

**13 October 1917:
Phillip Schubert
34th Battalion AIF**

Anton Schubert and Karoline Walk arrived in Australia in early March 1853. They had been married in October 1843 in Kafertal, Germany. Both came from farming families, but in rural Kafertal they had suffered a string of bad luck. The economic crisis of the 1840s had hit their family very hard and four of their children died when they were scarcely a year old. The Schuberts decided to take their three remaining children and risk the passage to Australia in order to start a new life. Two of them died during the voyage and when they finally got to New South Wales only their oldest child was still with them. Anton and Karoline went on to have four more children while in Australia. The oldest, Joseph, was born in Singleton in January 1855 and married Elizabeth Benton, the daughter of English emigrants in February 1884. They had thirteen children and their sixth child was Phillip Stanley Schubert, born in Singleton on 31 December 1892. As a boy, Phillip regularly helped on his parents' farm and vineyard. His father Joseph spoke English fluently, but could not disguise his German origins.

To war

Phillip eventually left the farm and found a job as a clerk with a railway company. The railways, like the coal mining industry, were new economic activities in the region and provided work for a large number of young men. Phillip moved to Scone, but did not forget his parents, brothers and sisters and took advantage of his working for the railway to send them regular parcels containing food and other items. Inspired by the enthusiasm of the volunteers in the recruiting campaign *The March of the Wallabies*, which also passed through Scone and Singleton, Schubert left his job with the railways on 7 January 1916 and reported to the recruiting office in West Maitland. His decision to join up was not taken overnight and he would almost certainly have consulted his family before doing so. He was, after all, of German origin and it was by no means impossible that there might be other members of the family fighting on the enemy side.



Sergeant Phillip Schubert (Schubert)

Soon afterwards, the 23-year-old Schubert was posted to D company of the 34th Battalion and was promoted to Sergeant, probably because of his previous military experience serving with the local militia. He underwent basic training at Albion Showground in West-Maitland and in early March 1916 the battalion moved to a new training camp in Rutherford. On 1 May 1916 the 34th Battalion boarded a train for Sydney, where they embarked on the Hororata the following day. After a brief stopover in Port Said on the Suez Canal, the men sailed for England aboard the Aragon. The battalion disembarked in Plymouth on 23 June and marched to Salisbury for further training. On arrival, Schubert immediately

wrote a postcard home: *'Just a [postcard] to let you know I have arrived in England and am quite well. I will write a long letter to you as soon as I get settled. Give my love to all at home and kiss little Ettie [Ethel, his eight year old sister] for me from your loving son.'* In mid-December Schubert was admitted to hospital suffering from flu, but was fit again two weeks later. He wrote another card home at the beginning of January 1917: *'Just a [postcard] of myself & my mate to let you see that I am still alive and smiling. It must be because we think of home as we go about our daily work.'*

The front.

His training continued and he was not able to join his unit until 2 September 1917, sailing from Southampton and arriving in Le Havre. His younger brother John Edward ('Ted') also wanted to join up, but Schubert did not want him to. In a letter home he warned him: *'Don't come over here as conditions are appalling and I will be most angry if you disregard this advice from your Brother - Don't do it, Don't join up!'* At the end of September the 34th Battalion, as part of the 3rd Australian Division was transferred to Belgium where they found themselves in the middle of the Battle of Passchendaele. On 12 October 1917 the battalion carried out a disastrous attack on Passchendaele itself. The battalion's jumping off line was what is now Tyne Cot Cemetery, and its final objective lay just beyond Passchendaele village. The attack quickly went awry and the Australians only managed to seize a small piece of ground. Losses were heavy, however. According to official sources, Sergeant Phillip Stanley Schubert was killed on 13 October 1917. The chaplain of the 34th Battalion, John Calder, wrote a letter to Schubert's mother informing her: *'So far as I can make out, he was killed instantaneously by a machine-gun bullet during the first or second day of the attack. As we had eventually to retire from the positions we captured on that occasion, it was impossible for me to bury his body, but that task would be eventually carried out by the Canadian troops who relieved us in that sector.'* In reality, Schubert was probably killed on 12 October, as there were no attacks on that part of the front on 13 October. It is, incidentally, not unusual to find that official sources give incorrect

dates, bearing in mind that attacks often disintegrated into complete chaos and the difficulties caused by subsequent reorganisation. The location at which Schubert's body was eventually found also suggests an incorrect date. In March 1920 his mortal remains were found on the site of Tyne Cot Cemetery and Schubert was reburied only a hundred metres from where he was found. His family certainly never forgot him. *'His mother was observed to cry for him on her 90th birthday when Phillip's name was mentioned. This occurred some forty two years after his death and his family was always emotional when discussing the tragedy of their great loss of a son and brother.'* She was never able to visit her son's grave. It was too far to travel and the journey was too expensive. Schubert's younger brother, who had also wanted to join up, gave one of his sons 'Phillip' as a second forename in memory of the brother who had been killed in the war. By an interesting coincidence Terry Phillip Schubert was born almost exactly 43 years to the day after his deceased uncle.



Grave 27/D/9 in Tyne Cot Cemetery (MMP)