

ANZAC DAY 2016 ALL THE COVERAGE FROM ANZAC DAY CEREMONIES AROUND THE GRANITE BELT

Stanthorpe and the Anzacs

What Anzac Day truly means to the Granite Belt and its residents

ALL around Stanthorpe, on the Granite Belt in Queensland, names of towns and local areas evoke images of battles on the Western Front in World War I. But how did these battles become part of the geographic namescape of the Granite Belt?

Of the 39 local men remembered with honour on the Stanthorpe World War I Memorial, 30 lost their lives on the Western Front. They died in the Battles of Pozieres, Bullecourt, Messines, and, most of all, in the horror known as Passchendaele. They died all along the Western Front at places with less familiar names, such as Armentieres, Dernancourt, Delville Wood, Villers-Bretonneux, Mont St Quentin, and Peronne.

Sadly, some died even after the war ended. Sapper Burschall Dinham-Peren, of Stanthorpe, died of pneumonia in March 1919 and is buried in Charleroi, near Brussels, Belgium. Sergeant Lionel Lee died of typhus in April 1919 and is buried in the Ismalia War Memorial Cemetery, Egypt. Lionel was the son of Charles Lee who was the State Member for Tenterfield for 35 years.

For those soldiers who survived these battles and returned to Australia, many moved to live at the Pikedale Soldier Settlement Scheme on the Granite Belt. A community was created to support the returned servicemen in their difficult venture, each having taken on a sizable debt of £625 to purchase and run their farming block (Long 2014, 3). The Amiens Branch Railway was built to link this new community with the main Southern Line running between Warwick and Stanthorpe. The Queensland Railway Department, the Lands Department and the PMG Department decided that the sidings along the branch line would be named Fleurbaix, Pozieres, Bullecourt, Passchendaele, Bapaume and Messines, with the terminus being Amiens.

Today when we look at the railway siding signs at the Stanthorpe Heritage Museum, we understand better why these place names were chosen for the Amiens Branch Railway. These were the scenes of some of the great battles fought by the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) in Belgium and France. They are the battlefields where men from Stanthorpe and

the Granite Belt died and are buried today. They are names that remind us of the sacrifice of these men and the hardship and despair faced by their families and friends.

When the Pikedale Settlement Scheme was being finalised, many names for the railway sidings were considered. The local State Member of Parliament Donald Gunn made the case for the terminus to be named Diggerthorpe as he thought this name was favourably similar to Stanthorpe and Applethorpe (John Kerr, 1994). A. Clarke, who was the officer-in-charge of the Pikedale Settlement, thought it was fitting to name the sidings after Queensland's Victoria Cross winners and the terminus after General Birdwood, Commander of the AIF at Gallipoli and later I Anzac Corps on the Western Front. It was also proposed to name the terminus Romani, after the battle fought east of the Suez Canal in August 1916 where the Anzac Mounted Division fought off an attack by 14,000 Turkish troops (Bean 1948, 277). Corporal Frank Curran, of Tenterfield, was killed in action at the Battle of Romani and is remembered on both the Stanthorpe and Tenterfield War Memorials. "Romani" was not chosen as it was considered to be easily confused with the western Queensland town of Roma. Cambrai was also considered because of the Battle of Cambrai, fought on the Western Front in 1917. This battle involved for the first time the use of tanks in large numbers. Cambrai was not chosen because there was a town of that name in South Australia (Long 2014, 28).

In 1919, George D. Grant, writing from Thulimbah, suggested:

I feel sure that the soldier selectors would most heartily endorse the idea of naming the stations on this new line after the notable battlefields in Gallipoli, France, and Palestine... a station site has been located at 4 miles on the new line. It is some 3105 feet or 75 feet higher than "The Summit" (3030ft) and this will be the highest station in the Southern and Central districts... what could more fittingly commemorate the battlefield "Mons St Quentin" [sic] where it may be truly said the Australians reached the highest point in their brilliant career (Long



SIGNS OF REFLECTION: The railway siding signs at the Stanthorpe Heritage Museum.

PHOTO: SAMANTHA WANTLING

2014, 28).

The Battle of Mont St Quentin and Peronne, as mentioned by Grant, was fought by the AIF in September 1918 and was described by General Sir Archibald Montgomery as "a triumph for the Australian Corps" (Billett 1999, 118).

So, following much deliberation involving government departments, local committees and the community, the names of the railway sidings were determined to be Fleurbaix, Pozieres, Bullecourt, Passchendaele, Bapaume, Messines, and Amiens. Men from Queensland fought in every one of the "railway siding battles". For the returning servicemen these names would have provoked memories of hardship, loss and despair. These were the battles where many of their mates lost their lives and the returning soldiers were left to carry the physical and mental scars for the rest of their lives. Those now living

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at the soldier settlement would have drawn on the courage they showed in battle as they began the tough task of scraping a living out of the cleared bushland that was now their home.

However, the Pikedale Soldier Settlement was not a place of sadness. Jack Meek, who served with 4th Pioneer Battalion and was the surveyor for the Pikedale scheme, wrote in *Benchmarks & Boundaries*:

The names of the proposed stations on this branch were taken from battlefields of World War I where the AIF had fought. The other Passchendaele was fresh in my memory as a barren landscape of mud, trenches, jagged tree stumps

and heaps of rubble from ruined houses.

It was traversed by plank roads which had been put down by our pioneer battalions and which were lined with broken ammunition wagons and dead mules. Everywhere there was a stench of death. By contrast, the marvellous peace and solitude of The Granite Belt's Passchendaele was like a healing balm.

The returning soldiers' journey had taken a full circle: those who made the journey back to the Granite Belt were now living in places that to this day share their name with towns and villages of immense historical significance in France and Belgium.

They are not so well known as Gallipoli but remain places of extreme Australian sacrifice; sacrifice which is still remembered and commemorated today by the French and Belgian people living in these towns and villages.

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