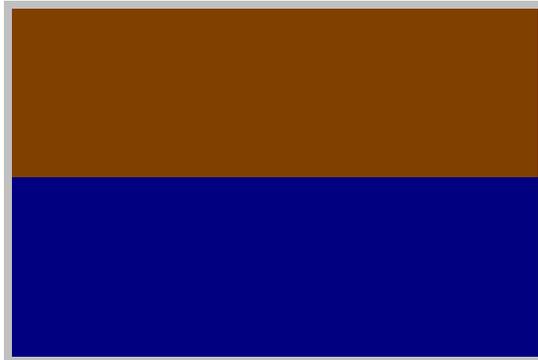


Stories from the Honour Boards

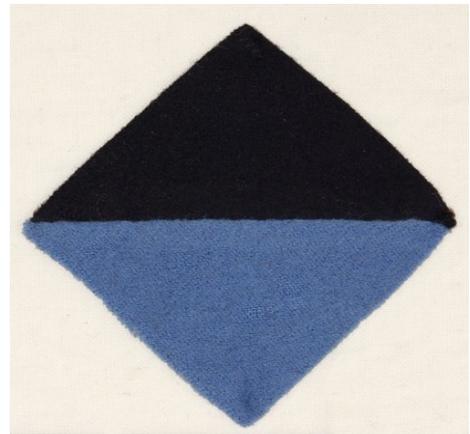
Stories of those who served and are remembered on the Honour Boards in the Merrington Anzac Memorial Peace Chapel at Saint Andrew's Uniting Church

Booklet Number 196

SHIELDS BROTHERS **CHARLES** **1888 - 1917** **DONALD RICHARD** **1896 - 1916**



Charles 15th Battalion



MEMORIAL

Donald 25th Battalion

The Colour Patches that the Shields brothers wore on their uniforms

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Corner Ann and Creek Streets
Brisbane QLD 4000
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The Shields Family

Charles and Donald Shields were sons of Alfred Henderson Shields, a carpenter, and his wife Harriet née Dunn. Their parents had married in 1885 in a house in Amelia Street, Fortitude Valley after emigrating when they were children, Alfred from Scotland and Harriet from Cornwall. To earn a living during the early twentieth century it had been necessary for Alfred and Harriet Shields to move with their young, growing family to Albion, Nanango and Woody Point before returning to Fortitude Valley and later settling at Sargeant Road (now Sargent Street) New Farm. Three of their ten children died in infancy; their youngest child was Dorothy Jean, their only surviving daughter.

Charles and Donald were nearly seven years apart in age. Both attended Fortitude Valley State School where Mr Hardcastle was the Head Teacher. Both went off to the war but did not return.

In 1925 Alfred and Harriet Shields moved to Bribie Island where Alfred continued his carpentry trade and played bowls at Bongaree in the days before a bridge connected the island to the mainland. Mrs Shields died there in 1934. Alfred Shields was 90 years old when he died in 1953. His grave is in Toowong Cemetery.

Private Charles Shields

Charles Shields was born in Brisbane on 5 June 1889 and spent most of his boyhood in the suburb of Fortitude Valley. He was employed as a steward on the steamer *Emerald* and at the age of 25 was one of the first to join the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) in the Great War. He enlisted in Brisbane on 21 September 1914, nominating his mother as next-of-kin and naming his religious denomination as Presbyterian. He was small in stature, standing to a height of 155cm. Given regimental number 646 and

allotted to 15th Battalion, 4th Infantry Brigade, Private Charles Shields commenced training at Enoggera Camp. In those early days he was 'admonished' for hesitating to obey an order and insolence to a non-commissioned officer – signs of a recruit's difficulty in accepting the conditions of army life. At Enoggera he played the role of bugler before his unit travelled to Melbourne for embarkation on board HMAT¹ *Ceramic* on 22 December 1914, bound for the Suez Canal and Alexandria.

The 15th moved into camp at Heliopolis where it was assigned to Major General Alexander Godley's New Zealand and Australian Division. An extensive period of training in the desert followed throughout February and March. Finally, on 10 April, the 15th Battalion was moved by train to Alexandria then by troopship to Mudros where the Allied force assembled prior to the assault on Gallipoli. Assigned to the follow-up waves, the 15th Battalion landed at Anzac Cove on the afternoon of 25 April 1915.



Soldiers going ashore at Anzac Cove on 25 April 1915

1. His Majesty's Australian Transport

As the Ottoman defenders checked the Allied advance inland, on arrival the 15th Battalion was rushed into the line on the left flank of the beachhead. The advance inland stalled, the battalion became isolated and threatened with destruction until Cannan¹



Major General Cannan

withdrew his force to a more tenable position. Later, they helped shore up the line before occupying positions around Pope's Hill and Russell's Top where they joined an attack on 1 May. After that, they occupied Quinn's Post and defended it against a strong Ottoman counterattack on 19 May. Further fighting occurred around the battalion's position as the Ottoman troops

began tunnelling under the no man's land that divided the two lines. Counter-mining actions were undertaken but on 29 May a significant attack was put in against the 15th Battalion's position and they were briefly forced back before restoring the situation with a strong counterattack.

After this a period of stalemate fell across the peninsula. In early June, the 15th Battalion, its strength having fallen to below 600 men, was withdrawn from Quinn's Post to recuperate in a quiet sector known as Rest Gully. Over the next two months, due to illness and exhaustion, the battalion's personnel including Private Charles Shields were almost completely replaced. He was transported in July from the peninsula to hospital at Mudros where he remained till the evacuation from Gallipoli in December and returned to Alexandria but again sickness troubled him.

1. Then Lieutenant Colonel Cannan, Commanding Officer, 15th Battalion; later Major General James Harold Cannan, CB, CMG, DSO, VD (29 August 1882 – 23 May 1976), an Australian Army brigadier general in the First World War and the Quartermaster General during the Second World War.

At Heliopolis he entered hospital suffering from influenza and other diseases. During rehabilitation on Lemnos he had been guilty of absence without leave and this happened again at Ismailia. His recovery was sufficient to enable him to join the British Expeditionary Force on the Western Front in May 1916 but in July he entered hospital in Boulogne then Colchester and other hospitals in England with rheumatic fever. After furlough he reported to the Perham Downs Command Depot for rehabilitation. There followed a series of more absences without leave for which Private Shields was strictly admonished and fined, each time more severely. On 14 May 1917 he was ready again for overseas service and rejoined 15th Battalion at Étapes in France.

At this stage, the 4th Brigade of which the 15th Battalion was a part, had withdrawn from battles around Bullecourt following very heavy casualties. In one attack, 2339 soldiers from the 4th Brigade lay dead or wounded out of 3000 including 400 from the 15th; by the end of the attack, only 52 men from the battalion's assault force remained uninjured. When Charles Shields rejoined his platoon, soldiers of the 15th Battalion had withdrawn from the line back to farmland around the village of Doulien where the battalion was rebuilding.

In mid-1917, the Australians were moved to Belgium as the focus of British operations shifted to the Ypres sector in an effort to draw German attention away from the French. The first effort came around Messines on the southern flank, where a series of tunnels were dug under the German lines. On 7 June, 19 mines were detonated and in the ensuing fighting, the British captured Messines Ridge. Assigned a support role, the 15th Battalion was held in reserve and did not take part in the attack. The following

day, it was committed to hold the gains that had been made during the attack, relieving the New Zealanders around Gooseberry Farm. During June, Charles Shields was admitted to hospital twice. The 15th remained in the Ypres sector and on the night of 18/19 July 1917 Charles Shields took a revolver from Lance Corporal Cochrane's equipment under his bed and one round of ammunition and shot himself near the boundary of the camp. His comrades identified his body next morning and a medical officer at the Court of Inquiry described the path of the bullet through his head and stated the wound was in his opinion self-inflicted.

Second Lieutenant JT Hynes, one of the witnesses at the Court of Enquiry conducted immediately after the incident, stated, "Deceased was a good soldier, enlisted November 1914 (sic) served right through Gallipoli campaign under me, was with Battalion from beginning ..." The Court's finding expressed the opinion that Private Shields died on the night of 18/19 July 1917 from a bullet wound in the head and that "the wound was self-inflicted during a moment of temporary insanity as a result of mental strain brought on by severe and prolonged active service conditions."

On 21 July Lieutenant Colonel Brockman, commanding 4th Australian Infantry Brigade concurred with the finding.

On 22 July Brigadier General Sinclair MacLagan, commanding 4th Australian Division wrote, "I concur with the findings with the exception of the words, 'as a result of mental strain brought on by severe and prolonged active service conditions'." He continued, "There is no evidence in support of the actual mental strain suffered by the accused on account of active service."

On 24 July Major-General Delavoye commanding 2nd Anzac Corps said, “The findings of the Court are concurred in.”

On 27 July Surgeon General Carter, Director of Medical Services, Second Army, signed his statement, “I agree with the finding of the Court that No 646 Pte Shields C. died from a bullet wound in the head self-inflicted, but there is nothing in the evidence to show that he was temporarily insane at the time.”

The differences of opinions expressed by these senior officers points to the sensitivity of the matter of suicidal deaths during the life of the AIF. In this case, a suicide was officially recognised, medals awarded and the soldier’s name appeared on the Roll of Honour. However, David Noonan's work *Those We Forget*¹ calls for a revision of World War 1 statistics and a fresh interpretation of their meaning. It would appear commentators today would be better informed and less reluctant to discuss ‘shell shock’ and causes of suicidal deaths than those who earlier attempted to give opinions on these matters. There was a real stigma around suicide in the early twentieth century and little incentive for people to talk about it. Records show that of the 308 000 who were hospitalized, about 62 000 were because of ‘shell shock’. Of the soldiers that survived combat, approximately 550 took their own lives, though Noonan notes that these were mostly between 1919 and 1920 - after the end of the war.

Correspondence between army authorities and Charles’s parents in New Farm followed over the course of years. The letters are sad to read. A package containing testament, pocket book, knife, letter and photos was delivered in April 1918. Having received a letter requesting preferences for inscriptions on the gravestone,

1. David Noonan, *Those We Forget: Recounting Australian Casualties of the First World War*, Melbourne University Press, 2014

Mrs Harriet Shields wrote in October 1920, “...you may put the Cross of the Christian Faith and Greater love hath no man than this that he lay down his life for his friends.” But she was advised in a later letter the number of words exceeded the limit.

Though history does not afford us an intimate knowledge of the life of the individual soldier called Charles Shields, he is remembered with honour on a headstone in Trois Arbres Cemetery, Steenwerck in France, on the Roll of Honour at the Australian War Memorial and on the Brass Roll of Honour in memory of those who gave their lives in the Great War in the Merrington Anzac Memorial Peace Chapel in Brisbane.



Trois Arbres Cemetery, Steenwerck, France



Woody Point Memorial Hall Honour Board.

Image courtesy Department of Environment and Heritage Protection



Details



The Humpybong Honour Board was unveiled at the Humpybong State school in 1917. The names on the board included those born in Humpybong, those who were resident there for five years, and those who enlisted from there - a total of 58. The honour board now hangs in the Redcliffe RSL.

This digital image was taken on behalf of Moreton Bay Region Libraries by Tom Hall. June 2017

Private Donald Richard Shields

Donald Shields was the third surviving son of Alfred and Harriet Shields. He had three younger brothers and a younger sister. He was born at Fortitude Valley on 7 February 1896 and attended Fortitude Valley State School. In his youth he served in junior cadets and senior cadets in the Citizen Defence Force acquiring the rank of corporal. He gained employment as a draper.

As soon as he reached the age of 19 years and six months and with his parents' permission, he enlisted in Brisbane on 25 August 1915 in the AIF for service beyond the limits of the Commonwealth of Australia. His mother, Mrs Harriet Shields of Sargeant Road, New Farm was next-of-kin and his religious denomination was Presbyterian. Private Shields was allotted to reinforcements for the 25th Battalion and commenced training at Enoggera Camp before embarking per HMAT *Kyarra* from Brisbane on 3 January 1916. After further training in Egypt while camped at Moascar, Private Shields was transferred to the 2nd Pioneer Battalion and his unit left Alexandria to join the British Expeditionary Force in France via Marseilles late in March. While in action at Armentières just over a month later on 5 May 1916, Private Donald Shields was wounded by shrapnel and admitted to No 8 Casualty Clearing Station in France where he died of wounds to the head and a bleeding knee. His burial was conducted by Rev Anthony Finn the next day at Bailleul Cemetery.

Donald's brief military service had begun and ended while his brother Charles was serving in Europe. One wonders if news of Donald's death might have triggered Charles's decision to end his own life.



Bailleul Cemetery, France

Donald's effects were sent in a package to his grieving parents - disc, wallet, cards, diary, belt, metal wrist watch (broken) and coins (5). Mr Alfred Shields signed forms of receipt when the British War Medal was delivered to his New Farm home in November 1921 and the Victory Medal in February 1923. As mentioned earlier, in a separate letter dated 19 October 1920 on behalf of each of her beloved sons, Mrs Harriet Shields asked that the Cross of the Christian faith be inscribed on the memorial tablets on her sons' graves, with the words in John 15, verse 13. She was advised however that the number of letters must not exceed 66, each space between words to count as an additional letter. He is remembered with honour however at the Bailleul Communal Cemetery Extension, beautifully maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in France, at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra and in Saint Andrew's Church in Brisbane.



British War Medal



Victory Medal

The medals awarded to Donald Shields

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Written by Noel E Adsett
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Lest we forget