12224 Corporal Bertram Gordon Thomas, DCM, MSM

(1896 – 1956)

Bertram Gordon Thomas was born in Kapunda, South Australia in 1896. Aged 19 years and 6 months he joined the Australian Imperial Force on 27th August 1915. His enlistment papers describe him as 5 foot 6 inches (168 CM), 130 lbs (59kg) with fair complexion, hazel eyes and brown hair. A telegraph operator by trade he had had previous military service in the Junior and Senior Cadets before transferring to the Citizens Forces with A Company, 81 Battalion.

Upon enlistment he was appointed to C Company, 2nd Depot Battalion, AIF before being transferred to the 13th Field Artillery Brigade (FAB) as a driver and then the 6th FAB Draft on 1st November 1915 as a Gunner (Signaller). He embarked from Melbourne on 27th January 1916 and after arrival at Ismailia, Egypt in February was taken on strength of 6th FAB and posted to its Headquarters. Departing from Alexandria, he arrived at Marseilles on 23rd March 1916. In May he transferred to 21st Battery 22 FAB with whom he stayed until January 1917 when he shifted to 14 Battery 5 FAB.

In recognition of valuable services rendered with the Forces in France he was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal, the citation stating: **'From 23/9/17 to the present date (6/3/18) this man has displayed great courage and devotion to duty. At times owing to heavy casualties, he has been in charge of the Battery staff and by his persistency and courage maintained communications under very heavy shell-fire'.** Following leave in the UK from 5 to 17 October 1917 he rejoined his unit in Belgium.

Promotion to temporary Bombardier (Lance Bombardier equivalent today) occurred in February 1918 and for action at Lavieville on 24 April 1918 he was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal **'For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. During a very heavy gas and high explosive bombardment which cut all the telephone lines this NCO worked for two hours in a small box respirator on the lines and succeeded in establishing communication. On returning to his Battery he assisted in putting out fires and saving two guns from damage. His resourcefulness and courage set a fine example to all'.**

Promoted Bombardier in May 1918 he was wounded in action (gassed) on 1 July 1918 and admitted to hospital in Boulogne. After rejoining his unit he was transferred to 2 Divisional Artillery Column and then to 15 Battery, 5 FAB in July 1918. Promoted to temporary Corporal (equivalent to Bombardier today) in August 1918 he was on leave in the UK in October 1918 and in hospital sick when the war ended. Postings with HQ AIF in the UK followed where he attended a telegraphy course at the Central Telegraph Office, London. Corporal Thomas returned to Australia on the Orontes in June 1920.

Bertram Thomas died in May 1956.