

THOMAS BOYCE McATEE WX7720

Thomas Boyce McAtee was born in Busselton on the 16th of April 1910 to parents Robert George and Mary Elizabeth McAtee of Jalbarragup Via Nannup.

Thomas enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force on the 10th of August 1940 at Nannup. He gave his occupation as that of Farm Worker, single, permanent address as that of Nannup and religion as Church of England.

10/8/1940 - Taken on strength as a general reinforcement at the Recruit Reception Depot, Claremont. At the time of enlistment, Thomas was 30 years and 3 months old.

22/8/1940 - Drafted to Melville Training Depot.

12/9/1940 – Drafted to No. 2 Depot (Btn.) Northam.

From the 2nd of October to 3rd of December 1940, Thomas spent several days in the Camp Dressing Station and hospital, finally diagnosed with acute tonsillitis, Thomas marched in to rejoin his unit, 3rd Reinforcements 2/16th Battalion (13th Training Battalion) on the 3rd of December 1940.

On the 9th of February 1941, Thomas was granted 9 days pre-embarkation leave and on the 16th of April 1941 embarked at Fremantle for the Middle East. The convoy of ships included the Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth, Mauretania, and the Aquitania.

Thomas disembarked in the Middle East on the 14th of May 1941 and was Taken on Strength, 2/16th battalion AIF on the 16th of June 1941.

On the 14th of November 1941, Thomas was charged with “Neglecting to obey a general order” and was fined 10 shillings.

On the 29th of January 1942 Thomas embarked on the “Ile De France” bound for Bombay, on arrival at Bombay, the battalion was encamped awaiting a convoy of smaller ships to take them to Singapore. Thomas was to embark on board HMT “Kosciusko”. The convoy set out for Singapore on the 9th of February 1942. When Singapore surrendered to the Japanese on the 15th of September, the destination of the convoy, on the orders of Winston Churchill, was changed to Rangoon (Burma) to assist with its defence. The Australian Prime Minister, John Curtin, however, was determined to bring every possible soldier home to defend Australia and demanded that that the convoy, now re-designated SU1, turn around and sail for Australian ports.

THE 2/16TH BATTALION.

The 2/16th Battalion AIF was formed in Perth on the 20th of April 1940. Many the men were from the Western Australian goldfields who gave the battalion a hard and rough character. The Battalion departed for the Middle East on the 25th of October 1940, arriving in Egypt on the 25th of November. As part of the 21st Brigade, 7th Division, the 2/16th's first operation assignment of war was to bolster the defences along the Egypt-Libya frontier against an expected German attack. It occupied positions at Maaten Bagush and Mersa Matruh throughout much of April and May 1941, before returning to Palestine in preparation for its first offensive operation – the invasion of Syria and Lebanon.

For the 2/16th Battalion, the Syria and Lebanon Campaign, beginning on June 8 was characterised by difficult and costly actions against well entrenched Vichy French troops. The 2/16th suffered the most casualties (264) of any of the Australian battalions involved. Its major battles were the crossing of the

Litani River on the 9th of June, the unsuccessful attempt to capture Sidon on the 13th of June and the seizure of El Atiq Ridge as part of the battle of Damour on the 6th of July. The 2/16th remained in Lebanon after the armistice of 12th of July as part of the Allied garrison force.

The battalion left Egypt on the 30th of January 1942, most of the 2/16th – over 350 members of the battalion had absented themselves without leave when their transport called briefly at Fremantle – disembarked at Adelaide on the 25th of March 1942. The battalions stay in Australia was brief. On the 12th of August it arrived at Port Moresby in Papua, and by 29th of August was in action against the Japanese at Abuari on the Kokoda Trail. Forced to withdraw, the 2/16th fought a series of desperate actions back along the Trail. During these engagements, the battalion suffered heavy casualties.

After a brief period of training in the Atherton Tablelands, on the 6th of August 1942 Thomas embarked at Brisbane on the SS “James Cooper”, an American liberty ship, bound for Port Moresby arriving there on the 13th of August 1942.

Thomas, along with the rest of the battalion was soon to be in action against the Japanese Imperial Army on the infamous Kokoda Trail.

On the 2nd of September 1942, during a short defensive engagement at Templeton’s Crossing, Thomas was Killed in Action.

Originally buried in grave No.3, Plot A, Row C. Templeton Crossing War Cemetery Thomas’ body was later exhumed and reburied in the Kokoda War Cemetery, Grave No. 006.

Thomas was finally laid to rest in the Soputa War Cemetery PNG) in January 1946.