

# Australian World War I 'Unknown Soldier' Identified as

## Private George Richard Storey



*13 Aug 2008* - Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, the Hon. Warren Snowdon MP, today confirmed that an Australian World War I soldier recovered from a lost grave in Belgium in 2006 has been identified as Private George Richard Storey.

"It is with great pleasure that we are now able to confirm the name of George Storey, and have notified his family of the final resting place of their brave relative killed during the Battle of Polygon Wood in September 1917, so far from home," said Mr Snowdon.

Private Storey's remains, along with those of Private John Hunter, Sergeant George Calder and two other unidentified Australian soldiers, were discovered during excavations near Westhoek, Belgium two years ago.

"While very good research work produced a list of seven possible names for the men, DNA matching techniques were only able to confirm the identity of two of the five prior to the re-burial ceremony with full military honours last year," said Mr Snowdon.

Confirmation of George Storey's identification was made using DNA together with compelling historical research.

"It has been a long, arduous process, but now Private Storey's place of burial is known to his country and most importantly his family. Plans are underway to replace the current headstone at his grave from 'known unto God' to 'Private George Richard Storey'".

A small, informal ceremony will be held in Belgium to mark the occasion and it is hoped that representatives of the Storey family will be in attendance.

Private Storey was born in London, England but was working as a farm hand in Western Australia when he enlisted on 31 March 1916 as a 20 year-old.

As part of 5th reinforcement, he was posted to the 51st Battalion and embarked for Europe on 20 September 1916 where he joined his unit on 19 December.

He was wounded on 9 June 1917 but recovered in time to rejoin his unit on 27 August 1917 and participate in the attack on Polygon Wood.

He was killed in action on 30 September 1917.

His brother, Jack Storey, survived the war and returned to Australia in January 1918.



David Storey with a photographs of his father Jack on the left and his Uncle George on the right..

# DNA proves unearthed remains are those of WA Digger

JOSEPH CATANZARO

**T**he 91-year-old mystery over the final resting place of a missing World War I Digger was solved yesterday, with cutting-edge DNA technology identifying remains found in an unmarked Belgian grave as those of WA soldier George Storey.

A farmhand from Subiaco, 21-year-old Pte Storey was one of 5770 Australian soldiers killed in 1917 during the battle of Polygon Wood.

Buried in an unmarked grave by his mates, it was suspected his remains were among those of five Diggers unearthed in August 2006 by workmen excavating a pipeline in Belgium.

Australian military authorities later acknowledged the location had been a temporary burial ground and that it was likely the five bodies were not exhumed and reinterred in permanent cemeteries because a road had been re-routed over their graves.

By matching DNA samples taken from the remains and close relatives, scientists initially identified two of the Diggers but Pte Storey was among the three soldiers who could not be identified because DNA technology at the time required a sample from a close female relative, which was not available.

In April last year, a vital breakthrough which allowed scientists to match DNA from the remains with that of close male relatives rekindled hopes for family members that identification would be possible.

Pte Storey's nephew David Storey, 78, of Menora, said he was contacted by the Department of Defence and asked to provide a saliva swab.

Yesterday, the family's hopes were realised when a call from the Australian Army History Unit confirmed Belgian scientists had matched Mr Storey's DNA with that of his long-lost uncle.

"We had almost given up on finding him," Mr Storey said. "I'm over the moon."

It was April 1916 when Pte Storey



Family history: David Storey with photographs of father Jack, left, and uncle George, whose body has been

and his older brother Jack Storey, 22, enlisted in the 51st Battalion and left Fremantle on a troop ship bound for Europe.

By December, both found themselves posted to France, embroiled in heavy fighting on the Western Front.

Shot in the leg, Jack was sent home before the year was out. But despite being wounded on June 9, 1917, George was kept on to fight.

On September 26, 1917, Pte Storey was part of the ANZAC force tasked with securing and holding a stretch of ground known as Polygon Wood.

Some 5770 Diggers were killed but by the following day the position was taken and held.

According to army records, on September 30, while the Allies were cleaning up, Pte Storey was killed. Witness accounts taken from letters received by Pte Storey's mother in 1918 told of how the young soldier and three others were hit and killed by a German artillery shell outside their dugout.

In their letters, his mates wrote

glowingly of their friend Pte Storey, buried with the other dead close to the dugout where they had been killed.

"We put up a stick to mark the grave with his name on it," one wrote. "He was killed the morning of the day we were to move out."

David Storey, the son of the elder Storey brother, said when he received the news his uncle's remains had been identified, the overall feeling was excitement.

"I've done so much research that I felt as if I knew him," he said.

Mr Storey said the remains of the five Diggers found in August 2006 were reinterred with full military honours in the Butte Cemetery in Polygon Wood last October on the 90th anniversary of the battle.

"My uncle was buried as an unknown soldier. Now they are changing his headstone," he said.

Minister for Defence Science and Personnel Warren Snowdon said the army would fly David Storey and his younger brother Geoffrey to Belgium this year for a graveside memorial service.

Source [West Australian newspaper](#) – many thanks