

## Stories from the Honour Boards

Stories of those who served and are remembered on the Honour Boards in the Merrington Anzac Memorial Peace Chapel at Saint Andrew's Uniting Church

Booklet Number 31

# **WILLIAM JOSEPH FORD**

**1886 - 1916**



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Please see a Guide if you would like a copy.



*An Australian trench at Messines in Belgian West Flanders.  
Private Ford was killed in action near Messines*

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Corner Ann and Creek Streets  
Brisbane QLD 4000  
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## Private William Joseph Ford

William Ford was born in Ipswich, Queensland, son of William and Mary Ann (née Stevens). Bill was employed as a printer in the Brisbane Newspaper Company for some five years before he enlisted at Brisbane in August 1915, a single man nearly 30 years old, in the Australian Infantry Force. Allotted service number 3077, William Joseph Ford joined the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion for training at Enoggera. Bill's younger brother, Samuel Callaway Ford enlisted at the same time but he joined the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion. Their father died when the boys were quite young. Their mother, Mrs Mary Ann Ford who lived at various East Brisbane addresses had struggled to rear her two sons.<sup>1</sup>

Private Ford embarked on HMAT *Itonus* from Brisbane on 30 December 1915. He was promoted to the rank of Corporal from 1 January 1916 but only for the duration of the voyage to Alexandria.



*The HMAT A50 Itonus weighed 5,340 tons with an average cruise speed of 12 knots or 22.22 kmph. It was owned by the British India SN Co Ltd, London. The Itonus was torpedoed and sunk in the Mediterranean, 20 December 1916.*

*From: State Library of Victoria, picture number b38118]*

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<sup>1</sup>William Joseph Ford's connection with Wharf Street Congregational Church is not apparent. He and his brother, Sam who though wounded returned from the Front, both wrote 'Church of England' as their religious denomination when they enlisted.

After further training in Egypt, Private Ford's unit sailed from Alexandria on 21 March on the *Oriana* for Marseilles, France, then overland to the Front.

Bean wrote of this time, "In Flanders for two or three weeks the Anzacs were given the usual training – with lectures on the methods of billeting, of relieving trench-garrisons, of preventing frost-bite, of bathing and disinfection in the military baths. Most of the troops passed in gas helmets through a trench filled with chlorine gas; many saw an exhibition of flame projectors, then being used by Germans in some attacks."<sup>1</sup>

The Anzacs took command of the area south-east of Armentières from the British in April and the troops soon experienced the dangers of trench raids, spying and sniping. Private Ford was admitted to Divisional Rest Station and treated for pharyngitis in early May and rejoined his unit on 20 May. Heavy fighting had intensified. In the I Anzac Corps sector along the British Front five raids were undertaken between the night of 25 June and the launching of the great offensive on 1 July, and in the next two nights, five more. By then the corps had suffered 773 casualties as against an average of 563 for each of four other corps. The loss among the Germans was probably higher. Heavy bombardment continued and Private Ford was killed in action near Messines on 5 July 1916.

News of her son's death reached Mrs Ford at her home in Woolloongabba on 3 August. She wrote 'to whom it might concern' at the Military Depot, "I have received a message that my son 3077 Private W.J. Ford D Company 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade Queensland Forces has been killed on active service on 4<sup>th</sup> July.

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<sup>1</sup>Bean CEW *Anzac to Amiens*, page 201

“I am writing to ask if you will kindly let me know if it is true and all you know about him when and where and how he died and if he left me any message in his dying moments. By doing so you will do me a great kindness. I am respectfully, yours, M.A. Ford.”

The date of death and place of burial were eventually confirmed. Correspondence with defence offices in Melbourne and London, Protestant Alliance Friendly Society of Australasia and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission extended over ensuing months and years.

One of Mrs Ford’s letters reveals her sadness and frustration. It was written some twelve months after her son’s tragic death and addressed to Major Lean from her home in King Street, East Brisbane: “Kindly pardon my writing to you but I wish to know is it compulsory for every soldier on leaving Queensland on active service to make a will? If so what can have become of the will of my late son 3077 Corporal William Joseph Ford D Coy 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion? It seems hard. I am his lawful mother and had to work very hard to rear him as well as his only other brother who is also at the front. I gave my boys without a murmur so surely am entitled to what little there is coming to me. I have already had almost too much to bear. I am an old woman 65 years of age. The blow has been quite enough. Trusting you will do your best to right things for me, I am, yours sincerely, Mary Ann Ford.” Fortunately, her claim was granted at £1/16/- per fortnight from 28 September 1916.

In one letter Mrs Ford received notice of a parcel which had been dispatched containing her son’s scarf, balaclava, eight handkerchiefs, mirror, two devotional books, chevrons, bead and shell armband, whistle, matchbox, curio, diary and souvenir.

In another, photographs of William's grave at La Plus Douve Farm Cemetery, south of Wulverghem, 1¾ miles west-south-west of Messines; in another, her son's Victory Medal. Mrs Ford replied each time she received a letter, expressing her thanks or enclosing a small financial contribution.

Mrs Ford concluded another letter dated 19 August 1924 with these words, "You could hardly think how relieved I am to know that although so far away his resting place will be permanently marked. Believe me to be, yours sincerely, M.A. Ford."



**In Memory of  
Private WILLIAM JOSEPH FORD**

**3077, 25th Bn., Australian Infantry, A.I.F.  
who died age 30  
on 05 July 1916**

**Son of William Joseph and Mary Ann Ford, of Longland St., East Brisbane,  
Queensland. Native of Ipswich, Queensland.  
Remembered with honour**



The Honour Boards at Saint Andrew's Uniting Church contain the names of 267 soldiers and medical personnel who served in the Great War of 1914-18. Fifty-one of them paid the supreme sacrifice. The story of William Joseph Ford illustrates not only his own loyalty and courage, but also the pain and struggle of a loving mother at home in Brisbane.

### **Select Bibliography**

National Archives of Australia, military records

Queensland Register of Births, Deaths and Marriages

Bean CEW, *Anzac to Amiens*, Penguin Books, re-published 2014, Melbourne

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Saint Andrew's Uniting Church Archives

Compiled by N E Adsett, Brisbane, January 2015 Revised 2018



*Lest we forget*