

John David Blackwell (Jack)

Service Number: WWI 13073, WWII V26207

Early Life



Back Row: L-R David Mann Goldsworthy, Annie Goldsworthy, John David Blackwell (Jack), unknown, Isabel Goldsworthy, Ruby Blackwell, Stan Thomas
Middle Row: L-R Hannah Goldsworthy, Samuel Herbert Goldsworthy, Helen Smith Goldsworthy, Maria Jane Blackwell, Ivy Blackwell
Front Row: L-R Unknown, Vera Blackwell, James Elliott Blackwell, Richard Newton Blackwell c.1912



Jack Blackwell, 14
November 1916 in England

John David Blackwell, also known as Jack, was the eldest son of 7 children. His siblings were Ruby, Ivy, Clarice, Vera, Richard, and James. His parents were Richard and Maria Blackwell. John was born on the 28th of May 1895

John David Blackwell and family (Davey 2023)

in Milang, South Australia (Davey, 2023). He started

(Mann and Mann, 1995)

his schooling in Milang, finishing in Strathalbyn. To family and friends, John was known as Jack and is referred to as Jack in most unofficial records (Blackwell, 2022).



Goldsworthy and Blackwell store, after Jack Goldsworthy took over. (Williams 2020).

After school, John sat the post office entrance exams. He did very well in these, coming top in South Australia and third in the Commonwealth, before being posted to Streaky Bay (Mann and Mann 1955). He found being a postmaster boring, so John moved to Nhill, (Faull, 1981) in Victoria where he worked for his Uncle William (Will) and Aunty Cate Goldsworthy in their furniture and drapery business, referred to as 'Goldsworthy' (Mann and Mann, 1955). It was apparently "the largest general store in country Victoria selling everything from tombstones, cars, harvesters, and tanks" (Williams, 2020).



Goldsworthy Coles store, before Jack Goldsworthy took over (Williams 2023).

Goldsworthy & Blackwell	
HOME FURNISHERS.	MEN'S WEAR SPECIALISTS.
WOMEN'S HOSIERY AND UNDERWEAR.	
EIDER QUILTS. Nice designs. Prices from 26/6	MEN'S WARM CHESTERS. Prices from 35/-
BLANKETS. White and Grey. Prices from 30/-	MEN'S PULLOVERS, CARDIGANS, SWEATERS. All the latest colors.
WOMEN'S FLEECY BLOOMERS. Blue, Green, Fawn, White. Prices from 2/11	STRONG WORK TROUSERS. Large range in stock. Prices from 15/6 pair.
WOMEN'S HOSIERY. Rayon Hose. Special Value 1/11	MEN'S STRONG WORK SHIRTS. Prices from 4/11 each.
FLORAL WINCEYETTE. Nice range. Colors: Green, Lemon, Blue.	BOYS' WEAR. Large range of Pull-overs, Sweaters, Knickers, Overcoats, and Shirts.
TRAVELLING RUGS. Prices from 15/6 each.	Also FURNITURE & LINOLEUMS. Big range in stock.
We are Agents for the famous Jones Sewing Machine.	
Phone Nhill 11.	P.O. Box 30.

During WWI

WWI broke out in 1914. In 1916, aged 21, John enlisted and was posted with the 11th Field Ambulance (National Archives of Australia). In this role John was devoted to his duty of caring for the wounded. On August 8th and 9th 1918, John was serving in Hamel, France. For his service he was awarded the Military Medal on September 15th, 1918 by General Birdwood in the Adelaide Town Hall (National Archives of Australia). The official despatch read as follows,

During the operations on 8th August 1918, East of Hamel, while in charge of bearer squads clearing the R.A.P.'s Regimental Aid Posts he showed great courage and determination, under heavy shell fire from the enemy. He directed his men and organized their work ensuring that the wounded were carried out of the shelled area without delay. By his example he inspired his men and greatly assisted in the rapid evacuation for the Aid Posts. Again on 12th August 1918 he displayed fine qualities of leadership under heavy enemy shell fire.

Mann and Mann 1995

John was promoted to Lance Corporal during his service (National Archives of Australia).

After WWI, John returned to Nhill.

On August 23rd, 1922, he married Clara Lavinia Lambert, whose ancestor built Nhill's first building. John and Clara had two daughters, Shirley Florence, and Betty Jean (Dickson, 2023).



*Jack and Clara Blackwell during 1950's
(Mann and Mann 1995)*

During WWII

With the start of WWII, John left Nhill to serve Australia in the war effort again. During WWII, John was a Major in the 19th Machine Gun Regiment (Colleen, 2023). The 19th Machine Gun Regiment was formed as a Militia Unit in the Wimmera district of Victoria during 1940 (Monument Australia n.d.).



*John, Clara, Shirley, and Betty,
(Davies 2023)*

John was highly regarded by his superiors and was awarded the several promotions including Lieutenant, Temp Captain and Temp Major (Mikinis 2023).

The headquarters of the Machine Gun Regiment were in Horsham. In January of 1942, John travelled overland with the regiment from Colac to Winnellie. The unit was in 'Fit Coastal Defence', between Howard River and Mickett Creek (Monument Australia n.d.). Later, the Regiment travelled to Darwin. The 19th Machine Gun Regiment was retitled the 19th Machine Gun Battalion in September 1943 (Monument Australia n.d.). This Battalion received reinforcements from 48 South Australian Battalions and was then transferred to Watsonia Army Camp in Melbourne, in 1944. The Battalion stayed there until they disbanded in August 1944 (Monument Australia n.d.).

John visited his family in Nhill once during the war. His daughter, Betty recalled that "Dad wasn't one to talk about the war. We asked him, but he wouldn't answer" (Dickson 2023).



Jack, Clara, Betty, Shirley during W.W.2. before leaving for Darwin

Mann and Mann 1955

Life for John after the army

In July 1950, John retired from the army with permission to retain his rank as a Major (Mann and Mann 1955).

John Blackwell's commitment to serving others wasn't just seen during wartime. After WWI & WWII, John joined the Returned and Services League of Australia (RSL) where he was Secretary from 1921 -27 and 1946 -47 and President in the Nhill sub-branch in 1930 – 31.

Described as one Nhill's most enthusiastic and community minded men, John served the community through his business. He worked his way up at Goldsworthy and later it was renamed Goldsworthy & Blackwell. On the site of the Goldsworthy & Blackwell shop today, there is a coffee shop, among other boutique shops (Creek 2023).

John also served his community as a Justice of the Peace. He was involved in tennis, golf and bowling, participating successfully in competitions including winning the Australian Pairs Bowls Championship in 1952 (Mann and Mann 1955). John was committed to the Boy Scout Movement, involved with the 1st

Nhill Troop from 1920-1940 as scoutmaster and as District



John David Blackwell's Plaque Wall N (Johnson 2023)



Wall N, Ballarat cemetery (Johnson 2023)

commissioner of the then Lowan district (Mann and Mann 1955). John was a Master of the Loyal Lowan Masonic Lodge

and at the time of his death he was the secretary of the Nhill Chapter Lodge (Mann and Mann, 1995).

John loved working around the house and gardening at his home on MacPherson Street, Nhill (Mann and Mann 1955).

On July 2nd, 1967, aged 72, John died of a sudden heart attack. His daughter, Betty remembered that “he was carrying a bowl of chicken soup into the lounge room when he suddenly dropped dead” (Dickson, 2023). John was cremated and his ashes were interred in wall (N- row 3 niche 13) of the Ballarat Cemetery. John’s funeral was on the 5th of July 1967 (Johnson, 2023_).

John David Blackwell’s war efforts are recognised at the Nhill War memorial and in the Milang Memorial Garden (Blackwell, 2022).

ANZAC Spirit

John David Blackwell reflected the Anzac Spirit characteristics of perseverance and mateship. The strength of these in his war service is clear in the official dispatch from when he was awarded the Military Medal, as well as the way he lived in peace time, when he wasn’t being paid or forced to do so.

John’s perseverance is displayed though his commitment to serve in the Australian Army not just in WWI, but again in WWII when he’d already experienced first-hand the horrors and trials of war. Even during battle, under heavy shellfire, which would have been frightening, dangerous and



Nhill War Memorial, (Virtual War Memorial, n.d.)



Milang War Memoria Park (Lockwood 2022)

challenging, John persevered to get the job done, showing determination and courage, making sure that the wounded were swiftly carried out of the shelled area to safety. Working in the medical area of the Field Ambulance, John would have seen horrific gore and carnage. As confronting as this would have been, John persisted to care for the wounded and evacuate the Aid Posts, putting others before himself the many ways.

Mateship, defined by the Macquarie Dictionary as “a partnership based on mutual trust and loyalty” is an important part of the Anzac Spirit. John did not just work alone but was able to partner with others. He cooperated and coordinated to rescue and evacuate those wounded in battle. People loyally trusted him enough to follow his leading in the dangers of war. People didn't just do what John said but were inspired by him. This shows that John could relate to others well, as good mates do. Mateship involves caring for others, and John bravely cared for wounded soldiers in traumatic situations, putting the needs of others before his own. The many social groups and leadership roles that John embraced in peace times, including his strong commitment to people in organisations such as the RSL, sporting groups and the Scouting Movement, showed John's value of, and commitment to mateship beyond the bloodshed of war.

Word Count: 1247

Part 2

When I started researching John David Blackwell, I didn't know how amazing my research journey was going to be!

Last year, my Grandad told me about a WWI memorial in Milang, recognising the service of his Uncle Jack. Grandad knew very little about his Uncle Jack, other than that he'd moved to Nhill, and had served with the Field Ambulance. This sparked my desire to learn more about 'Uncle Jack', John David Blackwell.

My research began with reading a book called 'On Alexandrina's Shores' which was about Milang and surroundings. It gave me a starting point. I later found the book, 'Steadfast and Beyond', which revealed information, about John's WWI service, and included a photo of John, just before he left for Darwin in WW2 but no following information.

I interviewed John's nephew and niece, Roger Blackwell, and Jan Davey. Both remembered him a little, and Jan sent me some information and family photographs. I also found that another elderly niece was too unwell to be interviewed which fuelled my desire to learn more of John's story, before the people who knew him died and facts and memories about him were lost forever.

I found John's service numbers on the Virtual War Memorial and his service records on the National Archives website.

I visited Milang hoping to learn more, and contacted The Milang Historical Society, the Milang Museum, and the Milang Church of Christ (where John had attended). None of them had any information about John's service.

I started searching in Nhill, where John had moved after high school. The Nhill Historical Society had information about his work and community involvement and Nhill library told me that in WWII he'd been in the 19th Machine Gun Regiment. I contacted the Nhill Aviation Museum, hoping they might have information, but they didn't.

The lady I spoke to, however, mentioned my quest to a friend named Annette who happened to remember John's daughters from childhood. I contacted Annette, and she offered to talk to two men, one aged 96 and the other 102, at the Nhill Anzac Day Service, who'd probably know more.

Meanwhile, Annette learned that her neighbour knew John's daughter Betty, now living in Kaniva and got me her phone number! It was very exciting when I called Betty. She shared more about John's WWII involvement, and lots about him as a person.

Later, I contacted the Ballarat Cemetery where Betty had told me John was interred, and they sent me a photograph of his memorial plaque.

Searching the 19th Machine Gun Regiment on the Australian Monument website, gave more information about the regiment's locations, missions, and purpose.

My research journey has been challenging and rewarding. It was particularly special when I contacted my 89-year-old Grandad to share what I'd learned about 'Uncle Jack' and give him the phone number of his long-lost cousin, Betty.

I've been inspired by bravery and character of John Blackwell, and the importance of recording the stories of our war heroes before they're forgotten.

Word Count: 499

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Appendix-

Hi Grandad,

Can you please answer as many of these questions as best you can about Uncle Jack?

Thanks, Love from Mimi

1. Where did he go to church?
Church of Christ, Kelang
2. How often did you see him?
About once a year or so.
3. What memories do you have of Uncle Jack?
Only remembers him coming to visit us from Mill
4. What sports did he like?
Don't know. probably bowls.
5. What did he look like?
like the most up to date photo in the book
6. Did you spend Christmas with him?
No.
7. a) Did Uncle Jack ever talk about the war?
No.
b) If so, what did he say?

Roger Blackwell, QNA
sheet 2022, conducted by
Miriam
Lockwood(Lockwood,2022)

Dear Aunty Jan,

For a school project, I am researching your 'Uncle Jack'. His full name was John David Blackwell. He was from Milang and served in World War 1. Grandad remembers seeing Uncle Jack about once a year when you were children. Could you please answer these questions about Uncle Jack for me, if you know the answers, and return them to me.

Thank you for your time

Love from Miriam

1. When and where did you see John David Blackwell?

First recollection
was at our wedding in 1962

2. How often did you see him?

twice
once at our wedding
then we met accidentally in a road house
having coffee in 1964

3. What memories do you have of Uncle Jack?

Saw Miriam coming to his
sisters funeral

4. Where did you see him?

Westbourne Mc Mahood Church at our
wedding

5. Did Uncle Jack ever talk about the war?

not to me

If so, what did he say?

6. Do you know who else might be able to help me find more about John David Blackwell?

No

My email (miriamlockwood@Horizon.SA.edu.au)

Jan Davies, QNA shees 2023,
conducted by Miriam
Lockwood (Lockwood, 2023)

How I am related to John David Blackwell(www.familyecho.com, n.d.)

