

Private Mervyn Douglas Graham

December 10, 1896 – January 20, 1954



**Premiers
ANZAC
Spirit
Prize**

**Adelaide
Botanic
High
School**

By
Kyriakos
Lattas
(Jack Lattas)



Part A –

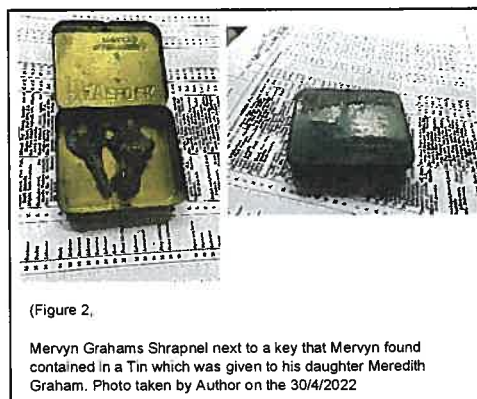
A brother, machinist and future father, soldier, and victim of the horrors of World War One; Mervyn Douglas Graham was just 18 when he and his brother Clarence enlisted into the Army on the 15th of April 1915. Neither had an idea of what the future would hold, the journeys and stories they would be able to tell and the horrors that they would witness on the front lines.

Born in Port Pirie on the 10th of December 1896, Mervyn Douglas Graham was born into a family of three. Mervyn would be the youngest of the brothers and was born only a year after his only sister Rena Graham. Whilst he was growing up on Queen Street, he would be accompanied by four more sisters to make a total of eight siblings¹. Mervyn would get his first job as a machinist working at the family's automobile shop with two other brothers². When the news of war broke out, Mervyn and his brother Clarence, or affectionately nicknamed Clarry, would listen to the cry for support and enlist into the Australian Imperial Force (A.I.F). Before embarking on the 31st of April 1915 Mervyn obtained a lens that would eventually be the only perspective his future family would remember him by – a camera, that he would use for the next four years of battle to document his experiences whilst travelling around Europe in the war ^{Figure 1}.



(Figure 1, Mervyn Douglas Grahams Kodak Camera Graham, M., 1914. *Kodak camera of Mervyn Graham*. [online] State Library of South Australia. Available at: <https://collections.slsa.sa.gov.au/resource/PRG+1717/6/1/A> [Accessed 10 May 2022].

Mervyn and his brother Clarence both signed up for the 4th Field Ambulance division but in the end only Clarence embarked to that Unit. Clarence's younger brother Mervyn, who Clarence was told to protect, would embark on the 31st of May 1915 with the 27th Infantry Battalion on the H.M.A.T³ Geelong A2 landing in Fremantle from Adelaide³. After being shipped to Cairo, Egypt, and getting his military training, Mervyn deployed to Gallipoli in the second wave of support for the Australian and New Zealand front lines⁷. Fighting as a foot soldier on the front lines at Gallipoli, Mervyn suffered an injury that would scar him for the rest of his life – a piece of shrapnel ^{Figure 2} burrowed into his left leg causing damage giving him a permanent leg twitch². On the 7th of October, Mervyn arrived and got cleared at the 16th Casualty Clearing Station and was eventually transported on the Caledonia from Mudros (now Moudros), Greece on the 9th of October⁶. Landing in Bristol England where he would stay at the Southmead Hospital until he was fit to return to the battle with the British Expeditionary Force (B.E.F) on the 24th of March 1916 in France⁶.



(Figure 2,

Mervyn Grahams Shrapnel next to a key that Mervyn found contained in a Tin which was given to his daughter Meredith Graham. Photo taken by Author on the 30/4/2022

¹Ancestors.familysearch.org. 2022. *FamilySearch.org*. [online] Available at: <<https://ancestors.familysearch.org/en/MNB2-41C/mervyn-douglas-graham-1896-1954>> [Accessed 26 May 2022].

²Jack Lattas, *Interview with Meredith Graham*, YouTube, 17 May 2022. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J3yHAJqqtQ>>

³Awm.gov.au. n.d. *AWM244 GEELONG - Troopship movement card, 1914-18 War: HMAT GEELONG (A2)*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C2627788>> [Accessed 26 May 2022].

⁴Awm.gov.au. n.d. *Mervyn Douglas Graham Embarkation Rolls*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/R1950193>> [Accessed 26 May 2022].

⁵Recordsearch.naa.gov.au. 2022. *Item details for: B2455, GRAHAM M D*. [online] Available at: <<https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRRetrieve/Interface/DetailsReports/ItemDetail.aspx?Barcode=4668974&isAv=N>> [Accessed 26 May 2022].

⁶Awm.gov.au. n.d. *27th Australian Infantry Battalion*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/U51467>>.



Mervyn would stay in the B.E.F in France for the following five months before Mervyn's brother Clarence would intervene requesting for Mervyn to join the 4th Field Ambulance division with him². Mervyn would join the unit on the 17th of August 1916 accompanying his brother at the Somme which is renowned for its high mortality rate⁷.

The battle of Somme was a huge bloody assault by British and French soldiers on the German Front Lines which took place in the Pas-de-Calais department in Northern France and along the river Somme¹⁰. It was a month after the Battle of Somme began in September, the 4th Field Ambulance division was called up to support as a 'Second Line'⁹ casualty evacuation from the 'First Line' regimental Aid Posts (RAP) in Rubempré, France⁷. Mervyn was the driver of one of the ambulances in the 4th Ambulance division, whose job was to take badly injured soldiers further back from the Regimental Aid Posts located nearby the trenches, driving, and treating them as much as possible before retiring them at the Casualty Clearing stations. Being a driver Mervyn would often have to support carrying the soldiers on the stretchers braving the image of decapitated, dying, and bloodied soldiers from the horrific Somme frontlines. These Casualty Clearing Stations that Mervyn would drop the soldiers at were located a few miles away from the front lines although medically trained people in the ambulance were told to prioritise triaging the soldiers as most could not be helped due to how seriously wounded, they were from the Somme front lines¹¹. Here Mervyn would stay until 1918 where he was once again transported to England for a final year due to the war's conclusion and in 1919 the unit would finally disband².



Figure 3 –
Photo of Mervyn's Photo Album. Photo taken on the 30/4/22 by Author.

Mervyn however would not return home to Australia on the next ship, rather he would stay and travel around world backpacking across different continents and using his camera to photograph different locations across the world. After receiving his payment from the war, Mervyn would backpack across Italy, India, France, and Switzerland, visiting multiple different landmarks across the continents including the Palace of Versailles, France, for the remainder of the year until late 1919 or early 1920². It was then he journeyed back to Australia returning to Port Pirie where he would quickly begin working as a machinist due to the lack of men in the working force². Four years after the war he met Edith Lamar in 1924, and two years later Mervyn would marry her in 1926².

Over the course of Mervyn's journey through the Somme and his experience at Gallipoli, he bore witness to the death and scale of the war. He watched as people travelled from the front lines in the back of his Ambulance, and he watched as people died on the frontlines of Gallipoli. This horror transformed itself into shellshock, now called P.T.S.D (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). The P.T.S.D showed itself every Friday evening after Mervyn would discuss the experiences with a small group of World War One veterans. He would reimagine the horrors, the screams and the pain and bring them back.

It would be that very same night that Mervyn would always "shout and talk" in the night. This did not go unnoticed by his children rather being hidden by his wife who would tell the kids "He's just having a bad dream" each time they would notice. Furthermore, Mervyn would never open up about his experiences with his children, only discussing his backpacking travels with his children sheltering the deep trauma and never getting the P.T.S.D officially diagnosed opting to tough through the trouble to continue to support his family².



Figure 4 –
Photo of Mervyn Douglas Graham's Ambulance. Created by Mervyn retaken by Author on the 30/4/2022.

⁷ Awm.gov.au. 2022. *AWM4 26/47/11 War Diaries of 4th Field Ambulance- August 1916*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1352275?image=1>> [Accessed 26 May 2022].

² Jack Lattas, *Interview with Meredith Graham*, YouTube, 17 May 2022. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J3yHAJqqtQ>>

⁸ DVA (Department of Veterans' Affairs) (2021), *Medical treatment of Australian soldiers in World War I*, DVA Anzac Portal, <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/ww1/military-organisation/medical-treatment>

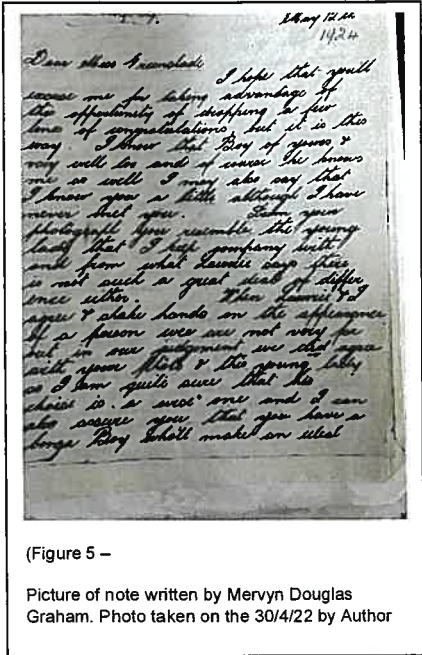
⁹ Vwma.org.au. 2014. *4th Field Ambulance*. [online] Available at: <<https://vwma.org.au/explore/units/266>> [Accessed 26 May 2022].

¹⁰ Staff, I. and Bronson, M., n.d. *What Was the Battle of the Somme?*. [online] Imperial War Museums. Available at: <<https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/what-was-the-battle-of-the-somme>> [Accessed 26 May 2022].

¹¹ Thehistorypress.co.uk. n.d. *The History Press | Evacuation of the wounded in World War I*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.thehistorypress.co.uk/articles/evacuation-of-the-wounded-in-world-war-i/>> [Accessed 26 May 2022].



Mervyn would continue his life as a machinist until he fell sick with tuberculosis in the early 1940's, the same year Meredith Graham, his youngest daughter, was born as a mistake due to the stress of World War Two being declared in September 1939². The tuberculosis would cause Mervyn to begin to rapidly deteriorate and was a direct result of his war service across Europe whilst travelling with the 4th Field Ambulance division. Whilst travelling with his unit in France Mervyn would be taught how to smoke which would inevitably make the terminal illness worse². Eventually thirteen years later Mervyn Douglas Graham on the 20th of January 1954 would pass, succumbing to tuberculosis, a final and belated blow from the war that gave it to him¹



(Figure 5 –
Picture of note written by Mervyn Douglas Graham. Photo taken on the 30/4/22 by Author

Mervyn despite the odds never lost his humanity, and would befriend his war partner, Lorry Hayhurst. They were friends that would go everywhere together protecting each other to make sure that they would never be lost. However, when the war ended, Lorry would opt to stay in England and eventually would get married. Mervyn however did not forget his time with Lorry and wrote a letter to Lorry Hayhurst's newlywed wife after having no communication with him since the war ended this displayed his pride and honour and mateship which are all part of the ANZAC spirit. Mervyn would never forget Lorry Hayhurst keeping a photo of them ^{Figure 13} framed on his wall being a constant reminder of his mate that he spent his worst and best times in the war with.

In the letter Mervyn would discuss Lorry and his experience with his best friend on the battlefield, never losing his friendship with Lorry even after they had not spoken to each other in years. Mervyn also displays his self-sacrifice for his family never officially getting his P.T.S.D diagnosed meaning he could continue to bring an income into his household instead of being brought to a facility. Moreover, Mervyn would continue his self-sacrifice for his family by sheltering them from his P.T.S.D and persevering through even the end of his life and his condition to be able to support his wife, sons, and daughters to make sure he is still a father over a soldier.

Mervyn Douglas Graham was a brother, machinist, father, and was victim to the horrors of World War One; now he has succumbed to those wounds, but never did he forget his family and never did he lose his perseverance and self-sacrifice.

Word Count: 1,455

²Jack Lattas, *Interview with Meredith Graham*, YouTube, 17 May 2022. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J3yHAJqqtQ>>

¹Ancestors.familysearch.org. 2022. *FamilySearch.org*. [online] Available at: <<https://ancestors.familysearch.org/en/MNB2-41C/mervyn-douglas-graham-1896-1954>> [Accessed 26 May 2022].

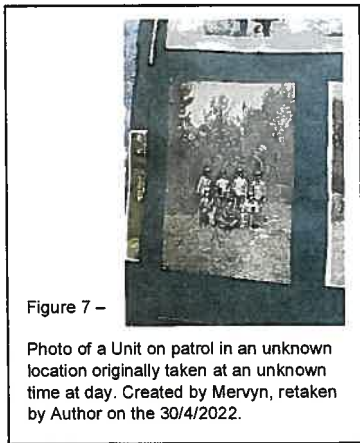


Figure 7 –
Photo of a Unit on patrol in an unknown location originally taken at an unknown time at day. Created by Mervyn, retaken by Author on the 30/4/2022.

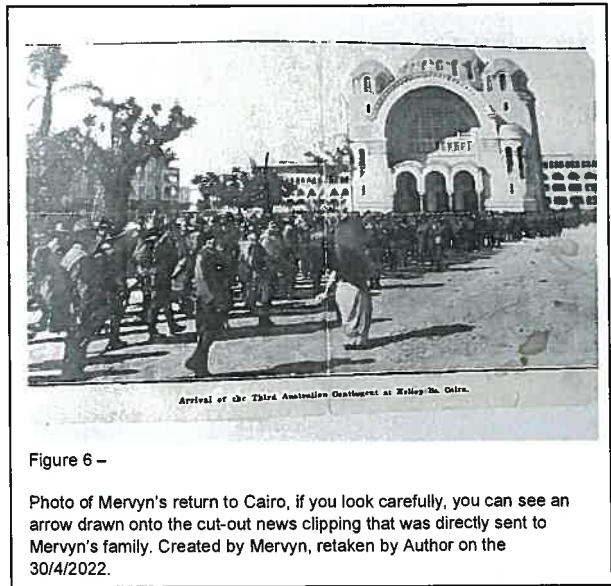
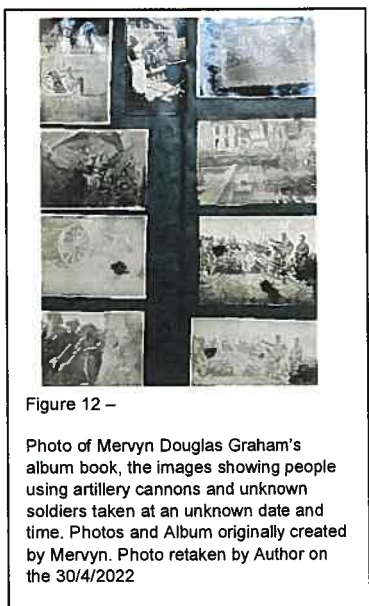
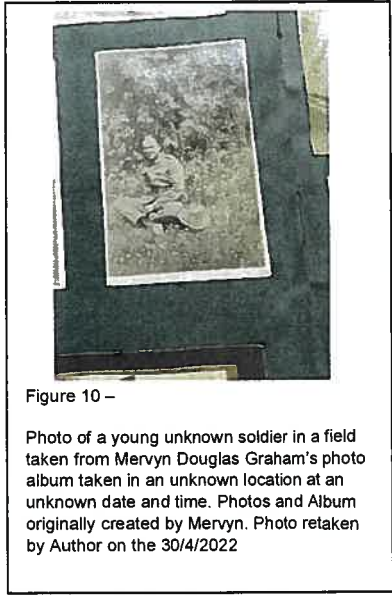
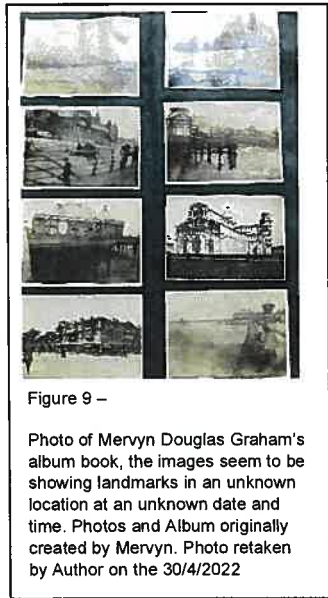
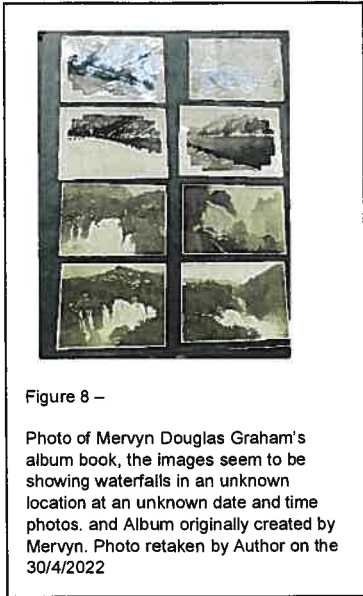


Figure 6 –
Photo of Mervyn's return to Cairo, if you look carefully, you can see an arrow drawn onto the cut-out news clipping that was directly sent to Mervyn's family. Created by Mervyn, retaken by Author on the 30/4/2022.



Part B –



Figure 13 –

Photo of Mervyn's best friend Lorry Hayhurst and his newly wed wife in a newspaper clipping kept by Mervyn Douglas Graham to remember him. Author Mervyn. Retaken by Author on the 30/4/2022

My journey began late last year as I began to search for a new soldier to research for this project. I wished to research something personnel, looking into a family. It was after searching, I came across my friend's work from last year, Clarence Graham. However, my friend had already researched Clarence as a school project and by choosing Clarence I would not be challenging myself. It was then I first stumbled upon Mervyn Graham, the younger brother of Clarence.

By using the National Archives, I was able to research Mervyn's embarkation rolls. This provided me with crucial information on what unit he was in and informed me that Mervyn transferred into a new unit. I continued by investigating the war dairies of the second unit Mervyn served in which enlightened me on where he fought across his service.

On the 23rd of April I first contacted Meredith Graham, Mervyn's youngest daughter. I anticipated that my first outreach would be ignored as she had never met me. This assumption was proven wrong as I quickly garnered a response from Meredith. Only a week later on the 30th of April I would enter Meredith's home with her daughter and her grandson. It was a pleasant surprise to see how keen she was to do this meeting already having prepared multiple printed documents and information for me to be able to look at. She also had spent the last few days searching for albums and memorabilia that Mervyn had collected whilst travelling with his unit. Meredith would be crucial to my understanding of Mervyn after the war, and would give me an insight I would never have seen providing me with a personal connection to Mervyn – something that would further motivate me. Meredith would also give me a piece of information I would never have obtained – the knowledge that Mervyn had P.T.S.D. and due to Mervyn's self-sacrifice in the name of his family, he never got his P.T.S.D officially diagnosed.

After the interview with Meredith, I would proceed to listen to the audio on repeat for days trying to absorb as much information as possible. Fact checking all the information and creating a timeline of Mervyn and his life before the war, in the war, and after the war. After the three hours of interview and with the information fresh I would begin my writing of this document. I would write three rough drafts focusing on different aspects I wanted to be important in my essay before finally combining them into the introduction. Previous winners provided samples on how to lay out my work and then I would continue to plan out the rest of the document keeping in mind the information provided by Meredith and the *Australian War Memorial*.

Over the course of the last year, I have gained an indescribable connection to Mervyn that has been able to improve my historical skills immensely and has given me a whole new perspective to World War One.

Word Count: 495



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