

**St. Nicholas Churchyard,  
North Cotes, Lincolnshire, England**

**War Grave**



*Lest We Forget*

**World War 1**



**23897 SERJEANT**

**E. HANDLEY**

**ROYAL FLYING CORPS**

**20TH AUGUST, 1917**

*Died While On Duty*

*Jesu Mercy. R.I.P.*

## Ernest HANDLEY

Ernest Handley was born on 2nd July, 1893 in Rockhampton, Queensland to parents Albert Ernest & Catherine Mary Handley (nee Crook).

Albert Ernest Handley, father of Ernest Handley, died on 20th February, 1906 in Queensland.

In 1915 Ernest Handley became a member of the Queensland Volunteer Flying Civilians, an organisation formed by Thomas Macleod, Barrister, to train civilians as aviators prior to them signing up for active service.

In 1916 Major McLeod and Lieutenant Rendle took seven trainees who had finished their instruction to England to enlist with the Royal Flying Corps. They arrived at the port of Plymouth, England on 19th February, 1916 from SS *Remuera*. The seven pilots were Percy Snell, William Fraser, David R. Stitt, Ernest Handley, Herbert Smith, George Cherry, H.H. Turk. All of these pilots ended up serving with the Royal Flying Corps on the Western Front.

Ernest Handley joined Royal Flying Corps in England on 26th February, 1916 at South Farnborough, England. He was aged 22 years & his trade was listed as "Aviator for Miscellaneous". His address was listed as c/o Agent General for Queensland, Strand, W.C. His next of kin was listed as Mrs C. M. Scott, c/o Mrs A. Klapworth, Cambridge St., Rockhampton, Queensland.

2nd Air Mechanic Ernest Handley was issued a Service number of 23897.

2nd Class Air Mechanic Ernest Handley, Royal Flying Corps, Cambridge Street, Rockhampton, Queensland gained his Royal Aero Club Aviator's Certificate on 26th April, 1916 at Military School, Gosport, England on a Maurice Farman Biplane.

2824

**HANDLEY, Ernest**  
Cambridge Street, Rockhampton, Queensland.

**Born** 2nd July 1893 **at** Rockhampton

**Nationality** British

**Rank, Regiment, Profession** 2nd Class Air Mechanic, R.F.C.

**Certificate taken on** Maurice Farman Biplane,

**At** Military School, Gosport.

**Date** 26th April 1916

Accidentally killed 20th August 1917

2nd Class Air Mechanic Ernest Handley was graded as 1st Class Flyer from 21st June, 1916.

2nd Class Air Mechanic Ernest Handley was promoted to Sergeant on 1st August, 1916 while with No. 6 Squadron & was flying two-seater BE2d's (one of the first of its type to be received by the squadron) on artillery observation missions that required the use of a wireless set for transmitting messages, as well as several bombing missions. The increased capabilities of the BE2d over the ageing BE2c gave it an endurance of close to four and a half hours, bringing distant strategic targets within range for the first time in the war.

Sergeant Ernest Handley was awarded the Croix de Guerre for a daring long range combined bombing raid on 2nd August, 1916 involving aircraft from five squadrons. The target for the mission was the Zeppelin storage facility in Brussels, at the extreme range of even the BE2d, especially as each aircraft was required to carry two 112lb bombs. Unable to take an observer because of severe weight limitations, each pilot had to fly alone with no one to help with

the navigation or defending the aircraft. Despite several mishaps along the way, the mission was a success, with Ernest Handley dropping both of his bombs from 3,000 feet on to the Zeppelin shed at Etterbeek, causing significant damage. After re-grouping to the west of Brussels at Strythem, the BE2s flew home under the protection of two separate sets of escort fighters (one of the FE2b escort fighters was flown by the then Sergeant James McCudden) and landed safely at their respective aerodromes with almost empty fuel tanks. The planning and execution of where and when the escort fighters would intercept the returning bombing force was finely calculated, leaving little to chance, but the plan worked. *(Information on No. 6 Squadron & mission for 2nd August, 1916 from [stevebusterjohnson.com](http://stevebusterjohnson.com))*

From Supplement to The London Gazette – 1 May, 1917:

*Crois de Guerre*

*23897 Serjeant Ernest Handley, Royal Flying Corps.*

### **Croix de Guerre**

The Croix de Guerre is a military decoration of France. It was first awarded during World War 1 & again in World War 2 as well as other conflicts. The Croix de Guerre was also commonly bestowed on foreign military forces allied to France.

The Croix de Guerre may be awarded either as an individual award or as a unit award to those soldiers who distinguish themselves by acts of heroism involving combat with the enemy. The medal is awarded to those who have been "mentioned in dispatches", meaning a heroic deed or deeds were performed meriting a citation from an individual's headquarters unit. The unit award of the Croix de Guerre with palm was issued to military units whose members performed heroic deeds in combat and were subsequently recognized by headquarters.

*(Information & photo from Wikipedia)*



On 9th August, 1916 Sergeant Ernest Handley (pilot) & Lieutenant W. S. Wright (observer) were flying BE2d 6728 when they had to force-land during wireless practice due to engine failure near Abeele, Belgium. Both men were uninjured.

Sergeant Ernest Handley was posted to Wireless and Observers School at Brooklands Aerodrome, Surrey, England in February, 1917 as an instructor.

Sergeant Ernest Handley (piloting) & Second Lieutenant Hugh Stewart Latimer Jordan (Observer) were flying RE8 A3672 on 20th August, 1917 out of Brooklands Aerodrome. The wings collapsed in a spinning nose-dive near Addlestone, Surrey, England.

Sergeant Ernest Handley died at 9.45 am on 20th August, 1917 near Addlestone, Surrey, England as the result of an aeroplane accident.

A Court of Enquiry was held on 21st August, 1917. The Casualty Card recorded the following information: "C of Inqy machine in perfect condition when taken up – viewed wreckage & inspected log books – machine did not catch fire in air – wings collapsed in air during a dive – cause unknown. Pilot accomplished flyer."

Newspaper item – The Times – August 23rd, 1917:

### Coroner's Inquest

The West Surrey Coroner held an inquest at Addlestone yesterday on the bodies of Lieutenant Hugh Stewart Latimer Jordan, R.F.C., and Sergeant E. Handley, R.F.C., who were killed on Monday morning in the fall of an Army biplane in a meadow near Woodham Grange, Addlestone. Describing the accident, John Hoare, a gardener at Woodham Grange, said that about 10 o'clock on Monday morning he saw two machines in the air one above the other. Suddenly there were two explosions, and the lower machine came straight down for some distance, when it straightened out and the right wing folded back on to the body of the machine. It next took a horizontal course for some distance with one plane, which also suddenly folded back. The machine then pitched over some trees into a field. The witness ran across and found Lieutenant Jordan and Sergeant Handley under the engine dead. Evidence was given that the machine was in perfect order when it went up from Brooklands Aerodrome.

Flight Commander Cecil Faber said that Sergeant Handley was acting as pilot and was instructing Lieutenant Jordan as an observer. An officer said he saw the machine come down with a spinning dive from 3,000 feet. Verdict was returned in each case of 'Death by Misadventure.'

Lieutenant Jordan was the son of Mr H. H. Jordan of Wembley. Sergeant Handley had flown in France and had received a medal for bravery from the French Government. He was the son of Albert Ernest and Catherine Handley, of Queensland, Australia.

A death for Ernest Handley, aged 24, was registered in the September quarter, 1917 in the district of Chertsey, Surrey, England.

Sergeant Ernest Handley was buried in St. Nicholas Churchyard, North Cotes, Lincolnshire, England and now has a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone. His father had been born at North Cotes, Lincolnshire on 3rd February, 1868.

Sergeant Ernest Handley was entitled to British War Medal & the Victory Medal, however they were returned unclaimed.

Name.	Corps.	Rank.	Regtl. No.
HANDLEY Ernest.	R. F. C.	Sgt.	23897.
Medal.	Roll.	Page.	Remarks.
VICTORY	RFC/101 B	34.	} Retd unclaimed NW/5/37297
BRITISH	do	do	
STAR			
Theatre of War first served in			
Date of entry therein			

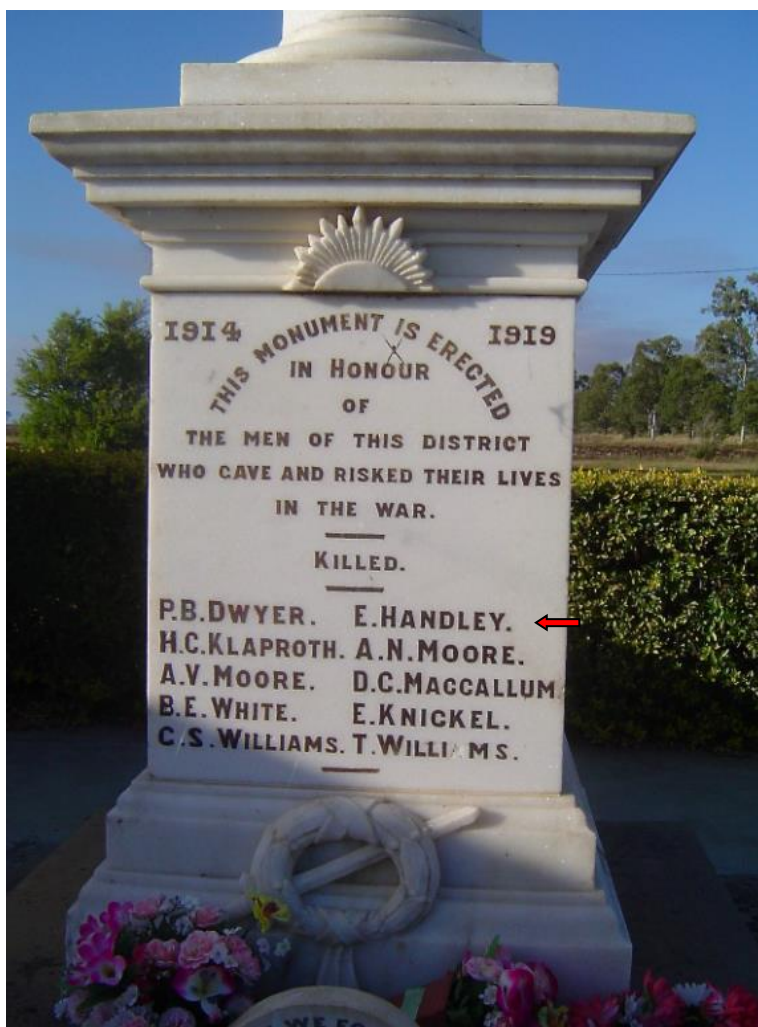
The Commonwealth War Graves Commission lists Serjeant Ernest Handley – service number 23897, of Royal Flying Corps. No family details are listed.



E. Handley is remembered on the Alton Downs War Memorial, located on Ridgeland Road, Alton Downs, Queensland.



**Alton Downs War Memorial** (Photos from AWM Places of Pride – Kevin McSweeney)



Sergeant Ernest Handley is remembered on the Commemorative Roll Book, located in the Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra. The Commemorative Roll records the names of those Australians who died during or as a result of wars in which Australians served, but who were not serving in the Australian Armed Forces and therefore not eligible for inclusion on the Roll of Honour.



**Commemorative Roll** (Photo from AWM)



**Commemorative Area of the Australian War Memorial** (Capital Photographer)

(3 pages of Sergeant Ernest Handley's Royal Flying Corps Service records are available at National Archives UK).

*Information obtained from the CWGC, Australian War Memorial (Roll of Honour, First World War Embarkation Roll, Red Cross Wounded & Missing) & National Archives Australia*



**Sergeant Ernest Handley**





## **Newspaper Notices**

### **BIPLANE TAKES FIRE IN AIR**

#### **Two Aviators Killed in Surrey**

Two army airmen were killed in a flying accident near Addlestone, Surrey, shortly before noon to-day. Their biplane caught fire in the air and fell to earth, with the result that the observer, Lieutenant H. S. Jordan, of the R.F.A., attached to the R.F.C., and the pilot, Sergeant E. Handley of the R.F.C., were killed. The machine fell with such force that portions of the framework were buried three feet in the earth, and the bodies were buried under the engine.

*(Evening Telegraph, Dundee, Scotland – 20 August, 1917)*

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### **INQUESTS ON AIRMEN**

A verdict of death by misadventure was returned at an inquest yesterday at Addlestone, Surrey, on Lieutenant Hugh Stewart Latimer Jordan, R.F.C., and Sergt. E. Handley, R.F.C., who were killed while flying an Army biplane last Monday.

Evidence showed that Sergt. Handley was acting as pilot, and was instructing Lieutenant Jordan as observer.

The machine was in perfect order when it went up from Brooklands aerodrome. When it was near Addlestone at a height of 3000 feet two explosions were heard and the biplane came down with a spinning nose-dive, during which both wings folded back and the machine fell into a field.

*(The Scotsman, Edinburgh, Midlothian, Scotland – 23 August, 1917)*

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### **AIRMEN KILLED NEAR ADDLESTONE**

#### **A FALL OF 3,000 FEET**

Lieut. H. Jordan, of the Royal Field Artillery, attached to the Royal Flying Corps, and Sergt. E. Handley, of the R.F.C., were killed instantaneously shortly before 10 o'clock on Monday morning owing to the fall of an Army biplane in a meadow near Woodham Grange, Addlestone.

An explosion in the air attracted the attention of persons in the neighbourhood, and it was then seen that a biplane, at a height of between 3,000 and 4,000 feet, had met with an accident. The machine made an almost straight dive to the earth, and struck the ground with great force. A rush was made for the spot, and the observer and pilot were found in a mass of wreckage. Sergt. Handley, the pilot, was under the engine, which itself was buried in the ground. At first little more than the boots of Sergt E. Handley were visible, and when his body was recovered it was terribly mangled and mangled. Lying near was the body of the observer, Lieut. H. Jordan, who had been but recently transferred to the Royal Flying Corps, and despatched from Reading to Brooklands. His home is at Wembley, near Harrow.

Sergt. Handley was an Australian, and was regarded as a thoroughly skilful pilot.

*(The Surrey Advertiser and County Times, England – 25 August, 1917)*

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### **DEATH OF SERGEANT HANDLEY**

#### **ANOTHER CENTRAL QUEENSLAND AVIATOR**

Information has come to hand that Sergeant Ernest Handley, the only son of his widowed mother and grandson of Mr. and Mrs. Crook, of Alton Downs, was killed in an aeroplane accident in England on the 20th of August. In this,



the latest loss to the Alton Downs district, the deepest sympathy has been extended by the residents therein to Mrs. C. M. Scott, the mother, to his only surviving sister, Mrs Klapproth, and to his grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Crook. It may be mentioned that young Handley, at the onset of the war, enlisted and went to England and joined the Royal Flying Corps. Having attained the rank of sergeant, he was sent to France and attached to the artillery, and for eight months did effective service there. For one bombing exploit or raid effectively carried out the French Government conferred on him the Croix de Guerre, the French equivalent of our own Distinguished Service medal. On his return to England from France for a rest he was called upon to undertake special duty, and it was while thus engaged that this young brave Queenslander, who felt at home amid the clouds, met with the accident in which he was killed.

*(Morning Bulletin, Rockhampton, Queensland – 3 September, 1917) & (The Capricornian, Rockhampton, Q'land – 8 Sep 1917)*

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## **PERSONAL**

News has been received of the death of Sergeant Ernest Handley, R.F.C. (late of the C.C.M.), who was killed on August 20 as the result of an aeroplane accident at Brooklands. Sergeant Handley went to England in 1915 with Mr McLeod to join the R.F.C. After training he was sent to France, where he won the Croix de Guerre. He was instructing at Brooklands, where he met his death.

*(The Brisbane Courier, Queensland – 11 September, 1917) & (Toowoomba Chronicle, Queensland – 12 September, 1917) &*

*(The Queenslander, Brisbane, Queensland – 15 September, 1917)*

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## **PROBATE OF WILL**

In the Supreme Court yesterday the Deputy Registrar, Mr E. W. Hughes, granted probate of the will of Ernest Handley, formerly of Brisbane, turner, but late of Brooklands, England, a sergeant in the Royal Flying Corps, to Catherine May Scott, of Jericho, widow, the sole executrix named in the will, The papers were filed by Mr B. M. Lilley.

*(Morning Bulletin, Rockhampton, Queensland – 4 January, 1918)*

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## **ROLL OF HONOUR**

HANDLEY – In memory of our dear Brother, Sergeant Ernest Handley, Royal Flying Corps, who was killed by accident at Brooklands, England, on August 20th, 1917.

He gave his life for his country.

(Inserted by his Sister and Brother-in-law, F. and A. Klapproth)

*(Morning Bulletin, Rockhampton, Queensland – 20 August, 1918)*

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## **IN MEMORIAM**

HANDLEY – In loving memory of Sergeant Ernest Handley, aviator, killed August 20th, 1917.

(Inserted by his widowed mother, sister, and brother-in-law, C. M. Scott, and F. and A. Klapproth)

*(Morning Bulletin, Rockhampton, Queensland – 21 August, 1918) & (The Capricornian, Rockhampton, Q'land – 24 August, 1918)*

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## ROLL OF HONOUR

HANDLEY – In sorrowing yet proud memory of my dear son, Sergeant Ernest Handley, Royal Flying Corps Croix de Guerre, who was killed in action, August 20th, 1917.

Only the grave of a soldier  
    Only a mould of earth,  
Far from the land of wattle,  
    The place that gave him birth.  
In a far off land he is lying.  
    He answered his country's call,  
And died an Australian hero,  
    Fighting to save us all.

(Inserted by his loving mother, Alton Downs)

(*The Capricornian*, Rockhampton, Queensland – 23 August, 1919)

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## Airman Returned

### Major Thomas McLeod

#### Queensland Volunteer Fliers

Major Thomas M'Leod, of the Royal Flying Corps, who organised in the early months of the war a Queensland Flying Corps, and subsequently proceeded to England, is back in Brisbane, having returned to Australia by the transport Bremen. Long before war broke out, Major M'Leod made a hobby of aviation. He had built gliders and used them at Oxley in 1910, and during a visit to England in 1911-12 he reported gratis on the latest machines to the Commonwealth Government, and had passenger flights at Salisbury Plains. When war suddenly broke over the world, he decided to place his knowledge at the disposal of the nation, and, to that end, he succeeded in organising a Queensland volunteer flying corps, which built a machine for instructional purposes, and subsequently proceeded to England. His idea was to train civilians in rudimentary work. After training had been in progress for some time, it was arranged with the British Army Council that the men should be sent home. In an interview with a "Telegraph" representative on Wednesday, Major M'Leod gave information as to his little corps.

He said that the Army Council had stated that they would be very glad to have the men, provided they could pass certain necessary tests. He also offered to get an almost unlimited supply of splendid recruits for flying service amongst the young sporting Queenslanders, whom he considered eminently fitted for flying work, but the Army Council said they only wished to take home the men to whom he had given some training. Messrs. H. H. Snell and Percy W. Snell went home first, and Major M'Leod then took with him Messrs. P. R. Stitt, W. Fraser, V. Rendle, **Ernest Handley**, H. G. Smith, and G. M. Cherry. He taught his men wireless telegraphy on the voyage over, and, by the time they arrived in England they were more expert than was required for service. He took his men to the War Office and was granted an interview by General Henderson, general officer commanding the R.F.C., and Colonel Marinden, and Major Warner. After a short interview, all were accepted without even passing a single test. Major M'Leod himself was offered a ground position, as he was told that, being over 30, it was out of the question that he should become a pilot. He expressed his intense desire of doing the same work as the men he had brought with him, and General Henderson agreed to make a concession in his case and gave him a commission as a pilot. Of the others the following obtained commissions: Messrs. Turk, Snell, Stitt, and Fraser, the remainder becoming sergeant-pilots. Later on, Mr Rendle was granted a commission. In addition to Major M'Leod, Messrs. Smith, **Handley**, Turk, Snell, and Fraser went to France as pilots, and received decorations. Major M'Leod received the Croix de Guerre with Palm (the first-class grade of the decoration), **Mr. Handley the Croix de Guerre with Palm**, Mr Turk the Military Cross, and Mr. Smith the D.C.M. Since then, Mr. Snell had been awarded the Air Force Cross, and Major M'Leod has received the O.B.E. The following members of the corps were killed on active service: Messrs. Fraser, Turk, M.C., and Handley. Mr. Stitt was kept in England for home service, and Mr. Rendle, on account of a defect in one eye, could not pass for general service, and was kept for training work in England and for ferrying machines to

France. Mr. Cherry also, was kept on instructional work in England, and since has been granted a commission in the Royal Air Force.

It is understood that Major M'Leod received his Croix de guerre for observation work in the battle of Arras and Vimy Ridge, in France, in face of the enemy. The O.B.E. was awarded for the reorganising and redisciplining two large training stations in the London area. It is a remarkable fact that he ended his association with the Royal Flying Corps by being the commanding officer at the station at which he started as a pupil.

*(The Telegraph, Brisbane, Queensland – 31 July, 1919)*

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## **AVIATION PIONEER**

### **MAJOR T. MACLEOD LOOKS BACK**

#### **BEGINNINGS IN QUEENSLAND**

After a hurried trip to England, Major Tom Macleod, O.B.E., Croix de Guerre (Palm), an aviation pioneer in this State, has returned to Brisbane. The object of the Major's visit to England was to see his mother, now 80 years of age, who lives in Cornwall.

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#### **ORGANISING AN AIR FORCE.**

"Under an arrangement with the Commonwealth Defence. Department, the Major proceeded, "when I went to England in 1911, I made investigations with a view to establishing an air force for Australia. This commission, of course, enabled me to see a great deal more of military aeronautics in England than other wise I would have been able to see. The War Office arranged for me to go to Lark Hill, Salisbury Plain, and showed me all that was being done in aviation there. The Royal Flying Corps was a very small thing in those days. Speaking from memory, I think they had only some six machines there. I had a number of flights over Salisbury Plain in, an old box kite biplane called the Bristol. In that type of machine the pilot and the passenger sat in little wicker seats projecting beyond the lower plane. There was no windscreen, and you had an uninterrupted view ahead, and also beneath. The machine was of the 'pusher' type, with the engine and propeller behind, and an elevator in front. Of course, you were very exposed in that type of aircraft. One day, I remember, I was taken up under very adverse conditions. It was very gusty and rainy, and as the controlling of the machine used was very difficult and tiring. I thought the performance was a very good one.

#### **QUEENSLAND VOLUNTEER. AIRMEN.**

"Some two years after I returned to Queensland," Major Macleod went on, "the Great War broke out. I formed a small volunteer flying contingent force here and built a machine. Accompanied by my eight colleagues we proceeded to England and offered our services to the War Office. Ours was the only contingent of this kind from any part of the Empire, so that, although I then was four years over the maximum age for pilots, at my urgent request General Henderson, who was in charge of the Royal Flying Corps, regarding the circumstances as unique, gave me a commission. A good position was offered to me in one of the ground depots at which aircraft are made or overhauled, but I preferred active service with the men whom I had brought over with me. These were:—

"Herbert Turk, who was awarded an M.C., but who was killed in France.

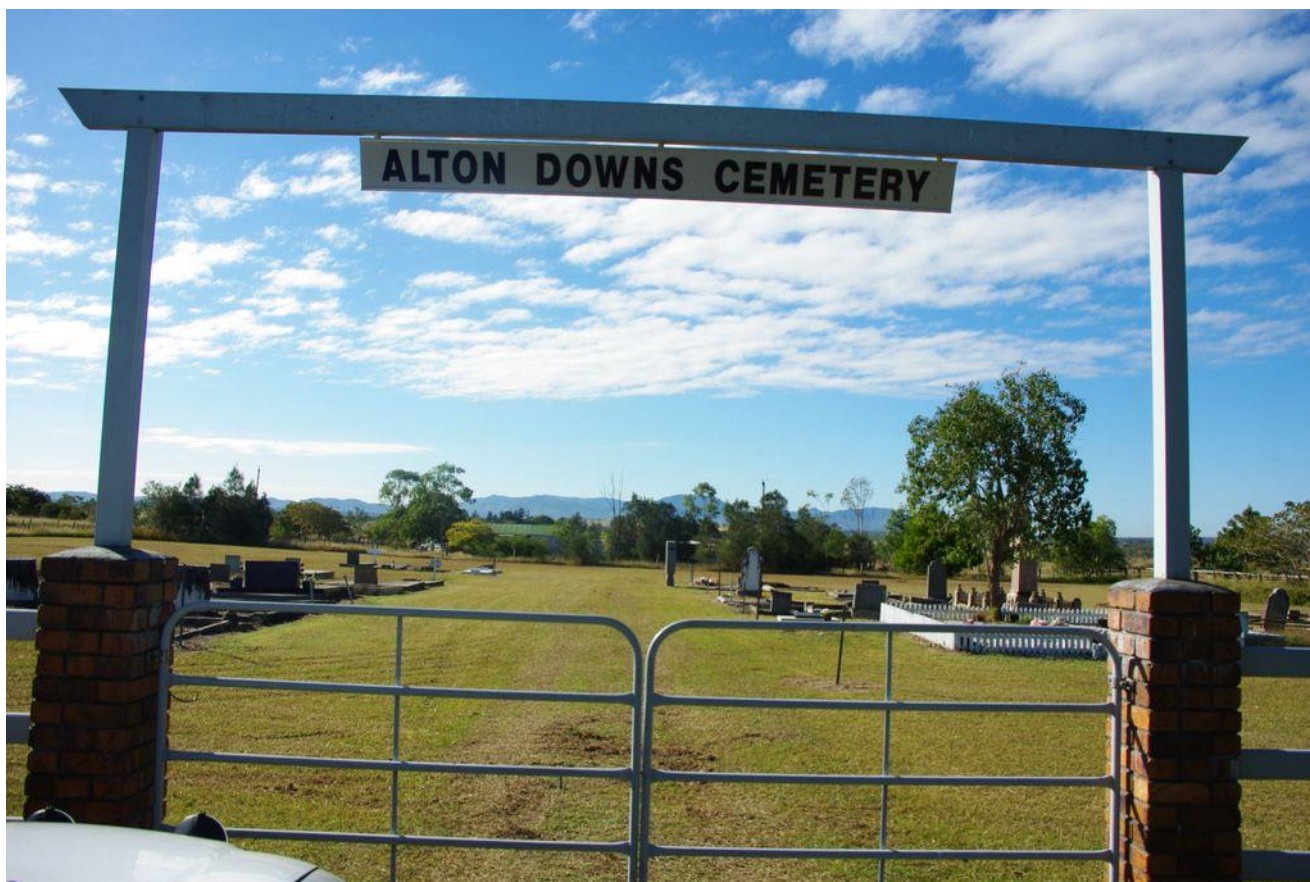
Ernest Handley, who was a sergeant pilot, and who received the Croix-de Guerre with palm, but who was killed at Brooklands through a machine breaking in the air.

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*(The Week, Brisbane, Queensland – 3 June, 1927)*

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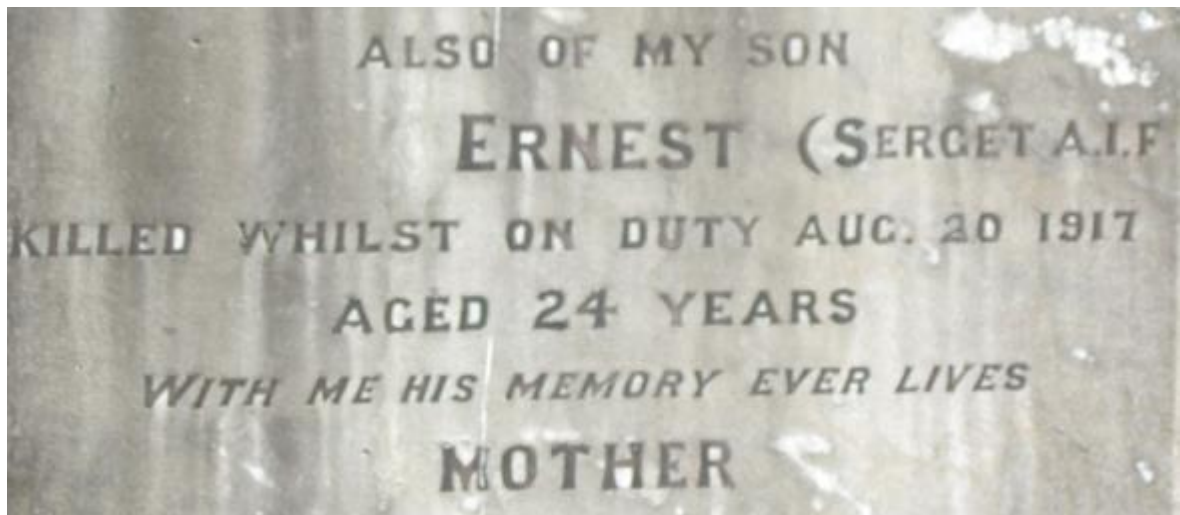
Ernest Handley is remembered on his father's headstone in Alton Downs Cemetery, Queensland, Australia.







(Photos from Find a Grave – Christine Frater)



## Commonwealth War Graves Commission

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission cares for cemeteries and memorials in 23,000 locations, in 153 countries. In all 1.7 million men and women from the Commonwealth forces from WWI and WWII have been honoured and commemorated in perpetuity.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission, as part of its mandate, is responsible for commemorating all Commonwealth war dead individually and equally. To this end, the war dead are commemorated by name on a headstone, at an identified site of a burial, or on a memorial. War dead are commemorated uniformly and equally, irrespective of military or civil rank, race or creed.

Not all service personnel have a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone. In some instances the relative chose to have their own memorial/headstone placed on the deceased's grave. These private headstones are not maintained by the CWGC as they have no jurisdiction to maintain them.

Serjeant E. Handley has a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone with the following inscription:

*Died While On Duty*

*Jesu Mercy. R.I.P.*

## **St. Nicholas Churchyard, North Cotes, Lincolnshire, England**

During the Second World War, there was a Royal Air Force station at North Coates and buried in St Nicholas Churchyard are 31 airmen of the Commonwealth air forces and Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm. The burials form a small plot which also includes the graves of three German airmen, one civilian and four service burials from between the wars associated with the RAF station. The churchyard also contains one First World War burial.

*(Information from CWGC)*



*(Photo from Find a Grave – Richard Pinder)*





*(Photo above from Find a Grave – War Graves; below by Gunner)*







*(Photos from Find a Grave – Gunner)*





Photo of Serjeant E. Handley's Commonwealth War Graves Commission Headstone in St. Nicholas Churchyard, North Cotes, Lincolnshire, England.

