

Anzacs pursued around the globe



James O'Loan

TEARS swell in Johan Vanderwalle's eyes when he mentions lost Anzac John "Jack" Hunter.

The amateur historian from Belgium arrived in Queensland last week to meet the descendants of the Anzac, a runner in World War I who died in his brother's arms in the battle for Polygon Wood.

If it weren't for Mr Vanderwalle, Pte Hunter's remains may never have been identified, robbing the Hunter and Millis families of the chance to lay their fallen ancestor to rest.

But the Belgian, who runs an inn back home called Anzac's Rest, was never going to let that happen.

His trip to Australia is about finding the essence of the three previously unidentified Diggers whose remains he helped find in 2006 — to blow life into their bones.

"I wanted to see the places they grew up, to walk in their footsteps, to listen to (their family's) stories for my heart," Mr Vanderwalle said.

He said he had dug up 15 bodies across the battle-scarred area around Ieper (Ypres), where trench warfare between the Allies and Germans was rife in 1917. None, however, was as life-



AT peace ... Mollie Millis, Johan Vanderwalle and Jim Hunter, and, above left, Pte John Hunter. Picture: Darren England

"I wanted to see the places they grew up, to walk in their footsteps, to listen to stories for my heart"

Johan Vanderwalle

like and striking as Nanango's Jack Hunter, who died in younger brother Jim's arms at the age of 28 after a shell exploded near him.

Jim — whose nephew, also named Jim, shared a laugh with Mr Vanderwalle this week — carefully wrapped Jack in a groundsheet and buried him in a makeshift grave that would be lost for nearly 90 years.

"It was just like a mummy, so well-preserved, and we will never see anything like this again," Mr Vanderwalle said.

He will also stop in Canberra to present sketches of the three Diggers — Pte Hunter, Pte George Story of Perth and Sgt George Calder of Perth — to the Australian War Memorial.

After that, a journey to meet the descendants of Pte Story and Sgt Calder in Melbourne and Perth awaits.

The three soldiers are part of a group of five brave Australians buried together in 1917, known as the Zonnebeke Five.

Two remain unidentified. Their remains were found

two years ago by accident when a gas company dug up a road near the town of West Hoek, in Flanders.

Through DNA tests with their living ancestors, the three Diggers were identified and re-interred with full military honours in Belgium last year.

In attendance were Pte Hunter's niece Mollie Millis and nephew Jim Hunter, both of Brisbane.

It was the type of closure the lost Digger's father Harry and surviving brother Jim never felt.