

Schwarzrock Rd Boonooroo

Many times I have driven into Boonooroo and have seen on the left just before entering town, a road with a rather unusual name, Schwarzrock Rd, and although it is unsealed, occasionally I have used it as a short cut to the Bowls or Golf Club. While doing some Medal research recently I stumbled across a bit of local history that I thought is worth passing on.

Schwarzrock Rd road was named after a George Schwarzrock. The Schwarzrock's were a family of German immigrants who arrived in Australia in 1886 and were one of the first settlers in the area. They were fisherman and oyster men, as were many who lived in Boonooroo at that time.

On 13 November 1916 a young man by the name of

JOHN OTTO SCHWARZROCK

Joined the Australian Imperial Force, the AIF. He was single, stated his age as 29, was 5'6" tall, of "sturdy" build, and of "dark complexion and brown eyes" gave his occupation as "motor mechanic", had been a member of the "Australia Rifle Club Reserve", and was a resident of Boonooroo. He was allocated an Army Serial Number of 6415, and posted as a Private Soldier to the 18th reinforcements of the 26th Battalion AIF.

The 26th Battalion was raised in April 1915, saw service at Gallipoli and on the Western front, with an initial authorised strength of 1023. During WW1 the Battalion lost 877 men killed and a further 2745 wounded, so there was a constant need of reinforcements. The Battalion drew its recruits from Queensland and Tasmania. The Battalion was disbanded in May 1919 but reformed in 1921 as part of the Citizen Force. In 1934 the Battalion was linked to the 15th Battalion to form the 15th/26th Bn. In June 1939 the Battalion became the 26th Bn once again, it spent time in Australia in training and defensive roles especially around the Torres Straights and Cape York areas. In 1944 the Battalion was sent to Bougainville on active service, and after that, and Garrison duty in Rabaul, returned to Australia in March 1946. The Battalion was again disbanded in August 1946.

John's training in Australia appears to have been minimal as on 22/12/1916 he was embarked on the Troop Ship A64 "Demoethenes" at Sydney arriving in Plymouth, England on 3/3/1917. However, sometime in the period between signing up and departure to England, John married Daisy May Skiffen in Alderley, and we presume that John was at Enoggera Camp at that time. For the period 3/3/1917 until 19/6/1917 he was posted to a training unit at Rollestone in England, and on 19/6/1917 he departed Southampton for Le Havre, France, and posted to his Unit, 26th Bn on 7/7/1917, which was part of 7th Brigade of the 2nd Australian Division.

On the 31/7/1917 the Allies launched the 3rd Battle of Ypres, more commonly known as the Battle of Passchendaele, which lasted until 20/11/1917, officially recorded as "3 months and 6 days". It was a ferocious and terribly bloody affair, with multiple separate Battles occurring in the overall offensive and defensive actions with 56 British and French Divisions facing 77 – 83 German Divisions, which at its end had claimed 448,000 Allied and 418,000 German casualties.

The ANZAC Divisions were not spared the carnage, and in one of these Battles, the Battle of Broodseinde, there were 6,423 Australian and 1,853 New Zealand casualties. New Zealand suffered its worst loss of life of the Great War during the Battle of Passchendaele.

It was in the Battle of Broodseinde that commenced on 4/10/1917 that John Schwarzrock went into action for the first, and as it transpired, only time. It was reported that he was seen on the morning of 4/10/1917 during the attack on "Zonnebeke", and it was reported that he had been wounded in the thigh by shrapnel. He must have felt lucky, if that's the right word, the wound was serious but probably not life threatening, he was classified as "Walking Wounded" and was able to make his way to the Casualty Clearing Station for treatment. At least he was away from the front line and it's possible that the wound may have required evacuation from the front entirely, possibly even transfer to England for treatment. We shall never know. Later that day German Artillery shelled the area where the Casualty Clearing Station was, and John, along with a Lance Corporal from the same Battalion, name unknown, were killed outright by a shell. He and the L/Cpl were buried by a Padre from a Sister Battalion at Sans-Sousi Ridge. The area around that ridge was fought over in the ensuing battle, and when it all ended, John's grave no longer existed. He was reclassified from "Wounded in Action" to "Killed in Action" with no known grave.

His Service file contains the usual formal and sad pieces of correspondence, from the Records Section of the AIF, Public Curators, and of course, his wife, all trying to establish his exact cause, and place of death, the return of his personal effects, formal issue of a death certificate and alike. The files also records that on 14/9/18 his widow advised Army Records that she had remarried, and was now known as Daisy May Lloyd.

In Belgium there are 2 major Memorials to those UK and Commonwealth Servicemen who fell during the Great War and have no known graves in the "Ypres Salient". One is the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing at Ypres. The other is at the Commonwealth War Grave Cemetery at Tyne Cot. There are 54,896 names on the Menin Gate Memorial, of which 6,198 are Australian. This records all Commonwealth missing, and those UK missing before 15/8/17, and there are a further 33,783 UK and 1,176 New Zealanders on the Tyne Cot Memorial who are listed as missing after 15/8/17, as well as 11,954 who are buried there.

John's name is recorded on the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing. His name is also on the Granville War Memorial located at Granville School.

For his service, John Schwarzrock was posthumously awarded;

The War Medal and the Victory Medal.

The Menin Gate Memorial was unveiled on 24/7/1927 and on 2/7/1928 the Ypres Fire Brigade conducted a Last Post Ceremony at 8pm. They wanted to do this to show their respect to all those UK and Commonwealth Servicemen who perished in defence of their country, listed as missing, and to honour them.

That Ceremony has been held continuously since that date at 8pm every night with the exception of the period when Belgium was under German occupation during WW11.

While Belgium was occupied, the Ceremony was conducted in England at the Brookwood Military Cemetery in Surrey. On the night of liberation by Polish troops in WW11, the Ceremony was once again conducted at Menin Gate despite the fact that heavy fighting was still going on in other parts of the town.

At Remembrance Services, especially ANZAC Days, the words “Lest we Forget” are uttered, in solemn acknowledgement to all of those who served, and especially those who did not return. Most of us indeed would have spoken those words at some time. Every night in every RSL Club in Australia there is always a moment of silence, when all proceedings pause, we face the Eternal Flame, and stand quietly, with our heads bowed, as the words are spoken.

In this Centenary year of the Great War, perhaps it’s appropriate that we pause to remember exactly what these words “Lest we Forget” actually means. And it’s simple, do not forget those who donned a uniform, answered their Countries call, and for many, paid the ultimate sacrifice.

REMEMBER THEM

Boonooroo was a small village in 1916. The Census of 3/4/1911 recorded just 61 souls. One of their number fell, and it’s hard to imagine the effect John’s death would have had on the family, and that small community. 1 in 5 families in Australia had a loved one who never returned, and almost every family in Australia was affected in some way by the loss of someone, a husband, father, brother, uncle, cousin, nephew or friend. We often forget the impact of how the loss must have felt in these small close knit communities.

So, when you pass Schwarzrock Rd next, pause for moment to think of a young man who never returned, and in the saying of the times “Dip your lid”

THE SPIRIT LIVES
LEST WE FORGET
2014 - 2018

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