

The Morcom brothers of Bendigo

Ron Morcom with Graeme Hosken and Heather Ford.

Sourced for DIGGER by Barry Stevenson.

Edmund John ('Jack') Morcom and Roy Stanley Morcom were the sons of Edmund John and Sarah Ann Morcom of 328 Barnard Street, Bendigo, Victoria. The brothers both enlisted in the AIF and returned from the war, with one volunteering his services again in WWII.

Company Sergeant Major 1733 Edmund John Morcom, 21st/24th Battalions/Aust Conv Depot

Jack Morcom was a draper/commercial traveller for Myer, aged 21 years and 11 months, when he volunteered on 8 April, 1915. He had three years military training in the 2nd Battalion AIR, and was serving in the Citizens Forces (militia) when he enlisted. Jack was 5'8" tall and weighed 10st 7lb, with fair complexion, blue eyes and fair hair. He and his brother Roy were both Methodists.

ANOTHER BENDIGO VOLUNTEER SERGEANT EJ MORCOM

There was a large gathering of relatives and friends at the Bendigo railway station yesterday to see Sergeant EJ Morcom off by the midday train. Sergeant Morcom is 22 years of age, and had been employed at Myer's [Department Store] for five and a half years. He was librarian at the Forest Street Methodist Sunday School during the past two and a half years, and was also an active member of the football club. As a sergeant in the local citizens' forces he had 33 men under him.

On Wednesday evening his friends assembled at the residence of his parents, Mr and Mrs EJ Morcom, Barnard Street, where a pleasant evening was spent. On behalf of the employees at Myer's he was presented with a wristlet watch, whilst the Sunday school presented him with a Bible. The wish was expressed that he would cover himself with honour and glory, and that he would have a safe return.

Source: 'Bendigo Advertiser' (Vic), 26 June, 1915, found on Trove.

Jack was allocated the 2nd Reinforcements to the 21st Battalion (6th Bde/2nd Div) at Seymour on 17 June, 1915. He sailed from Port Melbourne on board HMAT A64 *Demosthenes* on 16 July and probably landed on Gallipoli around 7 or 8 September, 1915.

On 8 November, 1915, Jack was promoted to corporal. He survived the Gallipoli Campaign without being sick or wounded and returned to Alexandria, via Mudros, on 10 January, 1916. At some time in the first half of 1916 (no date recorded, but possibly at Tel-el-Kebir in February or March), Jack was transferred from the 21st Battalion to the 24th Battalion.

On 20 May, the 24th Battalion sailed for France to join the British Expeditionary Force. After a three day journey from Marseilles, the battalion detrained at Thiennes and was billeted in the village of Robecq.

On 7 April, the 24th Battalion set out towards the front line near Armentieres. On 15 April the men entered the line near Fleurbaix for a week. At the end of April the battalion moved to L'Halle-o-Beau where they rested and trained for four weeks. It appears Jack had some UK leave, but this does not appear in his file. Jack was billeted near the village of Nieppe, from where a young French girl wrote to Jack's sister.

A SOLDIER'S LITTLE SISTER RECEIVES LETTER FROM FRENCH GIRL

Private EJ Morcom, son of Mr EJ Morcom, sorter at the post office, who lives at the corner of Violet and Barnard Streets, has had his eight days' leave in England. Up to date he has not received a scratch, and has never been ill. He is billeted with very nice people at Nieppe, a town north-west of Armentieres, and a little girl in the household, 10 years of age, has written a letter, of which the following is a translation, to Miss Gladys May Morcom, Private Morcom's little sister:—

Nieppe, 20th May, 1916, Blanche Lesage, c/o Widow Leroux. — Dear little Ally, — Your brother has given me your address in order that you can have a correspondence with a little French girl. I am very friendly with the Australian soldier, your brother. It gives me great pleasure to write you a little letter. Do not be at all uneasy about him. He is very well, in no danger, and is not in need of anything.

Dear friend, I who am ten years old, suffer through this war. I am far away from my home. In the month of October, 1914, I had to leave the house, for we were forced to evacuate our beautiful little village. What sadness for us all.

Will your parents also accept the best love and friendship of a little French girl?

Blanche Lesage.

PS. — Your brother also greets you and your parents from afar. Mamma and my sister send you their best wishes for good health. I hope that I also will have the good fortune to receive a letter from a little Australian girl.

Source: 'Bendigonian' (Bendigo, Vic), 20 July, 1916, found on Trove. Note: Gladys Morcom would have been 13 years old in 1916.

The following letter was most likely written in June 1916, soon after Lord Kitchener's death on the 5th of that month. Jack had now become part of the bombing squad of his battalion.

CORPORAL EJ MORCOM

Corporal EJ Morcom, who is a son of Mr EJ Morcom, of the Bendigo Post Office, has had 17 months of warfare with his company. He was among the last to leave Lone Pine. After leaving Gallipoli he saw service on the Suez Canal. He is now in France. Writing to his father, Corporal Morcom says:—

At the farm where we are billeted a boy 12 years of age looks after the cows. He is a bonnie boy; goes to bed early and rises early. The 'Bendigonians' you send always reach me. I read them from page to page. Christmas will about see the end of the war if things go on as they are now. Isn't it dreadful to think that a man like Kitchener has been drowned? We have daylight up to 10 pm, and day dawns at 2.30 am, so you see we have a short period of darkness. I am a battalion bomber now. It's a great job. I went to an instruction school for a week to learn the art of throwing bombs.

Source: 'Bendigonian', 7 September, 1916, found on Trove.

Jack Morcom took part in a raid by the 6th Brigade on the enemy's trenches on the night of 29/30 June, 1916. CEW Bean had this to say about the raid, southwest of the Armentieres-Wavrin railway, in Vol. III of the 'Official History', pages 267-271:

In accordance with suggestions from the higher staff, this raid was undertaken by a comparatively large assaulting force – 8 officers and 240 men from the 22nd, 23rd and 24th Battalions (organised as Centre, Right and Left Parties respectively), with a covering party of 3 officers and 61 men of the 21st Battalion – the whole under Capt Wiltshire, 22nd Battalion.

The German wire was cut for it on June 20 during a feint bombardment intended to assist another operation, and the gaps had since been kept open by turning machine-gun and shrapnel fire upon them at night, so as to prevent German working parties from repairing them. It had been intended to cover the attack with a discharge of smoke, but the wind was unfavourable.

The full preparatory bombardment lasted only four minutes, the guns then lengthening their range, not simultaneously (when the enemy might have observed the change), but gradually during the course of a minute. German prisoners afterwards expressed surprise at the shortness of the bombardment, but the attack itself seems to have been expected. The operation really comprised three simultaneous raids on separate points, and all parties met with opposition.

On the right the 23rd found the wire uncut, the trench-mortar bombs having fallen beyond it and on the parapet. However, by hacking through part of the wire and entering a German listening-post, a way was found into the trench. The Germans from the listening-post were seen running away along the parapet, but the raiders, on reaching the breastwork, were received with grenades. They climbed over and found four dug-outs, which they bombed. They could stay only five minutes in the trench, and claimed to have killed 40 of the enemy, but this estimate was very uncertain.

The centre party (22nd) found the wire partly cut, and the scouts hacked a way through it. The 'borrow-pit', however, was deep and sticky, and contained wire on spiked stakes. This caused five minutes' delay, and only half the party crossed. The bombing parties entered the trench and turned right and left, bombing the enemy. Some of these were in their dug-outs, where one of them who showed fight was killed. It was thought that the Germans were driven by these parties into the fire of the trench-mortars. One prisoner was taken, but he appears to have escaped or been killed.

The 24th [Battalion], on the left, was faced with a ditch full of water and containing barbed-wire. It took a minute to get through it. In this case also the enemy appears to have fought on his parapet, and there was a temporary falling back, through the signal to retire (the word 'bunk') having been given by some unauthorised person. The party was rallied, and re-entered the trenches. Dug-outs were bombed, and it was estimated that 50 Germans were killed, although on the left they continued to resist, firing over the parapet of a communications trench. Six prisoners were taken, but one escaped when his guard was re-crossing the ditch in No-man's land.

Four of the 24th were killed in the enemy's trench, and a fifth during the retirement by the fire of a machine gun, which played on the barbed-wire in front of the trench. Except for the three missing men, all the dead were carried back in spite of much trouble in re-crossing the ditch – a very gallant feat.

This raid – the most important of the Anzac series – involved an expenditure of about 8 000 shells, mainly of field artillery, and 1 000 trench-mortar bombs ...

The 24th Battalion entered the Pozieres battlefield on 26 July, 1916. On 4 August they launched an assault of OG1 and OG2 trenches. On 8 August, Jack was admitted to the 7th Field Ambulance with a sprained ankle, which was possibly incurred on his way out of the line the day before. He was transferred to the 1st Anzac Rest Station, then sent on to the 1/1 SSMB Casualty Clearing Station, where he was treated before being placed on an ambulance train on 10 August. Jack was admitted to the 5th General Hospital at Rouen later that day and underwent treatment until 14 August when was moved to the 2nd Convalescent Depot, also at Rouen. Morcom was discharged to the 2nd Australian Divisional Base Depot at Etaples on 30 August.

Jack rejoined his unit, now in Belgium, on 21 September, 1916. He was promoted to temporary sergeant on 27 September, replacing **Sergeant Irving** who had been evacuated wounded. This temporary rank was made substantial on 3 November. [Sgt 207, later Lieut, Robert Irving MM, 24th Bn, RTA 13/12/18.]

Three days later at Flers on 6 November, Jack was promoted company sergeant major to take the place of **CSM Sullivan** [Pte, later Capt, 126 James Sullivan, MC & Bar, MM, 24th & 21st Bns, KIA 5/10/18] who had been transferred. Jack wrote the following letter when on leave in the UK in January 1917:

NEED FOR MEN: BENDIGO'S SOLDIERS' APPEAL

Sergeant Major EJ Morcom, of Bendigo, who is with the Australian forces in France, writes to the 'Advertiser' as follows:–

This is my first attempt at letter writing to the good old paper, and nobody knows but the soldiers abroad how it is appreciated, especially the 'Bendigonian'. I read every word in it, then pass it along to the members of my company, and oft times after occupying billets that another Australian division has vacated here, the good old 'Bendigonian' can be seen. With what joy and delight we search its pages from cover to cover, taking particular care that we miss nothing.

People at home can scarcely realise what a military base in France is. This base is a seaport town, with its busy docks, the fish market, with its fisherwomen in evidence, as they are at a home seaport; its shops and market place, where each saleswoman reminds one that it is a foreign land.

And yet all the time, in streets and market place, on the docks or in the hotels, the dominant tone is khaki, and one catches in passing the familiar accent of a Londoner or of a Yorkshire 'Tommy,' or of a 'Jock' from Aberdeenshire, or the west of Scotland. These men in khaki are not in hundreds, but in thousands, and they are everywhere, for here is a great centre of work for the British Expeditionary Force.

From the military bakeries in this town go out every morning hundreds of thousands of loaves and other supplies in proportion. Millions of letters and parcels are despatched; troop trains laden with thousands of fighting men; heavy trains, too, which shake the surrounding houses, they carry such ponderous loads of ammunition and guns.

But there comes in other trains – alas, how often – bringing their loads of sufferers or of tired-out men to hospital or to rest camp. Consequently for the thousands of men at the base there is work to do – much of it very irksome, very monotonous, and some of it never-ending. A seven hours' day would seem a holiday indeed to many an officer and man in the RSO or in the hospitals, or to the drivers of motor lorries.

And yet there are slack hours, and it is in these that our men feel so far away from home and without any real interest in life. It is a tiresome thing to wander about the foreign streets, especially when it rains – as it does so often here – and there is no quiet and little comfort in a billet. But, thank God, there are other resorts. There are soldiers' institutes, YMCA huts, and many other halls, and at certain hours all these are crowded with men. All these are doing something to cheer and strengthen the men. Such places as these are a great boon to a soldier abroad.

We want more men, and must have them, if we are to see this war to a victorious end, but allow the boys to come under the voluntary system. I can assure you, Mr Editor, that the boys over here are proud that the sunny land of Australia has sent 350 000 men voluntarily. May she continue to do so.

Source: 'Bendigonian', 1 March, 1917, found on Trove.

Though the dates of Jack's UK leave are not recorded in his file, we know he was admitted to the Scottish General Hospital, Scotland, on 6 January for surgery on a growth in his nose. When he was discharged on 7 February, Jack was granted two days leave. After that leave expired, his furlough was extended until 16 February on medical grounds. He rejoined the 24th Battalion in France on 5 March.

Jack was wounded in action on 14 March, 1917, receiving a shell wound to the left shoulder. He was admitted to the 6th Field Ambulance and the 43rd Casualty Clearing Station the same day. Jack was conveyed by ambulance train to the 9th General Hospital, Rouen, on 16 March.

WOUNDED SOLDIERS SERGEANT MAJOR EJ MORCOM

Mr E.J Morcom, of the Bendigo post office sorting staff, yesterday received word from the Base Records Office, Melbourne, stating that his eldest son, Edmund, had been wounded in France. Company Sergeant Major Morcom was only recently sent back to the trenches after furlough, during which he made a trip through Scotland. He enlisted about two years ago, went through the Gallipoli campaign, and participated in some of the big battles in France.

Source: 'Bendigo Advertiser', 10 April, 1917, found on Trove.

On 23 March, Jack was transferred to the convalescent depot for five days, then to the 2nd Australian Divisional Base Depot on the 29th. He returned to his unit on 20 April.

Morcom was wounded on the second occasion on 3 May, 1917, when the 24th was engaged in the Second Battle of Bullecourt. This time he received a gun shot wound to the left buttock. He was given initial treatment at the 6th Field Ambulance and the 3rd Casualty Clearing Station, and was admitted to the 1st Australian General Hospital at Rouen on 4 May.

WOUNDED SOLDIER – CSM EJ MORCOM

Mr E.J Morcom, of the Bendigo Post Office, received word on Saturday from the Defence Department, that his son Coy Sgt Mjr EJ Morcom had been wounded for the second time. Prior to enlisting CSM Morcom was employed at Myer's. By the last mail several of his friends received letters stating that he had been recommended to a school for training for officers.

Source: 'The Bendigo Independent', 28 May, 1917, found on Trove.



Jack was transferred to England on 17 May, 1917, and admitted to the 4th Southern General Hospital on 18 May. After successful treatment, Jack was granted leave in the UK from 13 to 27 July, and ordered to report to the Weymouth Depot at the end of his furlough. Arrival at No. 2 Command Depot at Weymouth usually meant a return to Australia, but Jack must have convinced the medical board that he was fit enough to return to the action instead. On 8 August he marched out to No. 3 Command Depot at Hurdcott.

Left: In this picture published in the 'Bendigonian' on 1/11/17, Jack Morcom is seated left in the middle row.

Morcom was examined and classified as B1a2 on 9 August and B1a4 on 22 August. When classified A3 on 31 August, Jack was sent to the Overseas Training Brigade at Perham Downs the next day. He left for France on 9 October and rejoined his battalion on 14 October.

Jack wrote home about a Pierrot troop that he had seen perform, called 'The Barn Owls' [left].

Coy Sgt Mjr EJ Morcom, writing from the front to the editor of this journal, says –

I thought perhaps this would be an interesting photo for publication. These troops, I might say, have just come out of the trenches, and, having a lot of spare time on their hands, they thought they could put it to no better advantage than entertaining other troops coming from the trenches. I had the pleasure of witnessing their glorious show, and can honestly say I have sat out worse shows at home.

Source: 'Bendigonian', 28 February, 1918, found on Trove.



CSM Morcom was wounded in action (third occasion) on 21 March, 1918, when he was mustard shell gassed in his dug-out at Prowse's Point. He passed through the 5th Field Ambulance and the 2nd Casualty Clearing Station that day, then transferred to the 7th General Hospital at St Omer on 26 March. Following his

recovery, Jack passed through the 7th Convalescent Depot (Boulogne, 2 April), the 10th Convalescent Depot (Ecault, 4 April), and the Havre Base Depot (30 April), before rejoining his unit on 28 May.

Jack reported sick with diarrhoea to the 6th Field Ambulance on 7 August, 1918, and was treated at the 5th Casualty Clearing Station (7 Aug) and the 2nd Canadian General Hospital (8-17 Aug). On 18 August, Jack was admitted to the Australian Convalescent Depot at Havre. Due to his illness he missed the Battle of Amiens, which had commenced on 8 August.

Jack would remain at the convalescent depot for the rest of 1918, perhaps first as a patient and later in an administrative capacity. On 6 December, 1918, still with the rank of CSM, Jack was taken on strength of the convalescent depot as part of its staffing establishment. He was probably in the UK over the New Year period, as Jack is shown as returning from leave on 10 January, 1919.

The Australian Convalescent Depot at Havre was closed on 15 February, 1919, and Jack was struck off strength. He proceeded to England on 22 February and was billeted at the 1st Training Brigade until 17 March, when he moved to No. 1 Command Depot at Sutton Veny.

Jack wasn't too desperate to return to Australia (as a 1915 veteran he would have had high priority), because he had married **Doris May Noble** from 138 Somerset Street, Hull, UK, on 24 May, 1919. Doris had served in the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps in France for over two years.

Jack did not leave England until 23 July, 1919, on HT *Main*, accompanied by his English bride. Morcom disembarked in Melbourne on 11 October, 1919, and was discharged from the AIF on 10 December. Upon their return, Jack and Doris moved to South Yarra. In 1931 Jack was working as a salesman and Doris was a hairdresser.

Jack Morcom volunteered again in the Second World War. He served in the Middle East with the rank of captain (VX55300) from 1 September to 16 October, 1941, having volunteered on 8 May, 1941. His secondment from the CMF ended on 13 January, 1942, and he then served on fulltime duty with the CMF (V145705) until being placed on the retirement list on 16 February, 1944. Jack applied for Repatriation benefits in 1958.

Jack divorced Doris in 1944 or 1945, and he remarried in 1946 to Constance Emmiline (Emily) Dorothy McDonald (nee Rampton).

In May 1967, Constance Morcom applied for her late husband's Gallipoli Medallion. Jack's eldest son, Staff Sergeant VX129335 Douglas Roy Morcom, was a member of 'Lark Force' and died on the *Montevideo Maru* on 1 July, 1942, when it was sunk by a US submarine that was unaware that the Japanese ship was carrying Allied prisoners of war. The family believe that the stress of not knowing what had happened to Douglas for three years was a contributor to Jack and Doris' marriage breakup.

Jack Morcom passed away on 3 December, 1963, at Glenhuntly. He was cremated at Springvale and interred in the Melaleuca area. Doris Morcom was still living in 1971 and does not appear to have remarried.

Private 3443 Roy Stanley Morcom, 39th Battalion

Roy Morcom was the younger of the two brothers to enlist, doing so on 26 April, 1917, at the age of 19 years and five months. He was a salesman and living at home with his parents in Bendigo. Roy was 5'11" tall, weighed 10st 4lb, and had fair complexion, blue eyes and fair hair. He was medically examined on 25 April, 1917, so Roy may have been motivated to enlist by the Anzac Day commemoration held in Bendigo that day.

Presentation to a soldier

Private Roy Morcom, son of Mr J Morcom of the Bendigo Post Office, who has enlisted for service abroad, will leave Bendigo tomorrow to go into camp. For several years Private Morcom has been salesman at Humme & Iser's, and the employees yesterday presented him with a wristlet watch.

Source: 'Bendigo Advertiser', 8 May, 1917.

On 9 July, 1917, Roy was allocated to the 9th Reinforcements to the 59th Battalion (Vic) at Broadmeadows Camp. He is shown as having embarked in Sydney on HMAT A16 *Port Melbourne* on 16 July, indicating that his draft entrained to Sydney for embarkation.

Two months later, on 16 September, Roy disembarked at Liverpool, UK, and marched in to the 15th Training Battalion. Between 7 and 17 November, 1917, Roy was sick in the Group Hospital at Codford.

While on leave in Scotland, Roy was admitted to the 4th Scottish General Hospital in Glasgow with myalgia on 8 December, 1917. He was transferred to the 3rd Auxiliary Hospital at Dartford on 20 December, where he was treated until marching in to No. 1 Command Depot at Sutton Veny on 5 January, 1918.

Morcom marched in to the 15th Training Battalion on 2 February, 1918, and proceeded overseas to France from Southampton on 12 February. When he left the Australian Infantry Base Depot at Rouelles on 14

February, Roy was now serving with the 39th Battalion (10th Bde/3rd Div). As the 39th drew most of its men from the Bendigo area, this transfer may have been at Roy's own request.

Roy was taken on strength of the 39th Battalion on 19 February, 1918. He reported sick to the 7th Field Ambulance on 4 March with a disturbed rhythm of the heart. Roy was transferred to the 11th Casualty Clearing Station on 12 March and placed on an ambulance train (No. 32) the next day. Roy was admitted to the 53rd General Hospital at Boulogne with DAH (disordered action of the heart), where he was cared for before entering No. 1 Convalescent Depot on 21 March. On 22 April, Roy was moved to the Rest Camp in Boulogne for eight days, following which he returned to the Base Depot at Rouelles.

The photo at **right** shows Jack Morcom (left) meeting up with his brother Roy in a French hospital. This image was published in the 'Bendigonian' dated 25 July, 1918, so the photo must have been taken when both brothers were in Boulogne (probably April 1918).

On 9 May, 1918, Roy was attached to the Australian Postal Corps at Le Havre, where he worked (probably sorting mail) until returning to Rouelles on 13 July.

Roy Morcom was transferred to England on 17 July and two days later he boarded a ship (the D21 *Arawa*) at Weymouth for return to Australia with 'effort syndrome'. Effort syndrome (or 'soldier's syndrome') is an obsolete term for an anxiety reaction characterised by quick fatigue, shortness of breath, rapid heartbeat, dizziness, and other cardiac symptoms, but not caused by disease of the heart.

Invalided home a warm welcome

... Pte Roy S Morcom, son of Mr EJ Morcom, also returned by the express Tuesday and he was given an enthusiastic welcome, being warmly cheered and overwhelmed with good wishes, and ovationed by the WAACs and the crowds. The Mayor and the town clerk cordially greeted him and congratulated him on his safe return. Pte Morcom was a member of the 39th Battalion (commanded by the late Lieut-Colonel RO Henderson, DSO), and was invalided home on account of heart weakness developed by the stress of the active service conditions in France. Members of the Bendigo Ladies' Welcome Home Committee co-operated in the reception to the returning heroes, and had cigarettes and comforts for them.

Source: 'Bendigonian', 21 November, 1918.

Roy was discharged, medically unfit, on 3 December, 1918. He was entitled to the Victory Medal and the British War Medal.

Roy married Hilda Mabel Anderson of Ringwood, Vic, in 1922. According to the report of their wedding in the Box Hill 'Reporter' [Trove article 257162718], the newly-married couple were to live in Glenhuntly. In 1933 Roy and Hilda were living in Main Street, Ringwood, and Roy was working as a fruiterer when he applied for a replacement 'Returned Soldier's Badge' [sic] in that year. He submitted a claim for a Repatriation Department pension in 1935. Roy was a newsagent in Croydon from around 1939 to 1953. Roy then worked as a commercial traveller for the stationary firm, Wrappings Pty Ltd, until his retirement around 1972/73.

Roy Morcom passed away in Heidelberg (probably in the Repatriation Hospital) on 4 January, 1976, and was cremated at Springvale Crematorium. His wife Hilda passed away in April 1987.

