



**OVERSEAS HONOURS:** Private William Reid is buried in the Cabin Hill Cemetery where there are only 67 World War I graves, set among farmland near Wyttschaete in Belgium. PHOTOS: CONTRIBUTED



**A gravestone memorial to Private William Reid in Wallangarra.**

# Brothers unite in war efforts

## Reid siblings head to WWI but suffer different fates out on the battlefield

■ Peter McLady

WALLANGARRA brothers William and Stewart Reid enlisted to fight in World War I.

They were the sons of James and Isabella Reid who had left Scotland in 1883 to start a new life in Australia.

Stewart was wounded in action in December 1917, but recovered, survived the war and returned to live in Stanthorpe.

William was first to enlist and fought with the 31st Battalion on the Western Front.

Wounded in the Battle of Polygon Wood in September 1917, he returned to the fighting in February 1918 and was killed by enemy artillery fire on March 18, 1918. He is buried in Cabin Hill Cemetery, Belgium.

William was the second youngest of nine surviving children born to James and Isabella of Bald Mountain, near Wallangarra.

According to family research undertaken by Stanthorpe resident James Reid (the fourth cousin of William), James and Isabella were from Linlithgowshire, Scotland. James and Isabella, together with their three children, as well as James' brother William and his wife Jane, and James' other brother David, set out from Glasgow together to start a new life in Australia.

The extended Reid family sailed aboard the *Berwick Law*, arriving in Moreton Bay on December 23, 1883.

James and Isabella and their children John, Christina, and Elizabeth set up home at Bald Mountain

where six more children were born. William, born in 1897, grew up around Wallangarra where he also went to school. William's service record said he worked as a farmer.

At Warwick on July 17, 1916, one week before his 19th birthday, William enlisted and joined the 11th reinforcements of the 31st Battalion.

He departed Brisbane on active service on November 17 aboard *HMAT Kyarra*, arriving in Plymouth, England, on January 30, 1917. William spent three months training at the Hurdcott Camp on the Salisbury Plain before he proceeded overseas to France from Folkestone on May 3.

When William joined the 31st Battalion in the field five days later it was in a training camp at Montauban, France. William was given no time to settle in, for on May 9 the battalion moved to support trenches in the Buegny-Ytes Line near Bapaume.

From there the battalion went into reserve lines at Lagnicourt, in support of the Australian operations in the ongoing Battle of Bullecourt. The battalion was tasked with strengthening the support-line defences and carrying munitions to the front line, while under constant threat of enemy artillery and gas barrages (Browning 2013, 164).

The 31st Battalion then undertook several months training on the Somme. On July 29, the battalion, as part of the 5th Division A.I.F., moved north to the Ypres Salient as reinforcements

for the Battle of Passchendaele that was to begin two days later.

The battalion moved into the Racquinghem area near the France-Belgium border where the battalion underwent weeks of battle training. On September 17 the battalion marched 26km north to Steenvoorde in the Ypres Salient.

The 31st Battalion entered the fighting in the Battle of Polygon Wood which was intended to build on the success of the Battle of Menin Road. On the morning of September 26, the Australian 4th and 5th divisions joined an Allied

**“The 31st Battalion casualties were particularly devastating with 15 officers and 418 men killed, wounded or captured.**

— (Browning 2013, 212)

attack across a front of 10km.

The Australian divisions captured their objectives but paid a high price. The 4th Division suffered 1717 casualties. “The even more heavily engaged 5th Division suffered 5471 dead and wounded in the period 26-28 September” (Laffin 1992, 36). The 31st Battalion casualties were particularly devastating with 15 officers and 418 men killed, wounded or captured (Browning 2013, 212).

William was wounded in the left shoulder during the fighting at Polygon Wood on September 27. He was admitted to the 6th Australian Field Ambulance before being transferred by



**The Cabin Hill Cemetery is located in western Belgium, near the French border.**

ambulance train to the 2nd Australian General Hospital at Wimereux, on the coast of northern France.

He was sent for further treatment to the Exeter War Hospital, England. William recovered and was discharged from hospital on 8 November. He joined the No.2 Command Depot at Weymouth and moved to the A.I.F. Training Camp at

Sutton Veny on the Salisbury Plain. He transferred to the Overseas Training Brigade at nearby Longbridge Deverill. After several months, William departed England to fight on the Western Front, rejoining the 31st Battalion in the field on February 1, 1918.

Immediately, William was back on the front line as the 31st Battalion was in the trenches in the Houthem sector to the northeast of Messines (Browning 2013, 242). The battalion stayed in the front line until relieved on February 21 when it moved to a support area at the Rossignol Camp at Kemmel.

Although in a support area, the troops were kept constantly busy. “Working parties marched out for duty in freezing cold weather during the first two weeks of March 1918” (Browning 2013, 249). On 15 March, the battalion marched back to the frontline at Lumm Farm in the Wyttschaete Sector where “the sector had livened up considerably since the 31st Battalion’s previous tenure and numerous parties of enemy troops were observed behind their lines” (Browning 2013, 250).

Private William Reid was 21 years old when killed in action on March 18, 1918. Neville Browning described the events that unfolded that day as the 31st Battalion was in the line at Cabin Hill and Derry House: “On the morning of 18th March, enemy artillery batteries were engaged by counter battery fire, which effectively suppressed their fire. However, the artillery duel continued intermittently throughout the day and Privates William Reid, labourer from Warwick in Queensland and Thomas Tolley, fireman from Queensland, were killed and several men were wounded” (Browning 2013, 250).

William is not recorded on the original Stanthorpe War Memorial but he is remembered on the World War I Honour Roll in the Stanthorpe RSL and on the War Memorial in Weeroona Park.

William's older brother Stewart enlisted in Toowoomba on February 2, 1917, at the age of 31. Stewart served with the 47th and 42nd Battalions and the 12th Machine Gun Company. He joined the fighting on the Western Front in November 1917, but one month later was wounded in action.

Stewart suffered a gunshot wound to the back and like William, was sent to recover at the Exeter War Hospital, England. Stewart returned to the Western Front in March 1918 and survived the rest of World War I unscathed.

Before he returned to Australia in September 1919, Stewart was granted three months' leave. While on leave, he returned to his parent's original home county of Linlithgowshire, where he lived and worked as a farmer.

Following World War I, Stewart returned to live in Stanthorpe. Stewart died in 1978 at the age of 93 and is buried in the Stanthorpe Cemetery.