 April the 9th British Division relieved Syd's battalion – which then marched to La Clytte for transportation by enclosed trucks to billets at Borre on the Strazeele-Hazebrouck road. When the Australians were leaving Borre, Syd would have noticed that the French locals were distressed and worried. With good reason as it transpired -within eight days they would be homeless. During 5-11 April Syd's battalion was marched to Caestre then moved by train to Amiens via Calais and Abbeville.

From Amiens they moved to Coisy and Flesselles and found crowded and uncomfortable billets.

Although the men were in good spirits they had become soft after spending so much time in the trenches. Marching even a short distance made their feet very sore, so they were rested and undertook some training to toughen them up.

Over 6-7 April the 12th Battalion took up positions on the front-line west of Morchies. Thankfully, the situation was quiet along the whole front.

On 10 April a heavy artillery barrage was laid down at 0200 allowing sufficient advances to gain all objectives by 0400. Two days later, on 13 April, the 12th Battalion gained ground on the enemy by reaching first phase objectives. The enemy counter-attacked at the windmill east of Louverval but was driven out, leaving many casualties. Owing to the advance of the 1st Australian Infantry Brigade, the 12th established a post on the right of Boursies. On 13 April the front-line was pushed forward.

On 14 April, negotiating shell attacks, the Battalion was returned north by train to the Hondegham siding and ordered to assist in the defence of Hazebrouck. They marched through the centre of Hazebrouck to return to the deserted, looted and shattered village of Borre. The Division was kept in reserve and dug a defence line of strong posts in front of Borre and Pradelles. Defence phone lines were put in place. Severe fighting occurred along the whole 3rd Brigade front on 15 April. Counter-attacks saw the enemy retreating fast with many parties of them surrendering freely. Original lines were re-established. The next day hostile riflemen were very busy along the whole of the Brigade front. Louverval and Lagincourt were shelled during the day, and the Cambrai road heavily shelled at intervals. A considerable amount of material, left by the enemy, was salvaged.

On 17 April there was intense shelling lasting two hours resulting in 30 casualties. Thankfully, damp and overcast weather followed so the shelling ceased. Two days later it was very cold with snow when the Battalion relieved the 133rd French division opposite Meteren, and dug in along 1,000 yards of the Fletre-Meteran road. Apart from very active German snipers and aeroplanes machine gunning, the next couple of days were quiet. Over 22-24 April the Battalion launched an assault on the village of Meteren by advancing the lines and making surprise attacks. Counter attacks were repulsed. Heavy machine gun fire held up the centre of the line. It developed into a fight between bombs and machine guns and after two days the Battalion was forced to withdraw and remain at Phineboom for four days.



Meteren, France 1918 AWM E02804



Meteren, Nord, Hauts-de-France, France 2005
Image courtesy of Trip Adviser

The 4th Battalion on 28 April relieved the 12th Battalion so they could move into reserve. Although billeted in a comfortable hut camp at Borre railway siding, it was subject to

continuous shelling, resulting in many casualties. On 4 May they returned to the front line and relieved the 8th Battalion in front of the Strazeele Station.

The defence of Strazeele commenced with an enemy gun battery opening fire on the Brigade Headquarters camp, destroying two huts and wounding two men.

The 12th Battalion camp was moved to the west of the station. Strazeele and the railway station received heavy howitzer shelling on 5 May and so the defences were not able to be advanced very far. Foggy weather and light rain compound the situation, as these conditions were not favourable for firing gas projectiles in retaliation. The following day gas projectiles were finally able to be fired, and patrols were sent out. The enemy shelling continued, and in the evening of 7 May the enemy activity increased. The allies' artillery put down short concentrations on the enemy with good results. On 8 May the 12th Battalion Headquarters, at the station, was hit eight times with only one casualty. The front-line trenches of the 12th Battalion were on low ground and very wet with no drainage possible. The line was very thin and it was thought that an attack of any strength must penetrate it. A hostile barrage was put down in the evening. The enemy raided our positions but were repulsed. The 10th Battalion relieved the 12th Battalion so it could be moved into support near Pradelles.

On 10 May the 12th Battalion were able to bathe at the YMCA Baths at Borre, and cigarettes and matches were issued. On 13 May Syd and his fellows were moved into reserve, bivouacking at La Kreule, near Hazebrouck, so training could recommence. During 14-16 May all units were bathing regularly under unit arrangements. Preliminary arrangements for a Brigade sports meeting were completed, and arrangements made for re-commencement of the Brigade Concert Party. Hot, fine weather continues and on 18 May the Battalion was marched about four miles behind Hazebrouck, to the Reserve Brigade Area near Sercus. It was a wonderful sight, fresh and green countryside, with all the camps tented under trees in small fields. Aerial bombing at night. Training continued.

On 20 May a Brigade Concert was given by the 12th Battalion, and judged highly successful. Other entertainment was offered by the YMCA Cinema in Sercus. On 21 May the 12th was digging a cable trench for the XV Corps and undergoing further training. Night bombing continued and at times the allied searchlights picked up the enemy planes and the 12th Battalion Lewis guns became very busy.

Two days later it was overcast with heavy wind, yet training went on and the Battalion sports meeting was held.

The Brigade marched back to La Kreule on 26 May, and the men took the opportunity to bathe. Artillery fire had increased and an attack was expected to develop soon. The news was received that the Boche had attacked between Souissons and Rheims, using 30 Divisions against 8 Allied divisions. The next day the 12th Battalion relieved the 3rd Battalion in front of Strazeele Station. Raiding parties and fighting patrols were sent out, often in broad daylight, to harass the enemy and to reduce their morale. Signs of a "wind-up" to an attack were evident.



The culminating point was reached at 1 am on 3 June, when the Brigade brilliantly captured the Mont de Merris, a small hill overlooking a large portion of the allied lines in that sector. Many prisoners and much equipment were captured. The next day the 7th Battalion relieved the 12th Battalion so it could move back to the Ana Jana railway siding at La Kreule. On 8 June the Battalion moved back to Sercus, where the week's training was marked by an outbreak of "Spanish Influenza" which was prevalent on the Continent. About 80 men were evacuated from the Battalion in a few days. On 16 June the Battalion moved into support near Pradelles, and was employed strengthening the Strazeele defences.



On 25 June the 12 Battalion relieved the 9th Battalion on the Strazeele sector of the Front Line, astride the Bailleul-Hazebrouck railway. The enemy were very nervy and any activity would immediately bring down an artillery barrage. During 1-2 July the weather was clear and hot. The enemy was still very alert and appeared to be strengthening positions. Machine guns were very active. Thankfully the enemy aerial corps was not very active. Despite a very heavy enemy artillery barrage on the front line on 4 July, an enemy raid was repulsed. The next day the 1st Battalion relieved the 12th Battalion so it could move back to a camp at Weke Meulin, about a half mile out of Hazebrouck.

During 7-14 July Syd was kept at the 11th Casualty Clearing Station, very sick with vertigo. Then, on 15 July, he was admitted with Influenza to the 2nd Australian General Hospital, Boulogne. His health and general living conditions were obviously an ongoing issue, as he developed a mite related condition and on 26 August he was admitted with Scabies to the 25th General Hospital, Boulogne, He was later transferred on 1 September to the No 10 Concentration Depot, from where on 7 September he was discharged to the 1st Australian

Divisional Base Depot, Le Havre. On 18 September Syd was finally marched out to his unit, from the 1st Australian General Base Depot.

On 28 September he re-joined the 12th Battalion at billets in Ergnies, situated in the Goreflos area, France and commenced training. On 12 October, Syd and his fellow signallers attend the 3rd Brigade Signal School, France. Seven days later he re-joined his Battalion at Surcamps and continued training. On 20 October he moved back to his old billets at Ergnies. On 30-31 October a Divisional Rifle Meeting was held and Syd played his part in ensuring that the 12th Battalion won convincingly across the categories, taking out the Company, Battalion and Platoon competitions.

News was received on 7 November that Plenipotentiaries (envoys) had left Berlin for the front. Everyone expected an armistice to be signed in a few days. Over 9-10 Nov the Battalion entrained at Pont Remy for a 36-hour journey to the forward area at Tincourt. Trains were packed on the train lines and in hopeless confusion. On 11 November the Battalions gave up their rations to feed desperately hungry civilians. The Commanding Officer received news that an Armistice had been signed and it came into force at 11 am. He shared this with his men as well as the fact that the Kaiser and his son had abdicated. During 12-13 November, Syd and his fellows proceeded by bus to Mazinghien where troops began clearing up the village. In fine and sunny weather, parades were conducted for all units. Prisoners of war and repatriated civilians were streaming in from the east, most coming from the south of Belgium, principally from Charleroi and Phillipville.

During 23-31 November the Battalion marched back to Mazinghien and then continued to Cartignies, and on to Beugnies. Billets were spacious, but filthy, so a clean-up of them and the town was undertaken. On 1 December the Brigade marched out to line the sides of the Maubrrge-Avesnes road to receive King George V. Throughout 2-16 December, despite cold and wet weather, the Battalions carried on with military training, education and recreational games. Orders were received to move to Chatelet, a suburb of Charleroi. Over 17-19 December the long march to Chatelet was commenced with overnight stops at Barbencon and Thy le Château. The second day's march was under atrocious conditions, with sleet and driving rain. The route via Castillon and Fontinelle, was over narrow roads in very bad condition. All units arrived at excellent billets, amongst very friendly people at Chatelet, on 19 December. The civilian population were most hearty in their welcome. Householders everywhere were anxious to have some soldiers billeted with them. The men soon made themselves comfortable and most were billeted 2 or 3 to a house. Quite a new experience.

On 20 December an official welcome was extended by the Burgomaster of Chatelet. A composite Battalion was formed, using one company from each Battalion. It paraded in the square before the church. General Glasgow met the Burgomaster and was presented with a bouquet of flowers by a little girl. The Battalion then marched past the numerous civil dignitaries. Leading citizens and most of the school mistresses were presented. The Burgomaster read a lengthy address of welcome and some wine was drunk. Afterwards the Divisional Commander made a well-received speech in reply.


Over 21-23 December the cold weather continued, yet despite this, the men were all comfortable and much happier in this friendly village than at any time during the war. They shared in a great deal of the home life of the village and were able to take the girls to the cinema and concert parties. On 24 December, Christmas Eve was wondrously spent at peace. The sun even poked through at intervals. A special concert party was held by the Brigade and attended by the Brigadier and the Burgomaster of Chatelet. The latter enjoyed the show very much although he didn't understand a word, Syd may have thought that perhaps the glass full of whisky the Burgomaster poured himself helped. On 25 December the snow returned. The Brigadier visited all the men at Christmas dinner, and all the troops immensely enjoyed the celebrations and their boxes from Australia. The 26 December, Boxing Day, was a holiday for all. There were troops all over the place, but they were very orderly, and very few cases of drunkenness occurred over the Christmas period.

During 27-29 December preparations were underway for the visit of the Prince of Wales. The concert hall was prepared for the presentation of medals. Electric lights were installed and the hall was decorated with Belgium flags and pot plants. On December 30, HRH Edward, the Prince of Wales, arrived punctually at 1115. Each Battalion was allotted 100 seats, other units a proportion. Civilians occupied 60 seats.

The balance of the troops lined the streets toward the Place Hotel de Ville. The Prince was to present medals, but first he inspected the guard of honour, which included a very proud Syd Sweeney. Syd told his family that he remembered photos being taken, but he never saw a copy. On leaving the hall, the Prince was given a rousing cheer. The party then visited the troops in their billets, with the diggers apparently amusing the Prince very much.

The arrival of 1919 saw the preparation of Precedence rolls for the repatriation of troops to Australia. The order of repatriation depended upon length of service, family responsibilities and promise of employment in Australia. Non-military employment, pending embarkation to Australia, was being organised, resulting in a deluge of applications for employment in England. It was a cold and snowy winter in Chatelet with milder weather in February. Routine parades and work continued unabated. There was plenty of training available: military, educational and trades. Many sporting events were also organised, including: three football codes, skating, tug-of-war, boxing and cross-country running. In addition, the troops had ample occasion to socialise, and greatly enjoyed meeting and forming firm ties with the friendly locals.

There was also plenty of opportunity for leave in Namur, Paris, Brussels and in the United Kingdom. Syd enjoyed leave at Glebe House, Oxford, England from 10-24 January. He re-joined the Battalion on 1 February and celebrated his 23rd birthday on 15 February. Finally, it was Syd's turn to be repatriated to Australia. He marched out to the Australian General Base Depot on 29 March and on 25 April transferred into the No 1 Group in England. He embarked on HT "Ormonde" on 16 June to sail home to Australia, and arrived on 1 August. He was demobilised and discharged at Hobart, Tasmania, on 19 September 1919, three years and one month after enlisting.


 DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE,
 BASE RECORDS OFFICE,
 VICTORIA BARRACKS,
 MELBOURNE, S.C. 1-2 NOV 1937

NO.

ISSUED FOR IDENTIFICATION PURPOSES IN
LIEU OF LOST DISCHARGE CERTIFICATE.

Regimental Number 6854 Rank Private
 Name Sydney Phaulis SHEENEY,
 Unit 12th Battalion, A.I.F.
 Place and Date of Enlistment Claremont, Tasmania, 15/8/1916
 Date of Embarkation for Active Service Abroad 25/10/1916
 Date of Return to Australia 1/8/1919
 Place and Date of Discharge Hobart, Tasmania, 19/9/1919
 Cause of Discharge Termination of period of enlistment.

Personal Description at Date of Enlistment:— Age 20 years 6 months. Height 5 feet 7½ inches. Weight stone 136 lb. Chest measurement 33/36 inches. Complexion Bright Eyes Blue Hair Dark Brown Distinctive Marks (if any) -----	Decorations and Medals:— British War Medal Victory Medal <hr/>
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Signature of Ex-Soldier *S. Sheehey*
J. Robinson
Officer in Charge

Replacement 1919 Discharge Certificate (issued 1937)

No doubt, his return to civilian life in Tasmania was difficult, despite some post-Armistice rest and transition afforded by billeting amongst welcoming Belgian families. Back home he had to reinvent himself anew. After enduring severe fighting and heavy bombardments, attacks and counterattacks in numerous battles, across various sectors, his nights must sometimes have been troubled by distressing dreams and his days disturbed by flashbacks of the Menin Road, Ypres, Hazebrouck, Meteren, and Strazeele. Yet he never shared that with his family.

You may wonder what prompted me to make this journey? I was a teenager when my father died and wasn't fully aware of, or showed much interest in, the hardships and horrors that he and his fellow servicemen endured. He didn't speak about them. In those days, everybody had a dad who had served in one of the two world wars. It was not as big a deal as it has now become. In the 1950's, the only perceived difference between my primary school mates' dads and mine, was, that my dad still carried a gun at work! Syd was a Commonwealth Policeman. My mates loved tagging along when I called into the Commonwealth Bank in Hobart to visit him. They hoped to glimpse his shoulder holster under his coat. Sometimes he could be enticed to open his coat!

To understand my father and his experiences in his country's service, in 2005 Val and I visited Syd's battlefields in France and Belgium. We stayed at the hotel at Hooze on the Menin Road, just outside Ypres. We found the Hooze Crater and a pillbox right outside our window! It was only then that I realised that we were within a few hundred metres of where my father was wounded in 1917.

The hotel overlooked the Menin Road and the now lush green fields where the Australian 1st and 2nd Divisions struggled through a sea of mud, hail of bullets and relentless artillery barrages as they advanced toward Polygon Wood. Hellfire Corner was not far down the road toward Ypres. It was such a peaceful scene. It was hard to believe it had once been hell on earth. We tried to comprehend the scale of the carnage and suffering that had once played out right there.

I found it difficult to sleep that night. We had been wining and dining not far from the spot where Syd had experienced such terror, hardship and pain. What must he have felt when he was struck by the German bullet? I gained a new respect for him. Would I have been able to go through the horrors that he had endured?

We experienced the same warm Belgium hospitality as the Australians enjoyed so long ago, when local historians, Clair Dujardin and Bernard Lejeune, escorted us around the surrounding battlefields where Syd had fought. One memorable stop was at the famous Hill 60 which was the front line when Syd was there in March 1918. The area has been left as it was. Pillboxes and depressions outlining the location of many trenches. There was fighting on Hill 60 during the 2nd World War as well. Lead shrapnel was lying on the ground, exposed by weathering. Everywhere we were told to be careful what we picked up, as unexploded devices remain buried on the battlefields.

Claire and Bernard told tales of local farmers still ploughing up human remains, equipment, live shells and other remnants from the battlefields. Sometimes the shells exploded.

We were struck by the number of beautifully maintained graveyards and endless rows of headstones. Graves from both sides of the conflict. We saw them on almost every road. A Canadian graveyard was almost opposite the hotel. We paused for reflection at Tyne Cot, the largest cemetery for Commonwealth forces in the world, for any war.



*Author, Tony Sweeney
and his partner, Val Manwaring.
Hill 60, Belgium 2005.*



***Tyne Cot Cemetery 2005
with Belgium friends
L: Bernard Lejeune, R: Clair Dujardin
Author Tony Sweeney in centre***



Hill 60 Bunker 2005

As I surveyed Tyne Cot, I recalled our visit to Heilly Station Cemetery, in France, it was lovingly maintained as well. We had gone there to pay our respects at my uncle Dan's grave. Dan was the eldest of my father's brothers. The Diggers will certainly never be forgotten in France and Belgium. We were sobered by thoughts of so many young lives lost on all sides.

Claire and Bernard then took us to a tavern near the Menin Gate on the main street in Ypres. We were welcomed warmly when we were introduced as Australians. The proprietor told us the tavern was there in World War 1 and Syd would probably have visited as it was popular with the Australians. It had survived both wars and pictures of Diggers adorned the walls. We felt proud to be Australians.

Next, we attended the nightly last post ceremony at the Menin Gate Memorial. We had watched it on TV, but as moving as that had been, nothing could match being there. It was an overwhelming experience. We were mindful that every Aussie who served in the area, including Syd, would have passed through these gates. Heading out or returning from the front.



***Main Street and Cloth Hall, Ypres 1917
AWM EO1126***



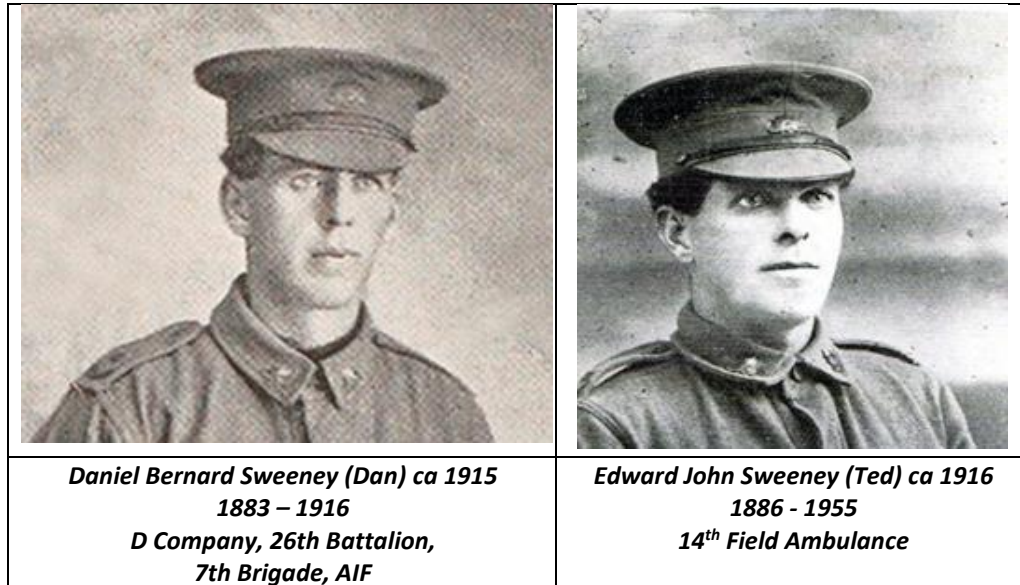
***Main Street and Cloth Hall, Ypres 2005
from the Menin Gate***

By the end of the journey in my father's footsteps, in my mind I had a clearer picture of him as an individual, and as a soldier functioning in a disciplined battalion as an infantryman. I knew he had mastered two skilled roles: as a sharp shooter laying down accurate and deadly fire, and as a signalman laying and repairing vital communication lines. I was finally able to imagine the sorts of conversations we might have shared before he died, if only my teenage self had been able to breach his inability to speak of what his generation deemed unspeakable.

Chapter 4

Fickle Fate: A Tale of Two Tasmanians

with different outcomes from the Great War



Daniel and Sarah Sweeney of Zeehan, Tasmania, had nineteen children. Eleven died in childhood. Of the remaining four daughters and four sons, three sons went to war: Dan, Ted and Syd.

Syd, the youngest, was a mill hand, and is the subject of the two previous chapters. The elder two -Dan and Ted - were miners. The Sweeney family, took up four sections on Pyke's Creek on the Heemskirk Range in 1904. A total lease of 80 acres. The mine had an open cut section as well as a 200 foot tunnel driven into the creek embankment. Daniel Sweeney senior, with his two eldest sons Dan and Ted, won fair returns of tin. In the "boom" days, Dan senior was offered and refused £6,000 for his show out on the corner of the range, for he held that he would one day discover the source of the wonderful shed of lode tin found in the vicinity.

However, in 1909, Dan senior's ill health meant Dan junior – the eldest son –had to take over management of the mine. Ted proved an able assistant and the brothers worked as an efficient team until they both enlisted in the AIF.

Although Dan and Ted both trained in Egypt then served in Gallipoli and France, their fates were quite different. Both were seriously wounded on active service, but tragically only one survived.

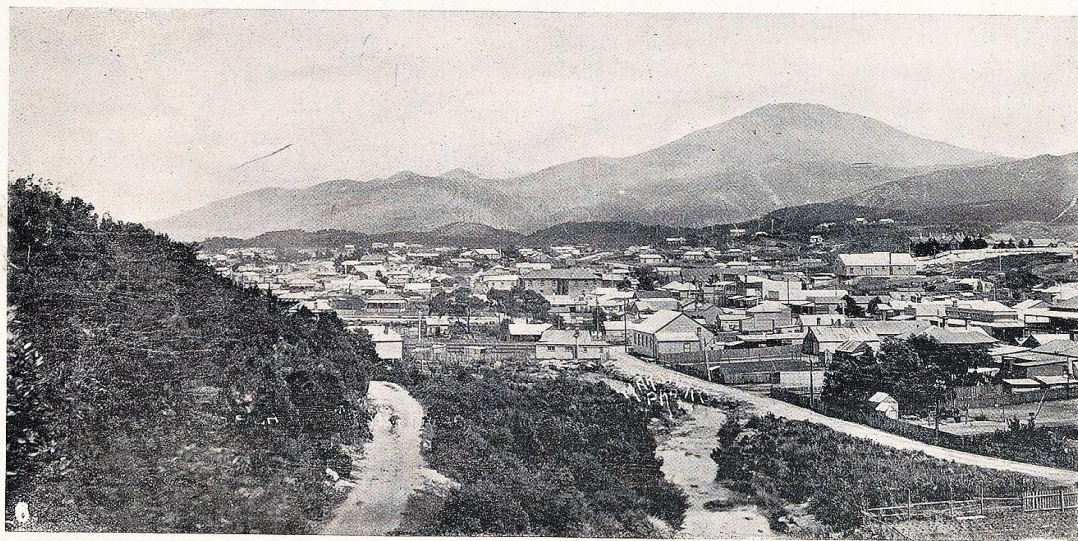
Dan was wounded in the abdomen during the Battle of Flers in the Somme Valley. His injuries were so severe he never recovered, and was buried on 8th November 1916 at Heilly Station Cemetery, Mericourt-L'Abbe, France. In stark contrast, Ted, also in France, survived a serious gunshot wound to the hip on 21 September 1917. The day after younger brother Syd received a gunshot wound to the chest, in Belgium. Ted was sent to England for further treatment and after recuperating sufficiently, with Syd, was finally repatriated to Australia. However, his injuries plagued him for the rest of his life.



***Pillenger, Kelly Basin 1902
Port for the North Lyell Mine
Photo: W L Crowther Collection, Hobart***



***The North Lyell smelter town of Crotty c1901
Photo: The Peaks of Lyell by Geoffrey Blainey:***



View of Zeehan from the Weekly Courier 22 September 1910

As Dan and Ted left Zeehan for service overseas, views such as this would have been fresh in their minds. Their hometowns certainly held a place in their hearts, they were proud of their family's place amongst Tasmania's pioneers.

The family were bushmen, farmers, builders and miners. They had played an important part in the development of the west coast. In particular, the port of Pillenger (Kelly Basin), the smelter town of Crotty and the booming mining town, Zeehan. In turn, Zeehan kept an interested eye on Dan and Ted as the following contemporary news items clearly show.

14 May 1915 Zeehan and Dundas Herald

CALL OF THE EMPIRE

NINE ZEEHANITES DEPART, A FITTING SEND OFF

The railway station presented an animated scene yesterday afternoon, when a very large number of people assembled to do honour to the departing volunteers for the front, and to give them a hearty send-off. Those who left by the Burnie train were as follows: - Lieut. H.G. McPhillips, "A" Company Senior Cadets; Privates F. T. Gray and Vivian Bartle "B" Company, 21st Infantry; **D. Sweeney**, V. Warren, Norman Colson, H. Sherrin, E. Lee and G. Lee. The Zeehan Band was at the station to say au revoir to their departing comrade, V. Warren and enlivened the proceedings by playing a number of patriotic airs. Just before the train drew out Councillor F. W. Wathen addressed a few words to the men. After apologising for the unavoidable absence of the Warden and Deputy-Warden, he said that the people of Zeehan sincerely appreciated the service they were doing to the Empire by volunteering at this great crisis in their history. The citizens were proud of them, and were confident they would do their duty in hour of trial. It was their fervent wish that the All Divine would see fit to preserve them to return to their homes, their mothers, and their sisters. Councillor Wathen concluded a stirring address by calling for three hearty cheers for King and Empire, and then more for "Our Boys," all of which were heartily given. An impromptu choir sang several well-known choruses, and as the train drew out, the band played "Auld Lang Syne" amid continued cheering, waving of innumerable handkerchiefs and not a few tears from many of the gentler sex.

12 July 1915 The

Examiner

ON PARADE ZEEHAN

Sunday.

Writing to a friend from Redfern, New South Wales, on 7 July, G. McGeorge, who recently left Zeehan, states: -

"I was out on Sunday to see the Tasmanians on parade-1800 of them, with the Queenslanders. I saw H. McPhillips, **Dan. Sweeney**, V. Bartle, E. Lee., and Ruec Stevens-in fact, all the Zeehan boys-looking well and happy, and wishing to be remembered to all Zeehan residents."

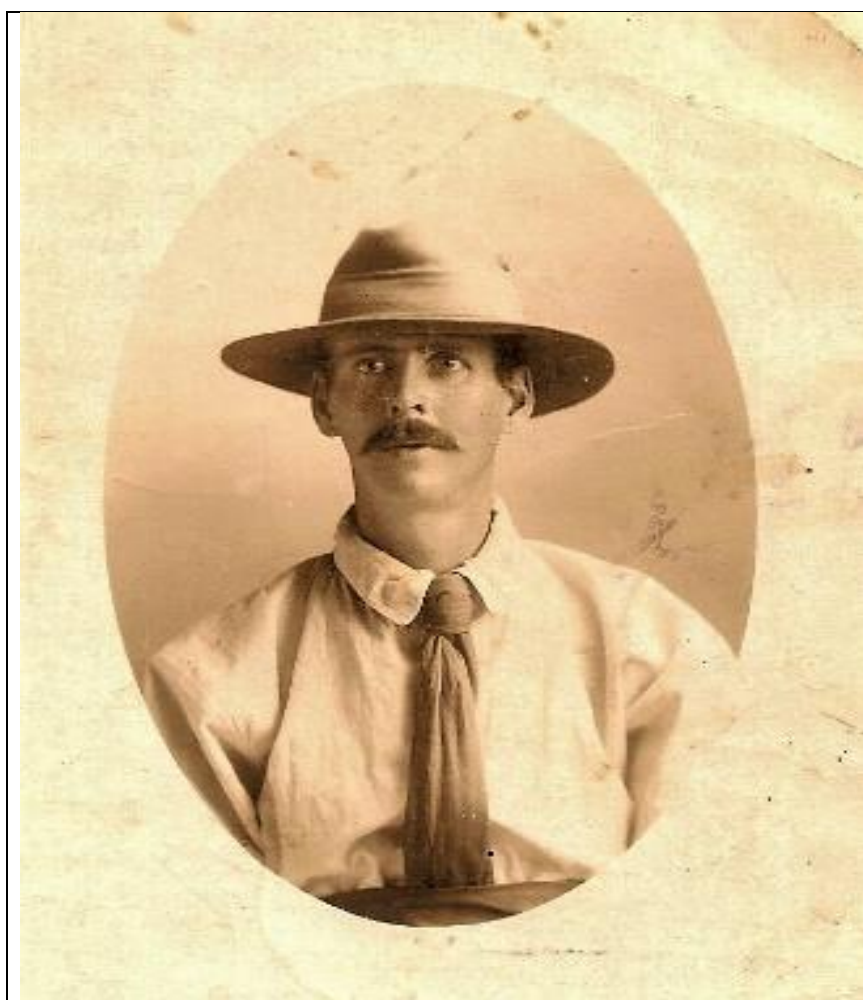
18 August 1915

Zeehan and Dundas Herald

Private E. J. Sweeney, who is attached to the Army Medical Corps, and who has been invalided home from Egypt as the result of an attack of cholera arrived in Zeehan yesterday. Unfortunately, the sitting of the Parliamentary Committee absorbed public attention, and most of the people were in the vicinity of the Courthouse when the Emu Bay train arrived at the other end of the town with the first of the Zeehan boys to return from the front. He was consequently not accorded the general welcome justly due to him and which one and all would have desired. However, there were some 40 or 50 relatives, friends and townfolk on the platform to extend a hearty greeting, which in some degree made amends to the otherwise seeming apathy. Private E. Sweeney is a member of a well-known West Coast family, his father being Mr. Daniel Sweeney, of Zeehan, the owner of Sweeney's tin mine at Heemskirk. He has a brother with the colours in Egypt, and another doing garrison duty in Hobart, so that there are three brothers in the service of the Empire. Private Sweeney expects to remain at home in Zeehan for a couple of weeks, and hopes thereafter to proceed to the fighting line.

The paper trails the two young men leave behind is a poignant charting of their lives. These two newspaper items help fill out the details of what befell Dan, including being invalided home, being honoured with a farewell social and gift of a wristwatch before returning to the front at Gallipoli, and a promotion to Lance Corporal some time prior to disembarking at Malta to recuperate from an illness

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Personal Items</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Private D. Sweeney of Zeehan, who was invalided home recently, is returning to the front. On Monday, he was tendered a farewell social, and presented with a wristlet watch.</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Personal Items</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>A cable has been received by friends of Lance-Corporal D. Sweeney, formerly of Zeehan, but who has been for some time at the front in Gallipoli, stating that he has been disembarked at Malta, where he is recuperating owing to illness.</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>2 September 1915</i> <i>Weekly Courier</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>2 September 1915</i> <i>Zeehan and Dundas Herald</i></p>



Dan Sweeney in Malta 1916

The newspapers are a veritable treasure trove, confirming sketchy service record notes, but also delivering hidden gems of information never recorded in the service files. Here we learn from the fifth item that Dan is wounded and undergoing treatment in Malta's Manoel Military Hospital. Whilst a patient he contributes a song, as his "turn", at a New Year's Eve transfer to France. From the seventh item we also learn of his mother's death on 30 September 1916, and the fact that all three of her sons have now enlisted, including Syd the youngest who attended her funeral prior to embarkation for service overseas. Ted was serving with the Australian Medical Corps, but it was unknown whether in England or France.

21 February 1916

Zeehan and Dundas Herald

AUSTRALIAN WOUNDED NEW YEAR'S EVE CONCERT

Lance-Corporal D. Sweeney, late of Zeehan, who is in hospital at **Malta**, sends the following account of a concert which the Australian and other wounded soldiers had on New Year's Eve: - On New Year's Eve the patients of **Manoel Military Hospital** enjoyed an excellent concert, arranged by Private George Hunter (Eng.) and provided in No. 22 ward which was elegantly decorated for the occasion. The following was the programme;- Overture, Corporal Heald (Eng.), "The boys that do their duty"; song Sergeant Drongode (N.S.W.), "Take me back to dear Australia "; song, Bombardier Lunn (N.Z.), "I'd like to be in Maoriland"; recitation, Corporal Wyndham (Q), "Strike me off the roll, I'd like to say good-bye, boys" ; comic song, Sergeant Lubbock (Eng.), "Sailing home to dear old England"; **song, Lance-Corporal Sweeney (Tas.), "Studying the doctor's orders"**; violin solo, Private Eastwood, (U.S.A.), "Another ship gone down"; recitation, Private George Hunter (Eng.), "You stick to the hospital lad"; song, Private Young (Eng.), "The Turk that caught me napping"; song and dance, Private Langridge (N.S.W.), "The captain's batman"; comic song, Private Quinn (Ireland), "We'll never go there any more"; comic song, Private Herbert (Vic), "The (mules that wouldn't go"; comic song, Private Miles (Vic.), "If I only had my pay"; comic song, Sergeant Butcher (Eng.), "The little shirt the Red Cross made for me"; song bombardier Bryant (Eng.), "Nothing to write home about." The several items were loudly applauded. Owing to a shortage of time, no encores were allowed, the concert closed with a hearty vote of thanks to Mr. George Hunter and to all those who kindly assisted. It is noteworthy that not a single casualty occurred to mar the harmony of the evening's proceedings, from which every form of drink was conspicuously absent.

26 August 1916

Zeehan and Dundas Herald

The local and West Coast friends of **Mr. D. Sweeney** who joined the Australian Expeditionary Forces some time ago, will be pleased to learn that he has **been promoted to the rank of Sergeant. After some months in Egypt he left for the front, and in France**, where with other West Coast boys, he is in the thick of it. There are **three of the Sweeney brothers now serving the Empire - Daniel, Ted and Sydney - and very fine soldiers they make, as they are hardy, courageous, and durable-the chief qualifications required for service and hard campaigning.**

2 October 1916

Zeehan and Dundas Herald

Deaths

SWEENEY-On 30 September 1916, at her residence, Solly Street, Zeehan, Sarah Ann, dearly beloved wife of D. Sweeney. Aged, 62 years.

Obituary: The death occurred on Saturday morning of Mrs. D. Sweeney, of Zeehan after a long illness. The deceased, who was a native of the North-West Coast, was for many years a resident of Launceston, but when her husband relinquished the position of Northern road inspector, the family moved to the West Coast, which was then booming. After being in business at Kelly Basin and Crotty, Mr. and Mrs. Sweeney settled down in Zeehan on the closing down of the North Lyell Company's smelting town.

The eldest son (Sergeant Daniel Sweeney) is at the front in France. Another son (Ted) is also in war service, with the A.M.C., either in England or France, and Private Sydney Sweeney is home on special leave prior to going to the front.

The following eighth and ninth items bear the tragic news of Dan's death in France on 8 November 1916 at the age of 33. We are given a brief word portrait of this man cut down in his prime. His obituary gives us a glimpse of his value to his family and community, and intimates the nature of his character. It also fleshes out some details of the places he lived in as a young child. Most heartbreaking of all is the fact that on the very day news of his death was conveyed to the family they had received two hopeful letters from him in France. Such were the vagaries of postal deliveries in times of war.

1916 November 20

Zeehan and Dundas Herald:

Deaths

SWEENEY. – On 8 November 1916, France, at 38 Casualty Clearing Hospital,

Sergeant Daniel Bernard, eldest son of Daniel and the late Sarah Sweeney, in his 33rd year.

He died for freedom's cause,

He gave his life – for all. R.I.P.

Obituary

Another Zeehan soldier has paid the great forfeit of his life in the great struggle for civilisation, now being waged in Europe.

Word was received on Saturday afternoon by the Very Rev. Bernard Murphy that

Sergeant Daniel Sweeney, the eldest son of Mr D. Sweeney, of Zeehan, had died of gunshot wounds in the abdomen, and it became the reverend gentleman's painful duty to break the sad tidings to the members of the deceased soldier's family – his sisters and father.

Sergeant Sweeney had spent the greater portion of his life on the West Coast, having been successively a resident of Kelly Basin, Crotty, and Zeehan. He was well-known and respected all over the Coast, and many will deeply regret to learn of his death.

Very great sympathy, indeed, will be felt for his father and sisters, Mrs. Frank Gorey and Mrs. George Riley, also for many relatives in other parts of the State.

The official intimation of Sergeant Sweeney's death added: -

"Please convey to the next of kin the deepest regret and sympathy of Their Majesties the King and Queen and the Commonwealth Government, as well as the District Commandant in the loss sustained by them and the army."

An added pathos is lent to Sergeant Sweeney's death by reason of the fact that his mother passed away a couple of weeks ago – and only on Saturday – the very day his death was announced – two hopeful letters were received from him from France.

29 Nov The Examiner

Following are the Tasmanian casualties: -

DIED OF WOUNDS

8/11/16. Lance-Corp. D. SWEENEY (Zeehan),

In 2005 my partner Val and I were able to make a pilgrimage to my Uncle Dan's final resting place to bring back these photographic records for the extended family. It was especially poignant knowing that on 7 July 1917 - when Syd joined the 12th Battalion at Ribemont camp- he was just one mile away and 8 months too late to have farewelled his brother Dan before his death and burial in this cemetery.



Heilly Station Cemetery, France



Heilly Station Cemetery, France

War can sometimes be a maddening mixture of order and chaos, so it should not seem too out of the ordinary that when Syd first joined the 12th Battalion at Ribemont, France, he found that Dan's eight-months old grave was only a mile away at Heilly Station Cemetery. Syd and Ted were wounded within a day of each other, Syd on the 20 September 1917, Ted on the 21 September. The newspaper items also highlight the uncertainty that families had to cope with, waiting for word, any word, of their loved ones, finally hearing they are on a casualty list and not being able to learn the nature of the injuries sustained, or how life-threatening.

15 October 1917

Zeehan and Dundas Herald

*Two more Zeehan soldiers have received wounds of honour and scars which testify to their patriotism and devotion in a great cause. Word was received on Saturday from the Base Records Office, Melbourne, that **Private Syd. F. Sweeney, who has been fighting for some months in the great battles in Flanders, had received a gunshot wound in the chest.***

*Word was also received that **Private Sweeney's brother, Private E. J. Sweeney, of the Ambulance Corps, had been wounded. In the case of "Syd.," as he was familiarly termed, the wound in described as mild, but in "Ted's" case there is no description of his injuries*. It is just eleven months ago since their brother. Sergeant Dan Sweeney, made the supreme sacrifice at the front, fighting for all the ideals of the Empire, civilisation and humanity. It is pathetic to recall that Sergeant Sweeney had a premonition that he would not return from the war, and that he was killed on the anniversary of his birthday.** Much sympathy will be felt for the aged father of the brave boys who have just been wounded, also for their widowed sister, Mrs. Frank Gorey, of Zeehan, and an elder sister Mrs. Geo. Riley, also of Zeehan.*

*[*author note: it was later learned that Ted Sweeney was seriously wounded in France on 21 September 1917 the day after his brother Syd was wounded.]*

18 October 1917

Weekly Courier

Personal Pars

*Mr. Sweeney and family received word from the Base Records Office that **Private Syd. F. Sweeney had been wounded in the chest whilst fighting in Flanders. Another brother, Private E.J. Sweeney, of the Ambulance corps, has also been wounded. In the case of the first-named, the injury is described as mild, but in the latter, no information is yet to hand as to the extent of the hurt. About a year ago, Sergeant Dan Sweeney gave his life for the great cause. The Sweeney brothers have evidently been in the thick of the fray. While we honour them for their efforts on behalf of the Empire, all hearts go out in sympathy to their relatives.***

Ted and his younger brother Syd recuperated together in the same hospital in England and became engaged to the Buckland siblings. They were nursing sisters attending patients in their family home which had been converted into a hospital. Syd recuperated and was returned to active service in France and Belgium. He later broke off his engagement.

Ted's injuries were such that he required further treatment but never returned to duty. He was declared medically unfit and classed as eligible for repatriation. He married Louisa Buckland in Weymouth in July 1918 and brought her back to Tasmania in 1919.

The seriousness of Ted's injuries is graphically described in this extract from his father's 1920 obituary:

12 December 1920

Zeehan and Dundas Herald:

Obituary (Extract)

A private telegram was received in Zeehan yesterday conveying intelligence of the death at Hobart of Mr. Daniel Sweeney [senior], a former well-known resident of this town. Deceased, who was born in Dundee, Scotland in 1850, came out to Tasmania with his parents in 1853.

..... When the great war broke out,

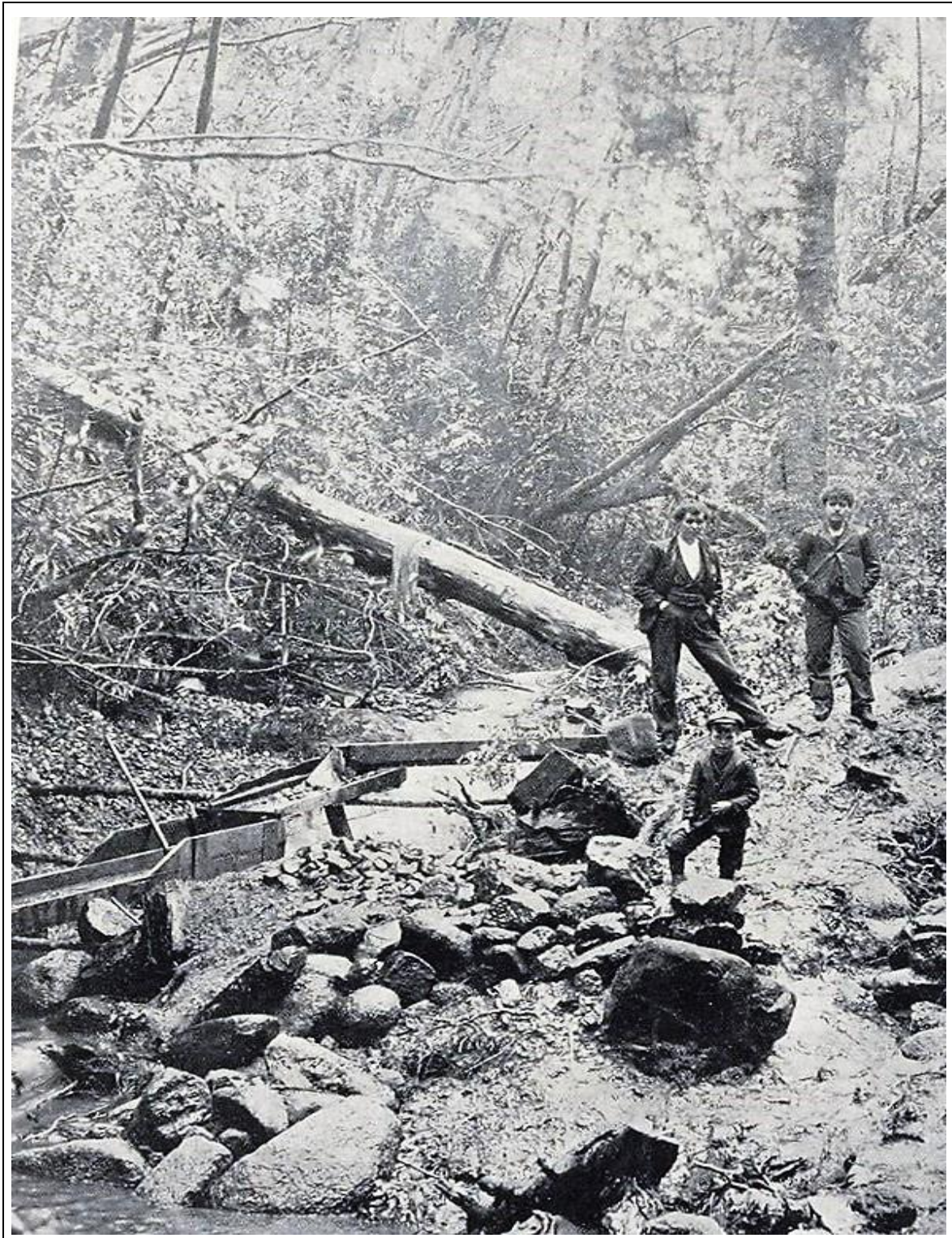
Mr. Sweeney's three sons joined up, and Dan, Ted, and Syd. served in Egypt and in France, Dan (the eldest) making the supreme sacrifice four years ago, and Ted returning with a shattered hip.

On returning to Tasmania with his wife Louisa, Ted reinvented himself as a shopkeeper. He opened a shop in Geeveston, in the Huon Valley. From two legal advertisements in *The Mercury* newspaper, we know Ted was certainly earning his living as a storekeeper in 1920 and 1921. As that was his stated occupation when he applied for letters of administration for two intestate estates, that of his father "Daniel Sweeney [senior] late of New Town, miner"; and of his older brother "Daniel Bernard Sweeney [junior] formerly of Zeehan, late of AIF, Railway Employee". From this description of Dan, it appears he had supplemented his income from the family mine by working on the railways. The railways would have been the largest employer next to mining. At that time the region was not much developed, there were only bush tracks, no roads, leading into Crotty, Kelly Basin and Zeehan. Because of his war injuries, Ted suffered ill health for the rest of his life. My Sisters and I have childhood memories of him in his later years as an invalid sitting in a chair, in front of the fire.



**Back L-R : Audrey, Barbara, Dan, Joan
Front L-R: Louisa, Bill, Marion, Ted**

Edward John Sweeney passed away on 3 April 1955. He was survived by his wife Louisa and a large extended family.



*The Sweeney brothers at Sweeney's Mine, Heemskirk Field, 1909.
At rear Dan (24 yrs) and Ted (19yrs) in front Syd (13 yrs)*

Chapter 5

John Joseph Sweeney

Coward or Hero?

John Joseph Sweeney was a first cousin to Dan, Ted and Syd Sweeney from Zeehan, Tasmania. Their WW1 experiences were detailed in previous chapters.

Private John Joseph Sweeney, a Tasmanian, serving with the New Zealand forces, was shot at dawn on 2 October 1916. He had been sentenced to death for desertion. At the time, it could not be understood how Private Sweeney, who had been convicted for deserting out of cowardice, calmly accepted his fate and showed no fear.

Private John Joseph Sweeney and Frank Needs (who enlisted under the name of John King), were the only Australians executed during the 1st World War. Both were serving with the New Zealand army. Three New Zealanders were also executed.

Sweeney enlisted in New Zealand because that was where he was working when World War 1 commenced. It proved to be his first fatal mistake. In sharp contrast, the Australian army did not allow their troops to be executed, after the public outcry that followed “Breaker” Morant’s execution during the Boer War. His second fatal mistake was to continue to behave like the “knockabout” Australian that he was. This contributed to his undoing.

John Joseph Sweeney (known to the family as Jack) was born in Sprent on Tasmania’s north-west coast on 2 April 1879. He spent his early years on the north-west coast and attended school in Ulverstone. He later worked as a bushman, labourer and miner. His father, Bernard, was a carpenter and a farmer. In 1898, Bernard and Eliza Sweeney relocated the family from Sprent to the mining town of Dundas on the west coast. Then, in 1900, they moved on to Kelly Basin, where Bernard’s brother Daniel and his wife Sarah had built and were operating a boarding house and a large hall. Eliza and Sarah were sisters. Bernard’s carpentry skills were in demand in the rapidly expanding port. It is believed that John Sweeney worked in the west coast mines and on the railroad.

In 1903, when the North Lyell Mine smelters closed and consequently the port, Bernard, Elizabeth and their younger children, moved to the north-east where they purchased a 26-acre property on the western side of the Lietinna Hall. Sweeney settled in nearby Scottsdale where he married Amy Ion on 26 October 1904, only to separate in December of that year. Their daughter, Doris Sweeney, was born on 19 April 1905, after the separation. It is believed that Sweeney went to live with his parents in Lietinna and then left for New Zealand.

By 1914 when World War 1 broke out, Sweeney was working as a bush felling contractor in New Zealand. His last contract, before he enlisted, was with Pain and Sutherland. He was the head of several gangs working in the Turanganui area of the Haurangi Forest Park. Now known as the Aorangi Forest Park. The “Tasmanian Gang” was contracted to fell 323ha of bush, which became known as Sweeney’s paddock, part of the old Sutherland farm. The area was drained by what is now known as Sweeney’s Creek in the Pirinoa district of Wairarapa. The creek joins the Turanganui River about 1.6k downstream from Sutherlands Hut. A waterfall and a ridge also bear Sweeney’s name.

Tasmanian bushmen were respected in New Zealand as hard-working timber cutters and were in demand. Sweeney's three brothers, Bernard, Harold, Edward and their brother-in-law, John (Jack) Adams, also travelled to New Zealand at various times. There was good money to be earned. A former Pirinoa resident, Mr Bill Busch said that: "The Tasmanians were among the leading bushmen in those days. They'd go around and undercut all of the block, then scarf all the trees and then start at the top and drop one tree. It would fall and hit the next and they'd all go down in a big drive". Mrs Edith Aburn, who lived for many years in the Turanganui Valley, recalled that the older Sutherlands had great respect for John Sweeney when he worked for them.



Trentham Military Camp

Here John Joseph Sweeney enlisted and trained within sight of mountains and forests

Photo credit Upper Hutt Library.

<http://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/culture/10281529/Whirinaki-exhibit-explores-WWI-camp>

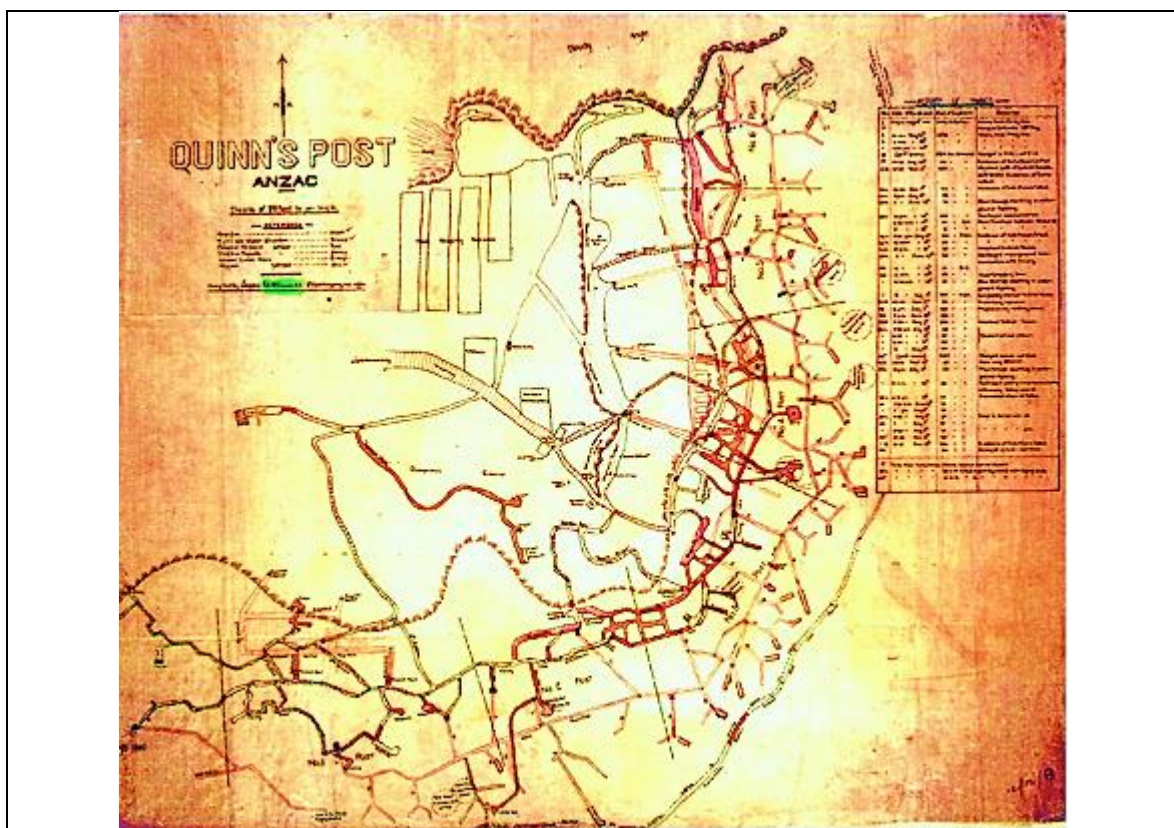
On 21 October 1914, 35-year-old Sweeney volunteered for the New Zealand Infantry. He was first attached to the Wellington Mounted Rifles but on 11 December 1914 transferred to the Otago Infantry Regiment. Sweeney had previous military training as he had served in the militia in Tasmania. Private Sweeney's enlistment papers described him as tallish at 5 feet 10 inches, slim and 132lb (60kg).

He was posted to Gallipoli on 9 April 1915. On arrival, he became an original ANZAC. Because of his valuable experience in tunnelling and the use of explosives, from several years mining in Tasmania, he was transferred out of his battalion to the Tunnelling Division. The job of a tunneller was extremely dangerous, back-breaking and nerve-racking. They set explosives under the frontline Turkish trenches. The Turks were also tunnelling and could often be heard nearby. They were looking for the ANZAC tunnels. There was always the possibility of the enemy breaking through or, setting off explosive charges.

As well as trying to tunnel beneath enemy lines, the men also dug deep trenches known as saps, and underground spaces used for storage and living quarters. The work was hard, dirty and dangerous.

At Quinn's Post, an elaborate network of underground earthworks was established, shown in this map drawn by an Australian engineer as it was in November and December 1915. To the right of Quinn's, it was necessary to dig a sap through to join up with Courtney's, and after much labour and loss, this work was accomplished. Fred Waite's assessment in his book, *The New Zealanders at Gallipoli* (1919), is that "in a large measure the strenuous labours of these improvised tunnelling units at Courtney's, Quinn's and Pope's saved Anzac to the British."

From April to November, 24 hours a day, for eight months, part of the incessant danger at Quinn's lay in the fact that it was overseen by enemy positions on three sides and to raise one's head here above the parapet of the trench was to invite instant death from every watchful Turkish rifleman. Up until mid-June, the fighting at Quinn's was of a ferocity and intensity unequalled on any other part of the line.



Quinn's Post ANZAC Map Nov-Dec 1915

compiled by Sapper Ronald Allison McInnis of the 5th Field Company, Australian Engineers(qualified surveyor), held at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra (AWM PR00917),

Colour coded reference reads: Trenches – Black, Mines and Winter Quarters – Brown, Covered Trenches – hatched Red,

Surface Tunnels – Brown, Lower Level Mines – Green, Winzes hatched – Blue.

An attack of colitis saw Private Sweeney hospitalised in Cairo in August 1915. On 19 September, he re-embarked for the Dardanelles. After a nerve gas incident, he was again hospitalised in Egypt. He returned to Gallipoli only to be injured and hospitalised in Cairo on three more occasions.

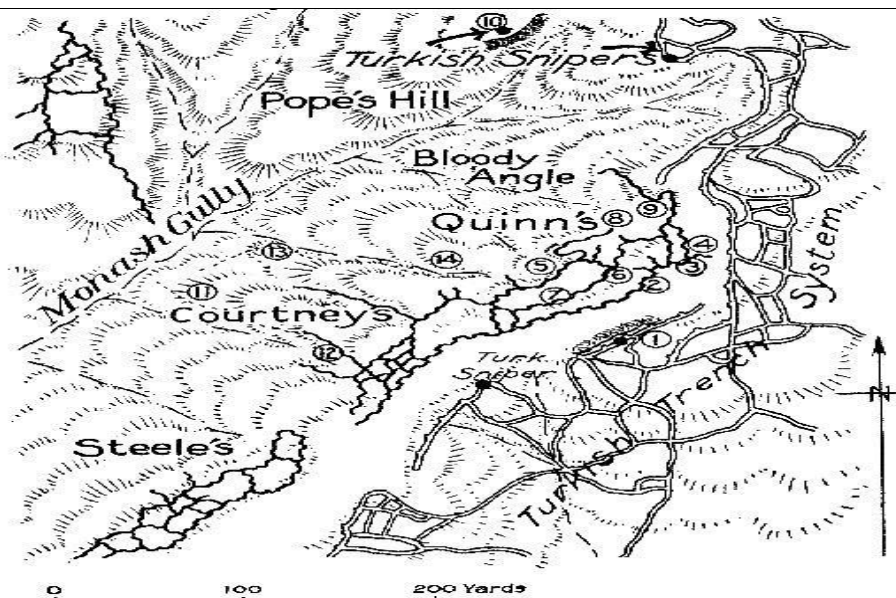
Christopher Pugsley, a New Zealand historian, who is well known for his writings on New Zealand military discipline in World War 1, wrote that "Sweeney was one of those brave

men who worked as a tunneller in the narrow drives under the front line at Quinn's and Courtney's Posts.

It was enough to break the bravest man and it broke Sweeney." "He had survived but it had broken him. He was a hard man, a tunneller, who liked a drink and thought he could take anything. But of course, he couldn't".



Q indicates Quinn's Post,
reproduced from *The Story of Anzac*, (Sydney 1981) Volume I, Charles E. W. Bean, p. 586.
http://www.gallipoli.com.tr/silent_witnesses/quinns_post.htm



Map showing the positions of Quinn's and Courtney's Posts where John Joseph Sweeney was engaged in tunnelling works.

reproduced from Wanliss, Newton, *The History of the 14th Battalion: being the story of the vicissitudes of an Australian unit during the Great War*. The Arrow Printery: 1929.
<http://empirecall.pbworks.com/w/page/11620537/Herweg-R-H-LCpl-67>



Opening to tunnel going under Quinn's Post

Photo credit: Peter Morrissey 2009, 2012

<http://www.anzacbattlefields.com/Gallipoli/index.htm>

"Quinn's Post is our most advanced post and juts out in front of all the others. The Turk trenches are only about 10 yards off and all day and all night mining and counter-mining, bombing and sharp-shooting, go on without ceasing."

Letter dated 4th June by another soldier, Godley, reproduced from **Gallipoli, The New Zealand Story** (Auckland 1998), Christopher Pugsley, p. 243

http://www.gallipoli.com.tr/silent_witnesses/quinns_post.htm



The proximity of the Turkish positions to the NZ tunnellers at Quinn's Post can be appreciated from this photograph.

*"Looking through a loophole at Quinn's. The Turkish line is the opposite line of sandbags. On the right is a communication trench dug during one of the raids on the Turks. The pickets were for barbed wire and for wire netting to stop grenades.", contemporary image reproduced from **Gallipoli, The New Zealand Story**, (Auckland 1998), Christopher Pugsley, p. 237.*

http://www.gallipoli.com.tr/silent_witnesses/quinns_post.htm

Then, on 9 January 1916, he embarked with his unit for Egypt. After being hospitalised again in Egypt, Private Sweeney officially re-joined the 1st Otagos at Armentieres, in France, on 10 July 1916. He was immediately sent on eight days leave in England because he was a Gallipoli veteran. On his return from England he was detailed for guard duty, in the billets on, 22 July 1916. On 25th July, he was found to be absent and was declared a deserter on 19th August.

There had been reports that he had been to a café in Houplines for a meal, but having no money, he left his pay book with the proprietor. He was seen wandering behind the lines at Houplines and was sheltering in a house. When apprehended, it was said that he tried to pass himself off as an Australian tunneller attached to a New Zealand tunnelling unit.

Private Sweeney made the following statement: "I had no intention to desert and on finding my battalion gone I intended to join up with the second tunnelling company and by travelling with them endeavour to re-join my unit. Lt Finch asked me where I was going and I answered to the 12th Battalion and when he asked me who they were I answered South Australians and Tasmanians".

Private Sweeney also stated that he had permission to be where he was, and referred the arresting officers to a Sergeant Stevens at a dump some distance away. It was also noted that he wore no badges on his uniform. No attempt was made to contact Sergeant Stevens and no record was ever found of Private Sweeney being issued with badges.

He was charged with desertion. At his court martial on 13 September 1916, he pleaded not guilty. Nobody spoke up for Private Sweeney from the 1st Otagos. He was a stranger to them having not served with them because of his immediate transfer to the tunnellers at Anzac Cove.

Nothing was said in his defence and the emphasis was placed on his past misdemeanours. His Gallipoli service was ignored as was his lengthy hospitalisation. He was found guilty and sentenced to “suffer death by being shot”.

Private John Joseph Sweeney’s execution, was carried out in Meaulte, France at 5.44am on 2 October 1916. He was 37 years old. A witness to the execution, Sergeant A E M Rhind, noted in his diary: “A deserter twice over and yet he went out to be shot without showing fear”. He was buried in Dartmoor Cemetery near Becordel, France.

Some senior army officers regarded the court martial evidence as unsatisfactory. Private Sweeney was not represented at the trial and there appeared to have been some serious irregularities. Legal procedures were ignored and the evidence presented was conflicting and incomplete. The only questions put to the prosecution were by the defendant. His medical history and courageous service in Gallipoli were not considered because “conduct sheets were lost”.

Private Sweeney was not a model soldier! He first went AWOL in Hobart in December 1914, from a troopship, on the way from New Zealand to Egypt. It is believed that he was denied leave to visit his Tasmanian family. He visited them anyway. He went AWOL the following February before being posted to Gallipoli. In the first instance, he lost six days pay. On the second, eight hours detention. After Gallipoli, but before France, there was another drunken AWOL episode with the loss of two more day’s pay. He was then caught drunk in the canteen after hours. That earned him ten days confinement to barracks. He also had several other offences recorded against him.

He was much older than most of the New Zealanders he served with, so it was said he sought the company of his Tasmanian mates when drinking - even if they were elsewhere at the front. That meant going AWOL. He and his fellow bushmen had led a hard-working and hard-drinking existence and, as his own boss he was accustomed to being independent. He probably resented authority, but his true character was defiant rather than cowardly. It seems he simply failed to appreciate that the repercussions of his continuing reckless conduct could be as serious as they ultimately proved.

Bernard Sweeney, Private Sweeney’s father, was advised of his son’s death but did not know that he had been executed until Brigadier General A W Robin advised him of the fact in a letter dated 8th November 1916.

On the 28 December 1916, Bernard Sweeney wrote to Brigadier General Robin:

***“I must say it is a great blow to me to hear of my son’s death in that way.
He was the last I would have thought do such a thing.
Would you kindly let me know if there is any chance of ever hearing any more of the case and
if he left anything to come to me or his mother.
The smallest article would be of comfort to us.***

***Thanking you for your letter,
I am yours truly,
Bernard Sweeney”***

Sweeney's wife Amy had died in 1910, so in his will he left his effects to his mother, but his parents were never given anything "of comfort" by the New Zealand Army. They were also denied access to his records, which remained sealed until 1987. Although John Joseph Sweeney had not provided for his daughter in his will, his father Bernard was able to arrange for the New Zealand Army pension to be paid to Amy Sweeney's aunt, Mrs Maria Wilson, who had the care of Amy and John Joseph Sweeney's daughter, Doris.

Some public recognition of John Joseph Sweeney's heroic service at Gallipoli was however given by the British General Birdwood on 21 February 1920, as the following news item about a ceremony at Lietinna reveals. The spot where it was held was not far from the home of John's father Bernard Sweeney, but Bernard was in Sydney with his wife whilst she underwent cancer treatment. However, John's siblings Alf and Grace Adams, still lived in Scottsdale and would have been able to attend. Birdwood's visit was part of his triumphal progress around Australia and New Zealand in 1920. He had been in command of the forces raised by Australia and New Zealand from November 1914. He had endeared himself to the soldiers in Egypt by his daily habit of showing concern for their welfare by walking amongst them and chatting. His respect for them, and their admiration of his courage, had deepened during the long months on the Gallipoli peninsula. The presentation of the commemorative medal to a representative of John Joseph Sweeney's family meant much in terms of restoring him to his rightful place as a Gallipoli hero. It was made more meaningful by its being presented by the commanding officer recognised as "the spirit of Anzac".

Lietinna

(From Our Own Correspondent.)

Residents of Lietinna and West Scottsdale, on Saturday the 21st, gathered at the cross roads, Lietinna,

*to welcome **General Sir William Birdwood and party.***

The corner was decorated with flags and laurel-wreaths.

General Birdwood stayed to present gold medals to the next-of-kin of our fallen soldiers.

With a few feeling words he pinned on to each of the bereaved ones the much-prized medal, the design being a cross and crown, with the name of the hero.

The following were the fallen soldiers:

B. G. Kerr, F. C. Church; M.M., A. Washington, C. H. Clarke,

J. Sweeney, B. French, C. Dunkley, C. Smith, W. Jessup and W. Walters.

The general then addressed the gathering, saying he felt it an honour to be allowed to do the small service he had done that morning.

North Eastern Advertiser, Scottsdale 2 March 1920 p3

When Private Sweeney's personal files were finally released in 1987, the New Zealand Defence Department still refused access to the court martial file. That file was not released until September 1988 and then only after negotiations through the Ombudsman by the New Zealand newspaper, the *Wairapa Times-Age*. Ross Annabell, the *Times-Age* reporter was permitted to view the file at the National Archives. He received the file in an envelope. The door was closed and even National Archives staff were not permitted entry. It appears that the Defence Department thought they had something to hide.

Whilst Private John Joseph Sweeney was certainly guilty of deserting his post and many other offences, he did not deserve to be executed. He was, without doubt, suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome after his horrific experiences in Gallipoli, and should never have been sent back to the trenches with battle fatigue. His court martial was a farce! Christopher Pugsley accurately summed up the contemporary mindset of the presiding officials: "it seems that the court was more conscious of the battle to be fought than Sweeney's fate". The final decision rested with the commander-in-chief who sent him to execution, not on the circumstances of the case, but on the perceived need for a deterrent. Sweeney was made an example to his fellows in order to maintain discipline and stiffen morale.

Christopher Pugsley's analysis was that the New Zealand Commanders failed in their responsibilities. There were mitigating circumstances in Sweeney's case. His service in Gallipoli and his lengthy periods in hospital were ignored during the sentencing procedure.

In the judgment of British historian, Julian Putkowski, the execution was "military judicial murder".

In September 2000, eighty-four years after Private Sweeney's execution, the New Zealand Parliament officially granted Australians John Joseph Sweeney and John King, along with three New Zealanders, posthumous pardons under the Pardon for Soldiers of the Great War Bill. These pardons came after a long campaign in Britain and a similar campaign in New Zealand led by Invercargill MP, Mark Peck. The campaigns were given much media attention in Australia and several national TV documentaries were produced.

The Parliament recognised that they were heroes who fought in horrific battles and were most probably suffering from what is now known as post-traumatic stress syndrome. An important aspect of the pardon was the "restoration of memory". This was in terms of public memory, but it also had the important effect of restoring the soldier to his family by withdrawing the veil of silence which had been drawn over their fate.

It is notable that the Scottsdale RSL had already added John's name to their honour roll about two years before his pardon.

Perhaps the most poignant legacy of John Joseph Sweeney is that, in the Turanganui valley in New Zealand, for some years after World War 1, the locals talked of "Flanders Poppies" springing up in the area that had been cleared by him and his Tasmanian team. After burning, the land had been re-sown with imported grass seed from France or Belgium and the poppies grew wild amongst the grasses.

Obituary

Daniel Sweeney (Senior)

12 Dec 1920, Zeehan and Dundas Herald:

A private telegram was received in Zeehan yesterday conveying intelligence of the death at Hobart of Mr. Daniel Sweeney, a former well-known resident of this town. Deceased, who was born in Dundee, Scotland in 1850, came out to Tasmania with his parents in 1853. They settled at Port Esperance where their son was, on his eleventh birthday, lost in the then wild bush for seven days and seven nights. The whole of the population around formed search parties, and when the searchers found him in a hut at daybreak on the eighth morning of his terrible experience, he was gaunt and in tatters, with strips of bark tied round his clothes to keep them together. The boy had followed the river right round and came out on the opposite side to where he was lost. He had lived on water and the white pith out of rushes. The occurrence at the time caused much comment, as the boy showed wonderful endurance, considering that he was lost in the month of August, and the weather was wet and cold.

When he grew to manhood's estate, the late Mr. Sweeney was one of the smartest men of his day. He was Northern road and works inspector for the Government for 20 years, a position he had to relinquish owing to failing eyesight. He went from Launceston to Kelly Basin in the "boom" time of that now quite little place, and he afterwards went to Crotty (the smelting town of the defunct North Lyell Company), where he built a large hall, and several dwellings. On the collapse of Crotty Mr. Sweeney came to Zeehan 17½ years ago and devoted himself to mining for several years. He took up four sections on Pyke's Creek, Heemskirk, and with his two eldest sons won fair returns of tin. In the "boom" days, when "Johnny" Mayne's, the "Publican's Purse" and other shows were the stars, he was offered and refused £6000 for his show out on the corner of the range, for he held that he would one day discover the source of the wonderful shed of lode tin found in the vicinity.

When the great war broke out, Mr. Sweeney's three sons joined up, and Dan, Ted, and Syd. served in Egypt and in France, Dan (the eldest) making the supreme sacrifice four years ago, and Ted returning with a shattered hip. About 14 months ago Mr. Sweeney removed to Hobart, where he resided since with his married daughter, Mrs. Alty. His wife predeceased him four years ago. Deceased leaves a family of four married daughters (one of whom is Mrs. George Reilly, of Zeehan), and three sons. Personally, he was a man of retiring disposition, but he was a warm friend, a kind and charitable neighbor, and a staunch supporter of his native and adopted lands.

(Author note: Despite the fact that Daniel was born in Scotland, the family have always considered themselves as Irish. Daniel Sweeney's parents, my great grandparents, moved to Scotland from Ireland during the potato famine. Daniel was born in Scotland in 1850 but was only 2 years old when he arrived in Tasmania with the family.)

Sources/Acknowledgements

THANKS TO

Alison McCallum - editing, formatting, additional text and photos
Diane Munro (nee Sweeney) – family research, additional text and photos
Clair Dujardin (Belgium) - friendship and encouragement
Bernard Lejeune (Belgium)
Lieutenant-Colonel (ret) Doug Wyatt

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