

## 1750 Gunner John Victor Bias



John Victor Bias was born at Eastabist, Birsay on 28<sup>th</sup> May 1887, the second son of fisherman Thomas H. Bias and Jane Bias (née Spence). After Victor (as was generally known) completed his education at Dounby and Birsay public schools, he worked for several local farmers in Birsay and served a 3-year apprenticeship with shoemaker A. Oag of Dounby, then worked as his van man.

Victor had been manager of Irvine's boot store in Finstown and served 1½ years in the Orkney Garrison Volunteer Artillery, before went out to Sydney, Australia. He left London on 9<sup>th</sup> July 1909, on the steamship *Otway* of the Orient Line. Victor worked in Sydney for the Water Conservation and Irrigation Commission.

On 8<sup>th</sup> September 1914 Victor enrolled into the Australian Imperial Force in the SE Sydney suburb of Rosebury, joining 8<sup>th</sup> Company, Australian Army Service Corps. Victor left Melbourne on 22<sup>nd</sup> December, in 301 M T Company ASC on transport A40 *Ceramic*.

Victor embarked on the steamship *Franconia* in Alexandria on 14<sup>th</sup> May 1915 and sailed to Gallipoli to join the Anzac Corps force there. Victor was promoted to Corporal on 6<sup>th</sup> September. After his Company's personnel were absorbed into the Army Corps Ammunition Park on 9<sup>th</sup> November, Victor applied to join the Heavy Battery and reverted to the rank of Gunner on 17<sup>th</sup> November.

Victor unusually completed seven months of difficult service on Gallipoli without being hospitalised, landed back in Alexandria on 26<sup>th</sup> December. On 6<sup>th</sup> March 1916 Victor transferred to 3<sup>rd</sup> Battery in 1st Field Artillery Brigade in 1st Australian Division at Tel-el-Kebir. Two weeks later he embarked with his battery at Alexandria and disembarked in Marseilles on 27<sup>th</sup> March to join the BEF.

After three months in the "quiet" Armentières sector, 1st Australian Division joined the Battle of the Somme when on 20<sup>th</sup> July it relieved British 34th Division in front of Pozières. Victor survived the heavy fighting there in July unscathed, but received a gun shot wound to his head on the day that 1st Australian Division returned to relieve 2nd Australian Division at Pozières, on 16<sup>th</sup> August.

Victor was admitted to 2<sup>nd</sup> Field Ambulance, then to 13th General Hospital in Boulogne. On 20<sup>th</sup> August he boarded the hospital ship *St Denis* to cross the Channel and was admitted to Kitchener Hospital in Brighton on the next day. Victor had recovered when was granted two weeks leave on 16<sup>th</sup> October, so he took the opportunity to travel to Orkney and spent a few days with his family.

Victor spent a month at the AIF depot at Perham Down, before returned to his battery in France. The hard winter that followed took its toll on Victor's health and he reported sick on 20<sup>th</sup> April 1917. After treatment at 56 Casualty Clearing Station for trench fever, Victor rejoined his unit on 6<sup>th</sup> May.

On 11<sup>th</sup> July 1st FA Brigade left Becourt Camp in the Somme area for Flanders. 1st, 2nd and 5th Australian Divisions' artillery brigades joined the 3,091 gun preliminary bombardment for the Third Battle of Ypres (now known as the Battle of Passchendaele). 1st Brigade was attached to British 30th Division, to assist in the artillery preparation for its advance on the opening day of the battle, which was postponed because of heavy German counter-battery fire until 31<sup>st</sup> July.

On 21<sup>st</sup> July 3<sup>rd</sup> Battery was firing from the gun line near Zillebeke Lake when it was hit by heavy German HE and shrapnel fire, killing Lieutenant Parker and six other ranks and wounding Lieutenant King and eight other ranks. Victor was one of the gunners killed. Gunner John Victor Bias is buried in Grave III.D.6 in Reninghelst New Military Cemetery, about 2½ miles SE of Poperinge in Flanders. Victor's older brother James returned from Australia to serve in the RNR and survived the war.