



## Private Robert Mathew Beatham VC

[1894 – 1918]



Private Beatham was not a member of the Club, however as the Victoria Cross that he was awarded posthumously is displayed in the Club (courtesy of Mrs Jenman), it is appropriate to record his story.



Robert Beatham was born at Glassonby in Cumbria on 16 June 1894 - one of nine sons of John Beatham (a papermaker's foreman) and his wife Elizabeth (née Allison).

He attended Maughanby School at Glassonby. He left school at 14 and worked at manual occupations in England. Robert emigrated to Australia with his parents in 1913, and worked at Geelong, Victoria as a labourer before enlisting in the AIF on 8 January 1915 at the age of 20 years.

Seven of the Beatham brothers served in the War, as did their father. Three of the brothers were to die in the conflict within five months of each other. Beatham's father also served at Gallipoli with the 21<sup>st</sup> Battalion - arriving with reinforcements in late August 1915.

*We thank the History Interest Group and other volunteers who have researched and prepared these Notes. The series will be progressively expanded and developed. They are intended as casual reading for the benefit of Members, who are encouraged to advise of any inaccuracies in the material.*

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Beatham enlisted as a private in the 8th Battalion on 8 January 1915. He embarked on HMAT *Hororata* from Melbourne and served at Gallipoli, landing in the second wave on 25 April 1915. He returned to Australia in August 1915 due to illness. After recuperating he re-enlisted and sailed again. He went with 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion to France, arriving in Marseilles on 31 March 1916.

He was wounded in action for the first time on 18 August 1916 at Pozieres during the early stages of the Battle of the Somme, suffering a gunshot wound to the back. After a year-long recuperation he rejoined his unit on 30 September 1917. He was wounded a second time a few days later on 4 October 1917 at Broodseinde during the Third Battle of Ypres. He was evacuated to England for treatment and recovery.

Beatham rejoined his unit on the Western Front in February 1918. He was 24 years old, and still a private when he was killed in action on 9 August 1918 at Rosières (east of Amiens) on the second day of the Battle of Amiens.

When the great Allied offensive was launched on 8 August 1918 his unit was among those ordered to advance from Harbonnières and capture the high ground of Lihons north of Rosières. On approaching this German strong point on 9 August, the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion, its supporting tanks knocked out by heavy artillery fire, was halted by a line of machine-guns.

Private Beatham's company worked its way forward to enfilade the enemy position and, assisted by Lance Corporal W. G. Nottingham, Beatham rushed forward and bombed the crews of four guns, killing ten men and capturing ten others. He was shot through the leg in the first charge but had silenced the guns by the end. This action enabled the battalion to renew its advance

A few days later Beatham, though wounded, rushed another machine gun and bombed and silenced it. In this final act Robert Beatham was riddled with bullets and killed. It was 11 August 1918. He was 24.

For his gallantry he was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross, which was presented to his mother by King George V at Buckingham Palace, on 8 March 1919.

*For most conspicuous bravery and self-sacrifice during the attack north of Rosieres, east of Amiens, on 9 August 1918. When the advance was held up by heavy machine gun fire, Pte Beatham dashed forward, and, assisted by one man, bombed and fought the crews of four enemy machine guns, killing ten of them and capturing ten others, thus facilitating the advance and saving many casualties. When the final objective was reached, although previously wounded, he again dashed forward and bombed a machine gun, being riddled with bullets and killed in doing so. The valour displayed by this gallant soldier inspired all ranks in a wonderful manner.*

—*The London Gazette* dated 14 December 1918

He is buried at Heath Cemetery (Plot VII; Row J Grave 13), at Harbonnières, France, (10 miles south of Albert).



*Beatham's Headstones, c1920 and current*

Sources included:

- Various web pages
- *United Service Club, Queensland: The First Century, 1892-1992* by Flight Lieutenant Murray Adams and Lieutenant Colonel Peter Charlton
- Club Meeting Minutes, Annual Reports and sundry documents