

Nicholas Henry Christian (generally known as “Harry”) enlisted for military service at Moonee Ponds on 28 February 1916. His age was given as 18 years and nine months. He was a natural born British subject and his occupation was listed as a draftsman. He was single.

He appears to have previously applied for military service and been rejected, as his enlistment document states that he had previously been rejected as unfit for military service on the grounds of his 'chest'. No further details were provided and he was declared fit for military service in 1916.

He was born in Moonee Ponds in May of 1897. His father was also a Nicholas Henry Christian, of Grange Rd, Ormond. His father was a grocer in Grange Rd., Ormond, and previous to that, the newsagent in Puckle St., Moonie Ponds. His mother was Mary Helen Christian (nee Kinnear), of the same address. He had a brother, George Robert, born at Essendon in 1900. Nicholas Henry senior was born in 1868 to a third Nicholas Henry Christian, and Margaret Wilson. There appear to have been five children to this marriage, William, Nicholas, Charles, and Thomas, providing four uncles for young Nicholas. Nicholas Henry and Margaret Wilson married in 1866.

Mary Helena Christian survived until 15 August 1955, and her death notice mentions Harry and Robert as her two children. She also survived to see three grandchildren.

He attended the State School at Footscray. He was one of the boys of St. John's Church, and being a draftsman by profession, designed and executed the honour roll of the church. He left his position in the Melbourne City Drafting office to join the Army.

On the 29 Feb 1916 he was assigned to the 37th Battalion, 'C' company. During his period of training in Australia (16/4/1916) he was promoted to the role of Sergeant, which he retained for the duration of his service. A letter from his father dated August 1916 and notifying the Army of a change of the family address (from Footscray to Ormond) contains a reference to “837 Sergeant N.H.Christian, 'C' Company, 37th Battalion, 10th Brigade.”

The 37th Battalion had been formed as part of the 10th Brigade of the 3rd Australian Division, in February 1916 at Seymour in Victoria. Its recruits were drawn from Melbourne, north-east Victoria and Gippsland. The battalion moved to France on 23 November 1916. Within a week it had begun to occupy trenches on the Western Front, just in time for the onset of the great offensives of 1916-17.

The 37th fought in its first major battle at Messines, in Belgium, between 7 and 9 June 1917. The battalion fought in another two major attacks in this sector - the battle of Broodseinde on 4 October, and the battle of Passchendaele on 12 October. Belgium remained the focus of the 37th Battalion's activities for the next five months, until it was moved south to France in late March 1918 to meet the German Army's Spring Offensive.

Nicholas embarked at Port Melbourne on the A34 “Persic” on the 3 June 1916, and arrived in Plymouth on the 25th of July. On 22 August he proceeded to France, and his records note that he was “marched to Rouelles” on the 27th. He is listed as having one brief hospitalisation on 21/1/17 but rejoined his unit on the 29th.

Nicholas Christian's involvement with the 37th between August 1916 and October 1917 would thus have seen him engaged in active service at some of the most severe battles of the war. It is likely that he was present at the battle of Messines and the date of his death coincides with the battle of

Passchendaele. The AWM history comments that “As a part of the continuing Third Battle of Ypres on the Western Front, Australian, New Zealand and British troops were involved in an unsuccessful attempt to seize the Passchendaele Ridge from the defending Germans on 12 October 1917. The vicious fighting took place in the most appalling of waterlogged conditions, which helped render the name Passchendaele a synonym for slaughter.”

He was listed as “wounded in action” on both the 13th October 1917 and again on the 20th of October 1917. He died of his wounds some days later. The records are contradictory and his date of death is listed in different documents as the 12 October 1917 and 23 October 1917. Whichever date is correct, he would have been twenty years old at the time of his death. The place of death is listed as “2d Anzac Corps Medical Dressing Station, in the field, Belgium.” The record notes “Died of Wounds rec'd in action. Nature of wounds not stated.”

A letter from the family (dated Jan 26 1918) states that the cable notifying the family of his death was not received until the 17th of November. The letter goes on to say “We have received no further word of any sort to say when he was wounded or how it happened. Can you give us any information that will ease our minds – surely when a soldier is wounded we can get some knowledge of where he was, etc. Hoping you will be able to give us some record from the field of our son's ending. Yours sincerely, N.H.Christian.”

The response was “In reply to your communication of the 25th instant, I have to state the only information to hand to date, regarding your son, No 837 Sgt N Christian, 37th battalion, is the brief cable message – died of wounds 12/10/17. Later official advice coming to hand by mail giving further details will, on receipt, be promptly forwarded to you.”

Given the number of casualties at Passchendaele it is likely that the Australian authorities simply could not keep track of the details of every death.

An official Will Form Cm Form 511b nominated his mother, Mrs Mary Helena Christian, of Grange Rd, Ormond, as his beneficiary.

The inventory of his effects returned to his mother was “Disc, metal wrist watch (damaged) & strap, fountain pen, badges, scissors, metal mirror, Prayer Book, Notebook, photos, wallet, letters.” This was only forwarded to his mother on 5 Sep 1918, more than a year after his death. As late as 25 May 1926 the records note that “a photograph of the grave was transmitted to the next of kin”, with the BRM number 16/958. A memorial scroll and memorial plaque (both numbered 335000) were also made available to his family. The records contain an authorisation slip for a G.R. Christian (almost certainly his brother) to collect the plaque on behalf of his father.

He is buried at the Brandhoek New Military Cemetery No 3, Belgium.

He was awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

WILL.

Name in full. I, Nicholas Henry CHRISTIAN

Unit. Regimental Number 837 serving in 65th Battalion
of the Australian Imperial Force do hereby revoke all former Wills
made by me and declare this to be my last Will.

Name and Address of person or persons to whom it is to go ~~I DEVISE and BEQUEATH all my real estate unto~~

Name and Address of person or persons to receive personal estate (See Note) absolutely, and my personal estate I bequeath to my Mother
Mrs. Mary Helena Christian
Grange Rd Ormond Victoria Australia

Fill in Date. IN WITNESS WHEREOF I have hereunto set my hand this 31st
day of July A.D. 1917

N.H.Christian (Signature).

All alterations to be initialled by Testator and Witnesses. Signed by the said Testator as his last Will and Testament the same having been read over and explained to him, in the presence of us both present at the same time who at his request and in his presence and in the presence of each other have subscribed our names as witnesses

FIRST WITNESS. Signature of Witness W.H.Ellison 65th Bn
Address and Occupation King St Ararat Vic.Farmer

SECOND WITNESS Signature of Witness M.Matthews (65 Bn)
Address and Occupation Brim Paen. Vic (Farmer)

N.B.-Personal Estate includes Pay, Effects, Money in Bank, Insurance Policy, in fact everything except Real Estate.

Certified to be a true copy of the Will of No.837 Sergeant Nicholas Henry CHRISTIAN
37th Battalion A.I.F.

Checked J.Hunter Cpl.

[Signature]
S/Sgt
Estates Branch,
Adm Hdqrs., London.
8/11/17