



History and Heritage Series

Private Robert Matthew Beatham, VC

Sources include various websites



These Background Notes have been prepared as 'bite-sized' light reading for our Members. The intention is to broaden understanding of selected aspects of the Club's rich history and heritage, and the remarkable people who have contributed to its development over the years. They are based primarily on a number of websites, with specific additional information in places. We acknowledge that there are probably errors and omissions. **Please contact the Club if you have additional information or comments that will assist to improve these notes.**

We thank the History Interest Group and other volunteers who have researched and prepared these Notes. The series will be progressively expanded and developed over time. They are intended as casual reading, for private use by Members only, and as they lack the rigor, attributions, and acknowledgements required for academic or public use, Members are requested not to reproduce or distribute them outside of our membership.

Private Robert Matthew Beatham, VC



Private Beatham was not a member of the United Service Club Queensland, but 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 in this series of History and Heritage Notes.

Summary

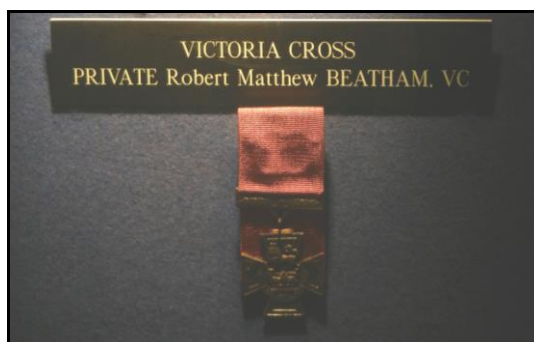
Born in England, Robert Beatham came to Australia as a teenager. He enlisted early in 1915 at 20 years of age, and accompanied the 8th Battalion to Gallipoli and to France a year later. He was wounded twice: at Pozières in 1916; and near Passchendaele the following year.

The day after the Australian Corps' successful advance on 8 August 1918, Beatham's battalion was thrown into a battle near Rosières that proved very costly. When his company was held up by machine-guns, Beatham attacked four posts, killing or capturing their crews. A few days later he was killed while attacking another gun.

He was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions.

Key details:

- Date of birth: 16 Jun 1894 (Glassonby, Cumberland, England)
- Date of enlistment: 8 Jan 1915
- Returned to Australia (illness): Aug 1915
- Re-embarked for Egypt: Sep 1915
- Re-joined 8th Battalion (Egypt): 7 Dec 1915
- Arrived Marseilles: 31 Mar 1916
- Wounded at Pozieres: Aug 1916
- Wounded at Broodseinde (Passchendaele): Oct 1917:
- Date of VC Actions: 9 Aug 1918
- Date of Death: 11 Aug 1918
- King George V presented his Victoria Cross to his mother: 8 Mar 1919



Robert Matthew Beatham, VC

Early life

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

He attended Maughanby School, Glassonby, Cumberland. He left school at 14 and worked at manual occupations in England. Robert emigrated to Australia 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 21st Battalion arriving with reinforcements in late August 1915.

Military service

Beatham enlisted as a private in the 8th Battalion (Victoria), Australian Imperial Force on 8 January 1915. He embarked on HMAT *Hororata* from Melbourne on 17 April 1915 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 8th 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 8th 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:

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



Headstones, c1920 and current

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

Private Beatham's Victoria Cross was presented to his mother by King George V at Buckingham Palace, on 8 March 1919. It is now on display at the United Service Club, Brisbane, courtesy of Mrs Jenman.



The heavily painted over portrait (left) is similar to, and based on, the photograph (right). It was not unusual to add medals awarded posthumously through such techniques.