

## The Story of William Francis 'Nip' Clifford

By Patrick Bourke, RAHS Member

On 18 April 1941 a war veteran named William Francis 'Nip' Clifford confronted the editor of the *Dubbo Liberal and Macquarie Advocate* newspaper in Dubbo.<sup>1</sup> It was about the news report that was written in their paper on 4 May 1939 about his death.<sup>2</sup> He said that he is very much alive and did not die in 1939 as a result of injuries when a car allegedly knocked him down. William 'Nip' Clifford then went on to explain how the mix-up in identities occurred. At the time of his confrontation with the newspaper editor, Nip Clifford was serving with the Australia Army after already serving in the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) and the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) during the First World War.<sup>3</sup>

During WW1 he and his three brothers signed up for service. Nip Clifford was gassed on the Western Front. One of his brothers, Terence Thomas, known as Tom, was killed on the Western Front on 23 August 1918. Tom's name is on the Narromine WW1 War Memorial. Both Nip and Tom were in the 3rd Battalion. Nip recalls that his platoon sergeant on the Western Front was Jack Hamilton VC.<sup>4</sup>

After WW1 Nip Clifford became involved in sports in the Narromine-Dubbo area, especially boxing. After his death in Dubbo in December 1942 this was mentioned in the newspaper reports.<sup>5</sup>

Nip Clifford was medically discharged from the Australian Army on 29 July 1942 and died in Dubbo on 27 December 1942.<sup>6</sup>

The Dubbo Regional Council confirms that Nip Clifford is buried in an unmarked grave in the Old Dubbo Cemetery.<sup>7</sup> A search of NSW war memorials does not find his name on any war memorials.



Lt. John [Jack] Patrick Hamilton, VC,  
circa 1919. AWM, P01383.015.

After a war grave claim was lodged with the Commonwealth Department of Veterans' Affairs earlier this year, the Department made the decision in September 2021 that the death of

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<sup>1</sup> 'DEAD MAN WHO HAD A TALE TO TELL', *Dubbo Liberal and Macquarie Advocate* (NSW: 1894 – 1954), 19 Apr 1941, p. 2, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/131300177>.

<sup>2</sup> 'Western District Centres', *Dubbo Liberal and Macquarie Advocate*, 4 May 1939, p. 9, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/135928122>.

<sup>3</sup> NAA service records: B2455, CLIFFORD F [AKA Clifford, William Francis]; B884, N272272, CLIFFORD WILLIAM FRANCIS. Both service records are digitised and available via the NAA RecordSearch.

<sup>4</sup> Victoria Cross: Private John Patrick Hamilton, 3 Battalion, AIF, Australian War Memorial, <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C339895>.

<sup>5</sup> 'DUBBO DEATHS', *National Advocate* (Bathurst, NSW: 1889 – 1954), 2 Jan 1943, p. 3, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/160894345>; 'OBITUARY', *Narromine News and Trangie Advocate* (NSW: 1898 – 1955), 5 Jan 1943, p. 1, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/99984560>.

<sup>6</sup> NAA service record B884, N272272; CLIFFORD WILLIAM FRANCIS, Death Certificate, NSW Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, 2030/1943.

<sup>7</sup> Confirmed in correspondence with the writer in April 2021.

William Francis 'Nip' Clifford in 1942 was war related.<sup>8</sup> Such delayed recognition is not unusual, as unless a veteran died during their military service within the eligible period of war, a war grave/war widow's claim had to be made with the Repatriation Department. Hence, for many single men like Nip Clifford with no widow, no war grave claims were made after they died.

Interestingly, Nip Clifford's death was found to be the result of his First World War service. The Office of Australian War Graves will now commemorate his war service either at the Old Dubbo Cemetery or in the Garden of Remembrance in Sydney.



The Dubbo Memorial Rose Garden dedicated to those who paid the supreme sacrifice in World Wars I and II. AWM, Places of Pride.



The Narromine War Memorial, where Nip's brother Tom Clifford is commemorated. Wikimedia Commons.

P.S. The death of Jack Hamilton VC was accepted by the Repatriation Department as war related two months after he died in 1961. Nip Clifford had to wait longer but he eventually joined his former platoon sergeant with this commemoration. Jack Hamilton VC is buried in the Woronora Cemetery at Sutherland.

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<sup>8</sup> Confirmed in correspondence with the writer in September 2021.