Slater, Henry Ernest, DSO, Belgian Croix de Guerre. MID 20th 56th 55th Bns. 6/8/15 to 2/6/19

This dossier has significance in that it reveals that Slater was “Recommended” for a Victoria Cross, but awarded DSO in lieu of. Apparently, there were some 69 similar examples during the war.

55th Australian Infantry Battalion

The 55th Battalion was raised in Egypt on 12 February 1916 as part of the "doubling" of the AIF. Half of its recruits were Gallipoli veterans from the 3rd Battalion, and the other half, fresh reinforcements from Australia. Reflecting the composition of the 3rd, the 55th was predominantly composed of men from New South Wales. The battalion became part of the 14th Brigade of the 5th Australian Division.

Arriving in France on 30 June 1916, the battalion entered the frontline trenches for the first time on 12 July and fought its first major battle at Fromelles a week later. The battle was a disaster, resulting in heavy casualties across the division. Although in reserve, the 55th was quickly committed to the attack and eventually played a critical role, forming the rearguard for the 14th Brigade's withdrawal. Despite its grievous losses the 5th Division continued to man the front in the Fromelles sector for a further two months.

With the collapse of Russia in October 1917, a major German offensive on the
Western Front was expected in early 1918. This came in late March and the 5th Division moved to defend the sector around Corbie. The 14th Brigade took up positions to the north of Villers-Bretonneux and held these even when the village fell, threatening their flanks.

Once the German offensive had been defeated, the Allies launched their own offensive in August 1918. The 14th Brigade did not play a major role in these operations until late in the month, but its actions were critical to the capture of Peronne, which fell on 2 September. The 54th fought its last major battle of the war, St Quentin Canal, between 29 September and 2 October 1918. For his valour during this action Private John Ryan was awarded the Victoria Cross.

The battalion was resting out of the line when the Armistice was declared on 11 November. The progressive return of troops to Australia for discharge resulted in the 55th merging with the 53rd Battalion on 10 March 1919. The combined 53/55th Battalion, in turn, disbanded on 11 April.

---

**Questions to be put to the Person Enlisting before Attestation.**

1. What is your Name?  
2. In the Parish of or near the Town of in the County of  
3. British Subject  
4. 14 Years 4 Months  
5. No  
6. No  
7. 175 Cattle 50  

---

**AWM**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank: Lieutenant</th>
<th>Unit: 55th Australian Infantry Battalion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation: Victoria Cross</td>
<td>Date of recommendation: 01 October 1917</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As the Australians began their slow advance, the anticipated enemy protective barrage began to fall to the rear. Here and there a few shells landed amid the picked ranks; Sergeant Will Cook, the Company Sergeant Major of D Company, was exsiccated by one of these shells.  

The 53rd did a thorough job during its advance to the Red Line; every shell-hole was carefully searched. However, Private Maynard, and his mates still had mopping-up to complete:

Here and there a pillbox was rushed and prisoners extracted. For the most part there was little resistance. [I remember] Lieutenant Slater (with a small party of about a dozen of us) swinging a big ‘Colt’ revolver working around to the entrance of a pillbox shouting out, ‘Out of it you B——s.’ The boys collected a few souvenirs, and away went Fritz to find his way back to the rear.
Lieutenant Slater and his three men advanced with little in the way of covering fire from their colleagues but with plenty of attention from the German garrison. In short rushes the Australians worked their way around to the flank of the pillbox. Once within throwing range, they showered the position with grenades and, after putting its machine-gun out of action, stormed and seized the pillbox. The party killed several members of the garrison and captured 30 prisoners and the machine-gun. While Slater’s clothing and equipment were riddled with holes caused by near misses from machine-gun bullets, none of the patrol was injured in this audacious attack. Slater was recommended for the Victoria Cross but had to be content with a Distinguished Service Order — a prestigious award for such a junior officer. Sergeant Mortlock, Corporal Peters and Private Dowling were each awarded Distinguished Conduct Medals for their part in the assault.

Lieutenant Slater’s actions, and those of the A Company patrol on the left, allowed the consolidation to continue without further disruption and casualties. Under the protection of the barrage, Private Maynard spent the remainder of the morning ‘Mostly digging and feeding on what we had and watching the artillery plastering the area in front of us.’

The focus now moved to linking up shell-holes into a primitive trench system, constructing strongpoints and rolling out telephone lines to the Bute and forward companies. When the covering artillery stopped firing just after 11.00 am the battalion was well prepared for the counter-attacks that followed.

“Snowy to the Somme.” Regret page source: not recorded?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/1/16</td>
<td>6 Cpl B Bzd</td>
<td>To be inform Officer to come for appointment to Company France.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/9/16</td>
<td>do</td>
<td>To collect 2/1 England to France.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7/11/16 appointment to Company France rank Bn. Bn. A.I.F.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/11/16</td>
<td>A.I.F. Orders</td>
<td>Having been passed as qualified for commission in Bn. Bn. is appointed to be 2/Lieut in England A.I.F. Seniority will be determined later.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25/11/16</td>
<td>A.I.F. Orders</td>
<td>To take seniority next to 2/Lieut R. J. W. Payle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15/12/16</td>
<td>5 D.R.B.</td>
<td>Marched in from England.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16/12/16</td>
<td>8 B.B.</td>
<td>Marched out to Service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17/12/16</td>
<td>5 A.B.</td>
<td>Marched out, joined 55 Bn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/1/17</td>
<td>8 B.B.</td>
<td>Thre on strength.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19/2/17</td>
<td>Adj Out of 133</td>
<td>Taken on strength of 55 Bn. From Officers School.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14/3/17</td>
<td>Bn. 355 Bn.</td>
<td>To No. 2 Sick.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17/3/17</td>
<td>15 F.Amt.</td>
<td>Adieu.}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PROCEEDED OVERSEAS FRANCE

29-12-16. Taken on the strength 65th Bn. from Depot (Cadet Bn.)

29-12-16. Fd to 6th Inf Bn. from Cadet. School.

29-12-16. France. 1st 55th Bn. from 6th Bn. to Cadet School. (Art. Orders No. 1889 dated 5-11-17)

28-3-17. Adm. to 1st 6th Bn. Norman Musgrove, M.C.

1-4-17. Discharged to Depot on 8th. Gen. H.V. Hovens.

19-3-17. Arrived at Depot. Awaiting to join units of 55th Bn.

5-4-17. Marched to 5th Div. Beach Detachment.

6-4-17. Rejoined Bn. in Depot.

Awarded 'D.S.O.' 1st Div. 20th. No. of 5th Div. 20th. 20-11-17.

Mentioned in Sir D. Hope's Despatch of 11th and Gallant Services to date in the Field during Period 2nd to 17th Nov. 1916.


1-7-18. M. B. adaw 7th Div. from 1st Div. to France.

3-7-18. 7th Div. to France 4th to France 4th Div. 18.


4-7-18. Dischd. to France.

21-10-19. Returned to Australia per "Belcher". Ex. Eng. Subalter and re-stated off. Strength
Note below, this is Recommendation for the VICTORIA CROSS which was not awarded. See to the right the hand written notation for the D.S.O.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Regt. No.</th>
<th>Rank and Name</th>
<th>Action for which commended</th>
<th>Recommended by</th>
<th>Honour or Reward</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>55th Bn, AIF</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lieutenant Henry Ernest Slater</td>
<td>This officer is recommended for conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty under heavy fire during the attack on ELYON WOOD on 26th Sept 1917. The attack had made good progress, and the battalion had reached its objective with few casualties, but when consolidation was in progress an enemy strong point, fortified with machine guns, commenced inflicting casualties on the right flank of the battalion and threatened the junction with the unit on the right, which was necessary for the effective consolidation of the line. Lieutenant Slater, with a Sergeant and 2 men, attacked the strong point with bombs, and after putting the machine gun crew out of action, captured the position, killing several of the enemy and capturing 30 prisoners together with a machine gun. His strong point was in advance of this officer's objective, but by clearing the enemy from such formidable stronghold, Lieutenant Slater and his men saved many casualties, in addition to clearing the enemy from a point which would certainly have threatened the right flank of the battalion. In subsequent stages of the fight, Lieutenant Slater, by his acts of gallantry and example, inspired his men to withstand and beat off the counter attack which followed.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dear Sir,

I have much pleasure in forwarding hereunder copy of extract from Fifth Supplement, No. 30792, to the "London Gazette," dated 12th July, 1918, relating to the conspicuous services rendered by the mentioned member of the Australian Imperial Force.

DECORATIONS CONFERRED BY HIS MAJESTY THE KING OF THE BELGIAN.

CROIX DE GUERRE.

Lieutenant Henry Ernest Slater, D.S.O.

The above has been promulgated in Commonwealth of Australia Gazette, No. 185, dated 27th November, 1918.

Yours faithfully,

J. H. Slater, Esq.,
1/5 Clarence Street,
Sydney, N.S.W.
DISTINGUISHED SERVICE ORDER.


AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE.

TELEPHONE:  CENTRAL 4741.
BASE RECORDS OFFICE.
VICTORIA BARRACKS.

Melbourne, 9th May, 1917.

Dear Sir,

I have much pleasure in forwarding hereunder copy of extract from Second Supplement, No. 30448, to the "London Gazette" dated 25th December, 1917, relating to the conspicuous services rendered by the undermentioned member of the Australian Imperial Force.

MENTIONED IN DESPATCHES.

The following is a continuation of Sir Douglas Haig's Despatch of the 7th November, submitting names deserving special mention, published in a supplement to the "London Gazette" of Friday, 28th December, 1917:

Lieutenant H. E. SLATER. D.S.O.*

The above has been promulgated in "Commonwealth of Australia Gazette," No. 57, dated 18th April, 1918.

Yours faithfully,

H. Slater Esq.,
175 Clarence Street,
Sydney,
WITH VICTORY LAURELS
RETURNED SOLDIERS WELCOMED FROM BATTLEFIELDS TO PEACE AND SUNSHINE.

"Now are our brows bound with victorious wreaths, our bruised arms hung up for monuments?

Our stern alarums changed to merry meetings.

Our dreadful marches to delightful measures.

Grim visaged war hath smoothed'd his wrinkled front."

With the whole city gorgeously set as a stage for the Peace rejoicings over 1000 returned soldiers passed through flag-decorated avenues and under triumphal arches yesterday. They went to fight for freedom, honour, and Justice these men of the Australian Imperial Forces, and they came back with the laurels of victory.

Two contingents of men reached Sydney yesterday. The Mahia contingent was made up of 367 men and 23 officers for NSW and 200 Queenslanders. The Beltana contingent consisted of 773 men and 29 officers for NSW and 230 Queenslanders. The Mahia men disembarked at Woolloomooloo Bay. The Beltana men came from Melbourne by special trains. The NSW men met their relations and friends at the Anzac Buffet - those by the Mahia arriving first. The Queenslanders had a train to take them to Brisbane.

The two contingents were met by Mr. C. W. Oakes, representing the State Government, Major-General Lee, D.S.O., C.M.G., State Commandant, and representatives of the Red Cross Society.

THE ANZAC BUFFET.

Inside and outside the Anzac Buffet there was an extraordinary display of enthusiasm, and as the medical examinations were put off until to-day relations and friends of the returned men were able to instantly claim them. Morning tea was served by Red Cross Voluntary Aids under Miss Evans. The buffet had never held a larger number of men, women, and children,

THE BELTANA.

Lieut-Colonel William Joseph R. Cheeseman, D.S.O., M.C., and Croix de Guerre, was the officer commanding the Beltana troops Captain Eric Sydney W. Vidal, M.C. Lieut Henry Ernest Slater, D.S.O. and Croix de Guerre.
Dear Sir,

I have much pleasure in transmitting herewith, under separate registered cover, the Diploma in connection with the Belgian Croix de Guerre awarded to you whilst serving with the Australian Imperial Force.

The package bears Registered No. 7622 G.P.O. Melbourne, and I shall be much obliged if you will kindly let me know whether it comes safely to hand by signing and returning the enclosed receipt form.

Yours faithfully,

[Signature]

Major,
Officer in Charge Base Records.

Lieutenant H.E. Slater, D.S.O.,
c/o J.H. Slater, Esq.,
175 Clarence Street,
Sydney, N.S.W.
The death occurred at a private hospital in Sydney on Monday of Mr. Henry Ernest Slater, of Yerrinbool. He served with the 55th Battalion in the first A.I.F. and won the Distinguished Service Order. He is survived by a widow, two sons and one daughter. Mr. Slater was 63 years of age.

The funeral of the late HENRY ERNEST SLATER will leave St Martin's Church Springdale, Road Killara, this Wednesday. After the service at 2.30 p.m for the Northern Suburbs Crematorium.

MEMORIALS IN ST. MARTINS, KILLARA

This list documents inscriptions on windows, furniture and some liturgical items in St. Martin’s. They record the names of benefactors who donated items.

In loving memory of Henry Ernest Slater D.S.O. C. de G. Died 16th August 1954
Brass plaque on pew in War Memorial Chapel.