

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 194

CECIL WILLIAM HART 1891–1974



Soldiers repairing a trench in France during the bitter winter of 1917

This booklet remains the property of Saint Andrew's Uniting Church.
Please see a Guide if you would like a copy.

Cover Illustration: Private Cecil Hart endured the harsh conditions in the trenches in Flanders till January 1918 when trench fever affected him severely and he was admitted to hospital.

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Corner Ann and Creek Streets
Brisbane QLD 4000
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Lance Corporal Cecil William Hart

Cecil William Hart was born at Milton, New South Wales on 14 December 1891, the fourth child in the family of six children of Henry Hart and Elizabeth née Barber. In 1897 when Cecil was only five years old his father, Henry 'died of dropsy' though we now know 'dropsy' is not actually a disease but a symptom of various diseases. Cecil's grandfather was a pioneer settler in the Milton and Ulladulla district earlier in the nineteenth century.

Founded in 1860, Milton is a village, now with a population of 1500 in the South Coast region of New South Wales 220 km south of Sydney. It is classified with the Australian National Trust due to the number of homes and buildings in the town that were built from 1870 onwards. Cecil Hart's parents and grandparents were there when the public school was built in 1877, the Congregational Church (now the Uniting Church) was constructed in 1872 and the Milton Creamery Butter Factory was opened in 1896. These places played an important part in the early life of Cecil Hart growing up in the small dairying community of Milton.



Public School at Milton on the NSW south coast



Congregational Church (now Uniting) Milton

He also developed skill at rifle shooting, winning prizes in district competitions at Kiama Rifle Range. In April 1915 he decided to leave the town where he had been brought up to try his luck in Queensland. He completed successfully the theoretical examination in milk and cream testing conducted by the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Stock on 4th December 1915 and his place of living recorded in the 1916 electoral roll was Maleny where he was employed as a butter maker and was an active member of the Maleny Rifle Club.

On 29 May 1916 Cecil Hart enlisted in Brisbane in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) to serve overseas in the Great War. He was 25 years old and a single man. He gave his mother's name, Mrs Elizabeth Hart who had moved to 112 Norton Street, Leichhardt in Sydney as next-of-kin and his religious denomination as Congregational. Private CW Hart was appointed to reinforcements for the 13th Machine Gun Company for training at Seymour in Victoria.

His unit embarked on HMAT *Medic*¹ from Melbourne on 16 December 1916, disembarking at Plymouth England on 18 February 1917. After further training at Grantham Machine Gun Training Depot, Perham Downs, Private Hart joined 13th Machine Gun Company in France on 7 October 1917. The bitter winters troubled the soldiers in France and Flanders. Soldiers suffered from frostbite and exposure, causing them to lose fingers. The trenches did little to provide shelter or warmth from the extreme low temperatures, especially at night, when even clothes and blankets froze solid. The muddy walls became hard as bricks, and any food and water became almost impossible to eat. Vehicles also succumbed to the cold: engines wouldn't start, prompting soldiers to attempt to revive them using hot water bottles. Private Cecil Hart endured these hard conditions till January 1918 when trench fever affected him severely. He was taken to hospitals in Boulogne and Wimereux in France, later admitted to Essex County Hospital, Colchester and transferred to 3rd Auxiliary Hospital at Dartford in late February. On discharge from hospital he carried out duties in Commonwealth Depots at Hurdcott until June. While on leave in Glasgow on 24 June he was admitted to hospital again with trench fever and in July was transferred to 3rd Auxiliary Hospital Dartford. He was probably feeling better in health during those days of recuperation for he was punished on three occasions for absence without leave. The so-called 'award' for these 'crimes' involved several days of confinement to barracks and forfeiture of pay. In September 1918 Private Hart commenced a month's course at Longbridge Deverill in preparation for return to the Western Front.

On 29 Oct 1918 he proceeded to Camiers, France to join the 1st Machine Gun Battalion, one of five such units formed in the previous March.

1. His Majesty's Australian Transport

The battalion comprised four machine gun companies, which had previously existed as independent companies assigned mainly at brigade level. The battalion consisted of 64 medium machine guns, and took part in the final stages of the war, seeing action during the Allied defensive operations during the German Spring Offensive and then the Allied Hundred Days Offensive, which finally brought an end to the war. The battalion was disbanded in mid-1919 during the demobilisation of the AIF.

Cecil Hart was appointed Lance Corporal on 14 January 1919 and proceeded to England in April to prepare for return to Australia per the steam ship *Port Darwin*. He disembarked at Melbourne on 27 July and was discharged from the AIF at Brisbane on 20 November 1919.

It was exactly twelve months later that Cecil William Hart married Marian Robina Hill, daughter of George Henry and Jane Maitland Hill of Ipswich. Cecil and Marion Hart lived at Warwick Road Ipswich and Cecil continued his employment as a cream tester. He served in Ipswich in the Army Citizen Defence Forces during the Second World War. They retired to Currumbin Beach in the late 1940s. Mrs Marion Hart died in 1972 and Cecil in the year 1974, aged 82.

Cecil Hart's name is recorded on the roll of honour at Maleny Soldiers' Memorial Hospital as well as the Wharf Street Congregational Church roll of honour in the Merrington Anzac Memorial Peace Chapel.



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Compiled by Noel E Adsett

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Lest we forget