Private John Thomas Malone, service no. 2731, emerged visually unscathed from World War One, apart from needing a set of dentures, possibly a result of trench mouth which was common in the trenches.[[1]](#footnote-1) The war alone did not decimate John’s life, however its repercussions did, as he lost everything of importance to him in its aftermath.

It is doubtful that, unlike many of his fellow 18% British-born volunteers, John enlisted out of patriotism for the mother country, as he was of proud Irish heritage, more likely he was driven by the prospect of regular good pay, as the cost of living had increased dramatically in 1915.[[2]](#footnote-2)

John had a wife and two children under five, with another due in January, 2016. He enlisted at Holsworthy, NSW, on 19 August, 1915, the second largest month for Australian World War One enlistments, three weeks after the death of his infant son with meningitis.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Thirty-six years old and five foot five inches in height, John would have been ineligible to enlist until a few months before.[[4]](#footnote-4) Weighing 119lbs, or less than 54 kgs., and as Australian soldiers went to war weighed down by almost 30 kgs. of clothes, weapons, tools and kit, more than half his total weight, John was not among the Infantry’s finest specimens.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Leaving Australia on HMAT Euripedes on 2 November, 1915, John was admitted to Heliopolis hospital with gastritis on 7 December, 1916, shortly after his arrival in Egypt.[[6]](#footnote-6) On the home front, wife Grace gave birth to daughter Hazel on 24 January.[[7]](#footnote-7)

John was taken on strength on 5 February, 1916, to the 6th Reinforcement, 20th Battalion, and sailed on HMAT Haverford, disembarking at Marseilles before marching to Thiennes.[[8]](#footnote-8)

He dug trenches in France’s Bois Grenier, experiencing “gas alarm signals heard” and some shelling and fighting before entering the front line trenches 24 April.[[9]](#footnote-9)

On 16 July, 1916, wife Grace, who had changed her address since John’s enlistment, notified the Department of Defence of another address change, the first of seven additional address changes between then and January, 1919.[[10]](#footnote-10) Grace was seemingly not coping, albeit she continued to receive three-fifths of John’s allotment paid weekly by postal drafts at Paddington Post Office.[[11]](#footnote-11)

John went AWL three times, and albeit he was docked a total of 53 days’ pay, Grace’s allotment was not similarly reduced, so his pay forfeiture did not contribute to Grace’s peripatetic ways.[[12]](#footnote-12)

*“The 20th Battalion entered the trenches of the Western Front for the first time in April 1916 and in the following month had the dubious honour of being the first Australian battalion to be raided by the Germans. The 20th took part in its first major offensive around Pozieres between late July and the end of August 1916. After a spell in a quieter sector of the front in Belgium, the 2nd Division, which included the 5th Brigade, came south again in October. The 20th Battalion provided reinforcements for the attack near Flers between 14 and 16 November, launched in conditions that Charles Bean described as the worst ever encountered by the AIF.*”[[13]](#footnote-13)

The men were “in poor state” by 24 November, and whilst John and his battalion were resting at Ribemont (the Somme), John went AWL for 11 hours, forfeiting 29 days’ pay and receiving 28 days’ F.P. (Field Punishment) no 2.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Field punishment in the AIF often differed from what is set out in the manuals, it was more likely to be detention and loss of privileges such as tobacco and alcohol.[[15]](#footnote-15)

*“In 1917, the 20th was involved in the follow-up of German forces after their retreat to the Hindenburg Line, and was one of four battalions to defeat a counter-stroke by a German force, almost five times as strong, at Lagnicourt.*”[[16]](#footnote-16)

John’s battalion was in position by 3.20 am for the second Bullecourt battle on 3-4 May in France, experiencing “very heavy M.G. fire”.[[17]](#footnote-17) On 22 May, at Rubempre (the Somme), with training “hindered by continuous rain”, John went AWL for 43 hours.[[18]](#footnote-18)

On 8 August, 1917, at Boulogne, John was admitted to hospital with laryngitis, followed soon after by a prolonged stay due to Olecranon Bursitis, probably the result of field training involving crawling without protective gear, and repetitive trauma to elbows.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Returning to his unit on September 28, John fought in the First Battle of Passchendaele, where 1,250 Australian casualties were sustained in the quagmire.[[20]](#footnote-20)

On 1 January, 2018, two men were sent to hospital with “sickness”, with many more ill that month, including John, who rejoined the battalion from the hospital in the field on 5 January, one of his numerous short hospitalisations.[[21]](#footnote-21)

*“The 20th was one of many Australian battalions rushed to stop the German Spring Offensive (March-May 1918), and it encountered some particularly severe fighting when ordered to attack at Hangard Wood on 7 April,*” where on the battle’s first day, 150 of its battalion were casualties.[[22]](#footnote-22)

Training near Tronville, John sprained his ankle in late June, was diagnosed with the flu, and admitted to hospital until mid July.[[23]](#footnote-23)

On 8 August at Amiens, John was on the front line, with “six men killed and 17 wounded by lunchtime”, heavy artillery was used, with “enemy planes very active,” and by 16 August, John’s battalion listed 30 killed, 115 wounded, seven hospitalised and 15 unaccounted for.[[24]](#footnote-24)

The battalion was relieved and moved to Fouilloy (the Somme) billets on 17 August and seven days later, seven men were declared illegal absentees.[[25]](#footnote-25) On 25 August, John was caught “in town without a pass” for four hours, forfeiting 14 days’ pay.[[26]](#footnote-26) The 20th was then involved in the attack on Mont St Quentin on 31 August, with the unit “being heavily shelled, inflicting heavy casualties” with 22 killed and 106 wounded.[[27]](#footnote-27)

John’s battalion then participated in breaking through the Beaurevoir Line around Montbrehain on 3-5 October, where there were 430 Australian casualties.[[28]](#footnote-28) The 20th Battalion itself suffered “nine killed, 107 wounded”.[[29]](#footnote-29) On 12 October, John rejoined the battalion from hospital, being one of the injured.[[30]](#footnote-30)

Three days’ later, the unit was billeted at the small French village of Vignacourt behind the front lines, where it remained until the Armistice was signed.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Disembarking in NSW on the Tras Os Montes in NSW on 25 May, 1919, John missed the funeral of his wife Grace, who had passed away with Spanish Influenza on 27 April, one of its 15,000 Australian deaths.[[32]](#footnote-32) His three children had been dispersed among his wife’s relatives, never to live with their father again.[[33]](#footnote-33)

John was one of the 133,000 veterans found jobs by the Department of Repatriation, three months’ work 500 kms away from his children in July, 1919.[[34]](#footnote-34) The Repatriation grant was “exhausted” in November and John made an application for assistance, receiving fourteen days’ sustenance on 20 November.[[35]](#footnote-35) He disappeared shortly after with no warning, his family never saw or heard from him again.[[36]](#footnote-36)

It was not until 2013 that John’s grandchildren identified his unmarked grave in Darwin, NT, where he died of chronic nephritis in April, 1941.[[37]](#footnote-37) John’s death was “accepted as being related to his war service” in December, 2013, and the family’s application for a Commemorative War Grave was successful, probably due to the “trench nephritis” so common in World War One, where it accounted for 35,000 casualties in British forces.[[38]](#footnote-38)

Electoral rolls and police records show that John had lived alone in a beach shack in remote Darwin, with a number of drunkenness convictions, the first in February, 1929.[[39]](#footnote-39)

John’s war did not end in November, 1918, the war-related Spanish Influenza epidemic, post-war unemployment conditions, John’s inability to cope, possibly due to the shell shock which afflicted 41,800 of his comrades, and his health issues ensured that his war lasted forever.[[40]](#footnote-40)

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