



united service club

history & heritage notes

Major H.P. PHILLIPS DSO, MC

[1875 – 1931]



Captain Phillips was the Honorary Secretary of the Club in 1915 and (as Major Phillips) from 1922 to 1923

Herbert Peter Phillips was born on 10 May 1875 in Brisbane. He was the son of Peter Phillips [1833-1915], a Welsh-born tailor, and Irish-born Margaret (née Orr) [1850-1927].

He was educated at Brisbane Boys' Central and Rocklea State schools, and later attended trade classes at the Brisbane Technical College. He served an apprenticeship with Evans, Anderson, Phelan & Co., engineers, iron founders and shipbuilders, at Kangaroo Point.

He moved to Fiji in 1899 to work for the Colonial Sugar Refining Co. He returned as foreman engineer at its refinery at New Farm, Brisbane, from November 1900 and was chief engineer from February 1911; he resigned on 31 March 1915.

We thank the History Interest Group and other volunteers who have researched and prepared these Notes. The series will be progressively expanded and developed. They are intended as casual reading for the benefit of Members, who are encouraged to advise of any inaccuracies in the material.

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In 1901 he married Pauline Edith Annetta (née Male), [1872-1956]. They had two sons:

- Herbert Gordon [1902-1973]
- John Horace [b. 1908]

and a daughter

- Annette Margary [1906-1996]

The family lived in Lower Bowen Terrace, New Farm.

He was a member, and President in 1910, of the Queensland Institute of Engineers and actively promoted engineering at the University of Queensland – and publicly in relation to the Port of Brisbane and a trans-continental railway.

He had been commissioned in the (Royal) Australian Engineers in 1907 (after serving in the ranks for 3 years) and was promoted Captain in 1913, and was an assistant censor, Queensland, from January to May 1915. He served with the Submarine Mines Field Company at Fort Lytton and in Signals units. He was called up for service in April 1915.

In February 1916, aged 41, he was appointed to the AIF as Captain commanding 'C' Company, 3rd Pioneer Battalion, and embarked for England in June, and France in November. His battalion served in the Armentières sector, moving to Ploegsteert, Belgium in June 1917 for the battle of Messines in support of 3rd Division.



Captain Phillips (seated) in France.

After his commanding officer was killed at Zonnebeke, Phillips was acting OC through the Passchendaele offensive until December. Promoted Major on 18 October, he won the Military Cross for maintaining roads and mule tracks 'under constant shelling and attacks by aeroplanes' and for 'keeping roads open to traffic' when the battlefield was a morass of mud.

In March-April and June-July 1918 Phillips commanded the Pioneers at Buire on the Somme. For service during the great offensive on and after 8 August he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order. One of the projects which he supervised was the reconstruction of a steel-girder bridge

across the Somme River between Cérisy and Chipilly, a task which he completed in five days: its speedy reconstruction has been described as 'one of the finest engineering feats of the A.I.F. in France' and was praised by Lieutenant-General Sir John Monash as 'a magnificent piece of work'.

Phillips served in the operations which broke the Hindenburg line, and from February 1919 until his AIF appointment ended on 4 September was commanding officer of the 3rd Pioneer Battalion. In addition to his DSO and MC he was awarded the French Croix de Guerre in 1919 and was twice mentioned in dispatches.

Phillips returned to Brisbane via North America where he visited engineering works. He worked for the Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board from 1919 (Club Life member Captain E.J.T Manchester was President of the Board) until it was taken over by the Brisbane City Council in 1928. He was then employed by the Commonwealth as an engineer in its lighthouse service.

He was described as bearded, tall, and very thin; and quiet, reserved and family oriented. He was a hobby-farmer and had a great love of music and a fine baritone voice. His wife was an accomplished musician.

He joined the Club after commissioning in 1907 and served on the Committee from June 1909 – possibly through to 1915 in which year he was Honorary Secretary. He again became Honorary Secretary in 1922-23 under renowned engineer President Colonel Daniel Evans.

Captain Phillips died from cancer on 27 Jul 1931 aged 57 and was buried at Balmoral Cemetery.

During his tenure, Captain Phillips served Presidents Curtis and Evans.

Sources included:

- Various web pages
- *United Service Club, Queensland: The First Century, 1892-1992* by Flight Lieutenant Murray Adams and Lieutenant Colonel Peter Charlton
- Club Meeting Minutes, Annual Reports, and sundry documents
- Australian Dictionary of Biography <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/phillips-herbert-peter-8035/text14009>
- NAA
- AWM