

# Memories of local soldiers lives on

■ Peter McLady

PRESENTING the story of Sergeant Lionel Lee brings to an end the six-year journey of researching the 39 soldiers remembered with honour on the Stanthorpe World War I Memorial.

The goals of the project were straightforward: To identify and to tell the story behind the list of initials and surnames recorded on the local memorials.

Carved into the Stone of Remembrance in every Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery are the words "Their Name Liveth for Evermore".

Rudyard Kipling suggested this phrase from the King James Bible as being a fitting inscription for the many memorials built in the aftermath of what was known as the Great War.

The 39 stories are intended to provide a lasting record to help ensure the local men are remembered as more than just names.

The other goal was to help generate a wider understanding of why the railway sidings on the Amiens branch railway were named Fleurbaix, Pozieres, Bullecourt, Passchendaele, Bapaume and Messines.

Through researching the stories of the men who died, the association between them and the "railway siding battles" has become increasingly apparent.

These were the battlefields of Belgium and France where 30 of the soldiers remembered on local memorials died. The sacrifice of these men, and devastation of their families, friends and community will be forever associated with these place names.

This link forms an eternal bond between the communities of the Granite Belt and their namesakes in France and Belgium.

Such a sentiment was expressed 100 years ago by Monsignor Andre du Bois de La Villerabel, Bishop of Amiens, France.

One week before the signing of the Armistice, he addressed a congregation of the first Australian Infantry Division in the Church of Long, Somme:

*"As Bishop of Amiens, I owe you and your illustrious dead my heartfelt thanks because the land of my diocese has been your field of battle and you have delivered it by the sacrifice*



Monsignor Andre du Bois de la Villerabel, Bishop of Amiens.

*of your blood... when victory at last began to smile upon our arms, the Australian army distinguished itself by the audacity of its attacks, by its utter disregard of death, by its doggedness, and by the rapidity of its advances.*

*"Why did you leave your far away Australia? Because of your sentiments of loyalty towards the British Empire whose banner has protected the British Empire and the development of your country, its existence, its economic future and its civilization, for these were in jeopardy as well as the destinies of France."*

*On the field of battle, far away from your homes, the love of your country became stronger in your hearts, and children, who, during the coming centuries will grow up in your homes and schools, will learn through your great deeds the lessons of patriotism.*

*"They will not be able to pronounce your names without speaking of the towns, villages, tablelands, ridges and valleys of the Somme, where you have gathered the laurels of immortality.*

*"Indissoluble links unite our two nations; a link of prayer because we will piously keep the tombs of your heroes; a link of friendship, because the freedom of my diocese has cost you so much blood and a link of mutual admiration because the hearts of our soldiers, Australian and French, beat with the same love and with the same enthusiasm for the saintly cause whose final triumph will assure the future and development of our two countries."*

The Bishop of Amiens spoke of the shared pain and suffering of his diocese and



NEVER FORGOTTEN: Stanthorpe Heritage Museum pays tribute to the battlefields where so many died. PHOTOS: CONTRIBUTED



Church of Long, Somme.

It would have been impossible for any person in the district to be unaffected. A family member, friend or workmate who died could never have been far removed.

The entire community felt the grief and sense of loss suffered by the families who lost loved ones.

In particular, they understood the suffering of Peter and Mary Ann Hindmarsh, Joah and Ellen Potts and Charles and Clara Lee, who each lost two sons as a result of World War I.

The year 1917 was by far the worst of the war for the Granite Belt with 18 young men losing their lives, including a terrible fortnight in October when seven men died in the Battle of Passchendaele.

All the grieving families received to remind them of these men was a package containing some personal possessions and, hopefully, a photograph of their grave.

100 years ago there was little chance a family member would ever visit the graves of the men.

Bart Ziino wrote, "60,000 Australians died in the Great War of 1914-18. Those who mourned them experienced loss at a remove from the battlefields and the graves of their dead.

"Mourning lost sons, husbands, friends and lovers, whose bodies were buried half a world away, theirs was a distant grief."

The stories of the 39 men from the Granite Belt reflect the breadth of Australia's participation in World War I.

Away from the devastation of the Western Front, local men died in all theatres of battle. Their graves are dispersed across the Gallipoli peninsula, Egypt, Malta, Hamburg, and the Palestinian territories.

Each man had a unique story but these often contained themes that underlie much of the written history of World War I.

For family reasons, men like William Shelford and Walter Potts enlisted under assumed names. Albert Jolly was 17 when he enlisted and became one of boy soldiers from Australia. William Cammack and Michael O'Connor were fathers of young families who were destined never to see them again. William Burns, Thomas Marstella, and Henry Williamson died within two weeks of going to the frontline. Burchall Dinham-Peren and Lionel Lee died of illness in 1919, long after the end of the war.

The men who died came from all backgrounds: tin miners and farm labourers volunteered alongside the sons of English gentry and members of parliament.

Many theories have been suggested as to why these men volunteered to fight. What is certain is that their deaths left a lasting mark on their communities.



Stanthorpe RSL, World War I Memorial.

Historian, Bill Gammage, described the aftermath of WWI in Australia as "one long national funeral for a generation and more."

Much is being done to ensure these men are not forgotten. The Granite Belt shares a history with namesake village and towns in France and Belgium, and together these communities are united in a passion to remember the sacrifice of the men and their families.

At the centenary of the Armistice, these community ties have never been

stronger. The poignant memorials across the Western Front and Granite Belt provide a physical reminder of this sacrifice for future generations.

The "indissoluble links" envisioned by the Bishop of Amiens in 1918 are being cemented today through the efforts of many dedicated Australian, French and Belgian community volunteers. Their steadfast focus and unflinching energy ensure the foundations of remembrance are set for another 100 years.