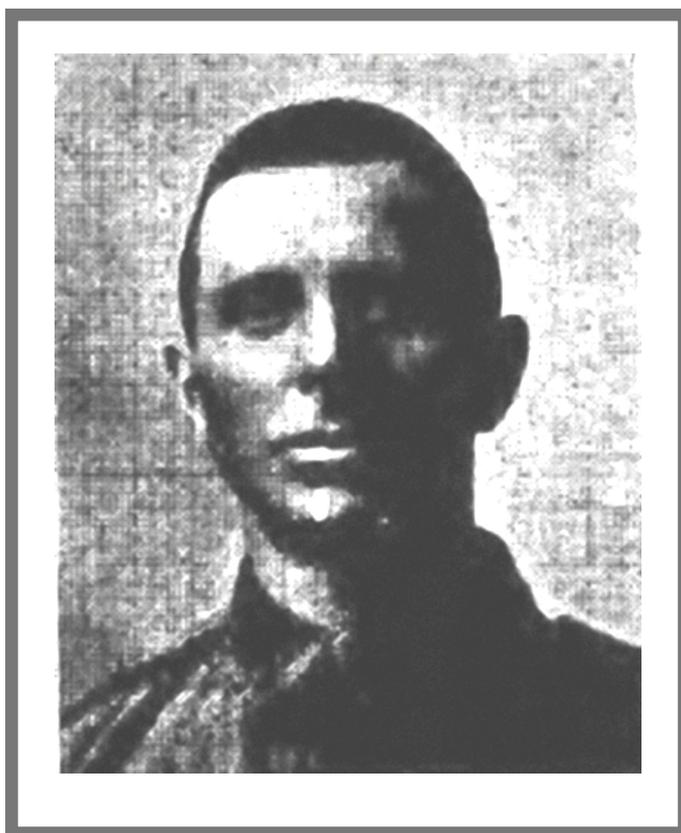


Stories from the Honour Boards

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 72

STUART NORMAN SPENCE 1876 – 1917



De Ruvigny's Roll of Honour, 1914-19, Vol 4

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



Broodseinde

This area saw heavy fighting in all three of the battles of Ypres. Among the casualties of the 41st Battalion at the Battle of Broodseinde was temporary Sergeant Stuart Norman Spence.

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Corner Ann and Creek Streets
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Go to <http://heritage.saintandrews.org.au/>
for an online copy of this booklet and more pictures.

Sergeant Stuart Norman Spence

Among the casualties of the 41st Battalion at the Battle of Broodseinde (the third phase of the third Battle of Ypres) was temporary Sergeant Stuart Norman Spence, a member of 'C' Company in the Battalion. He suffered wounds to his right shoulder and hip from a shell on 5 October 1917 and died of these wounds in the casualty clearing station two days later.

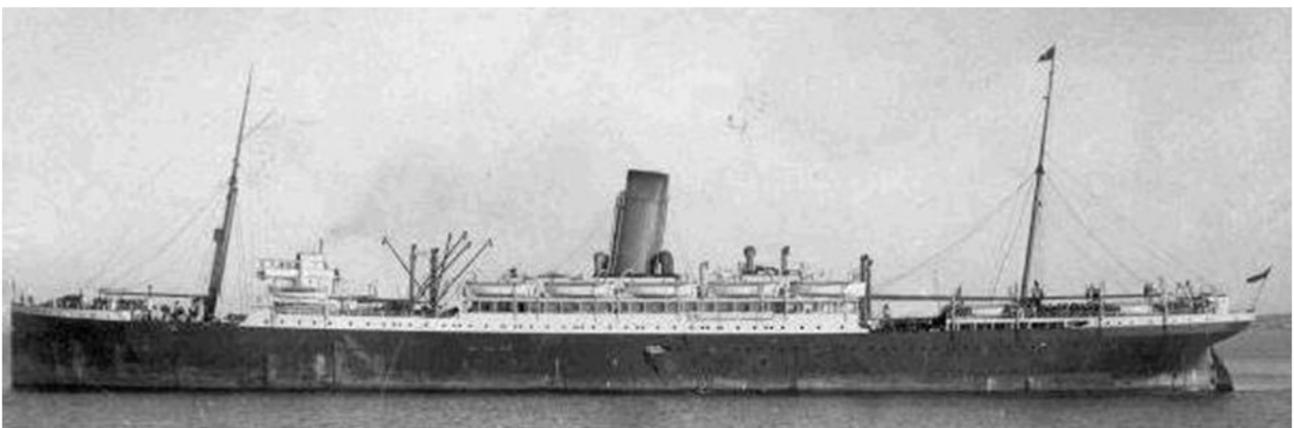
The 41st had arrived at Ypres by train on 3 October, and detrained at the Asylum – 'perhaps an appropriate place' the Battalion history wryly noted. Late at night the Battalion moved forward to their assembly area, with some halts where the sense of delay under enemy shellfire stretched far beyond the actual time. A massive barrage by British artillery started at 6am. Then in darkness and steadily falling rain the advance slogged forward. Three other battalions were ahead of the 41st, but some of the 'more adventurous spirits pushed forward with the leading waves'. When the 41st moved on the third objective, the Battalion history records that 'In a quagmire of mud knee-deep and tangled barbed wire, we lost the barrage, and after very heavy losses carried the objective at the point of the bayonet'.

Soon after the Germans massed for a counter-attack, and two Companies – one of them 'C' Company – pre-empted it by making 'a brilliant bayonet charge (that) routed them'. Further counter-attacks during the rest of 4 October were also repelled, as the Australians dug trenches and consolidated their position. The next day was relatively quiet, but death was always nearby in the front line – either from artillery fire (including British shells falling short), enemy snipers and occasional machine gun bursts. Having survived the ferocity of the previous day, on the 5th Stuart Spence fell wounded and succumbed to the wounds on the 7th.

Stuart Norman Spence was born in Glasgow, Scotland on 27 August 1876. His parents were Stuart Spence, a wholesale stationer, and Catherine Forgan Spence (nee Donaldson), who had married in Tayport, Scotland on 29 January 1874. In addition to Stuart they had two other sons (James and Frederick George) and two daughters (Mary and Caroline).

Stuart junior attended Hutcheson's Grammar School in Glasgow and in 1901 was working as a shipping clerk. We don't know the exact date of his arrival in Australia, but he was 32 years old, so it must have been in late 1908 or in 1909. In 1915 he was a fruit grower in the locality of Birkdale in south east Queensland (not Sydney as his family mistakenly thought). Birkdale is on the Brisbane to Cleveland railway line, and hence had the benefit of rail transport to Brisbane for its farm produce.

Stuart enlisted in Brisbane on 23 August 1915. He was recorded as 5'8" (173 cm) tall, 10st 6lbs (66 kg) with blue eyes, fair hair, and a fresh complexion. Camp life was apparently not entirely to his liking – he was once charged with drunkenness and on two other occasions with being absent without leave (AWOL). He was an acting Corporal when the first AWOL incident occurred and he was returned to the rank of Private as part of his punishment.



HMAT A64 Demosthenes weighed 11,223 tons with an average cruise speed of 15 knots or 27.78 kmph.

The Battalion embarked on the *Demosthenes* in Sydney on 18 May 1916 and arrived in Plymouth, England on 20 July 1916. After further training the Battalion was despatched to France and entered the front line for the first time on Christmas Eve 1916. The winter was a severe one and the 41st alternated between service in the front line and training and labouring in the rear areas. Stuart was made a Corporal on 7 February 1917.

The 41st was involved in the fighting at Messines, Belgium in early June 1917, and then had to endure heavy shelling and other fire as they constructed a new trench system west of Warneton, in full view of the Germans. This period in late June and early July was referred to by Battalion members as 'the 18 days'.

In early August 1917 the 41st held a new line - captured by two sister Battalions - in miserable conditions of continual rain, trenches waist-high in water and heavy shelling. The Battalion history says that 'For six days, wet through to the skin, with hardly any hot food or sleep, and with rifles and Lewis guns in many cases clogged with mud, (the posts) beat off repeated determined enemy counter-attacks'. When relieved the men were so exhausted they had to be assisted out of the lorries at the camp behind the lines.

During this rest period Stuart was made a Lance Sergeant on 8 August 1917, and then a temporary Sergeant on 13 August 1917.

In September the 41st moved to Assinghem for a period of training in new attack tactics. Then came for Stuart the fatal journey to Ypres in early October 1917.

Stuart was buried in the Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery in Belgium, in Plot XXI, Row B, Grave No.1A. He had made a will and the beneficiaries were his mother and his two sisters.



Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery in Belgium is the site of 1131 Australian burials or cremations from the First World War, among a total of 9901 Commonwealth burials and cremations.



Stuart Spence's name on the Roll of Honour at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra

Select bibliography

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Compiled by Ian Carnell, AM

October 2015, Revised February 2019



Stuart Norman Spence's life is also commemorated on this memorial at Cleveland



Lest we forget