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## World War 1 and Tasman Peninsula

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The dramatic impact of WWI on the Tasman peninsula is evident in the number of memorials listing names of men (and one woman, V.C. Jenkins) who volunteered. More men from the Peninsula joined and were killed in WWI than in WWII. Memorials varied in type and their original location illustrates the number of self-contained communities which existed on the Peninsula. With renewed interest in Australian history the effects of the war can be fully understood for the first time, using records from the Australian War Memorial, Tasmanian newspapers, local memories and memorabilia (including photos and diaries). The war affected soldiers who went away – many of whom returned - and a community of families and businesses left behind.

Where are the Peninsula memorials?

- Nubeena Area-School ground and once near the wharf.
- Oakwood-Carnarvon Council Chambers, and once at Port Arthur Council Chambers.
- Memorial Avenue – Pine Trees, Port Arthur; George Street, Nubeena and Taranna.
- Full Honour Roll – Council Chambers, Nubeena.
- Church Plaques e.g. Koonya.
- Taranna Plaque – Ex-servicemen’s Club, Nubeena

The complete “Roll of Honour” lists 31 soldiers who died and 88 who returned. These were compiled from names submitted to Council. Council contracted Mr G.W.E. Garnett to make the board including £2.5.0 for the blackwood used, £7 for “carving and scroll”, and £6.15.0 for “making and polishing”<sup>1</sup>

Members of the public insisted that ranks not be included on the honour roll; by contrast the interesting Carnarvon-Oakwood plaque, painted on a walnut table-top does include the rank of soldiers. The dead on the Nubeena Memorial (on which most research has been compiled), omits rank also, but adds battalion joined. Ten men who joined from the Nubeena district died in uniform. They are listed in order of death and consequently represent a history in miniature of the battles of the war, beginning with Harold Rumney’s death at Lone Pine, Gallipoli. The average age of these men was 26, ranging from Harold Rumney 37 to Mark Richardson, Aged 19.

L/CPL Harold Rumney (No. 1863) Orchardist of Nubeena, b. Colebrook, 12<sup>th</sup>  
Btn. K.I.A. 8 August 1915, Lone Pine, Gallipoli.

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<sup>1</sup> Council Minutes 5-3-1919

PTE John Davis Stacey (No, 962) Farmer, b. Nubeena, 26<sup>th</sup> Btn. D.O.D, 26 April 1916, Bailleul, Armentieres, France. Aged 27. Son of Robert James and Hennitta Stacey, Nubeena.

PTE William Thomas Free (No. 3139) Labourer, b. Rokeby, 40<sup>th</sup> Btn. Died of Cerebral Meningitis, Buried Free Town, Sierra Leone, West Africa. Aged 31. Son of W.G. and Isabel Free.

PTE W. Stacey Farmer, B. Nubeena, 1<sup>st</sup> Auckland Btn, New Zealanda. Cause of death as yet unknown. (as for J.D. Stacey).

Gunner Vernon Alfred Charles Batchelor (No. 26239) Tram conductor, b. Nubeena, 4<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery K.I.A. near (Westoak Ridge) Ypres, Belgium 4 October 1917. Aged 25. Sister Mrs Eva C.C.M. Spaulding of *Highcroft*.

SGT Albert Curran (No. 160) Labourer, b. Coppington, 40<sup>th</sup> Btn D.O.W. Messines, Belgium 6 October 1917. Aged 26. Son of Peter and Margaret Curran, Coppington.

PTE Horace Edward James Calvert (No. 6258) Farmer, b. South Arm, 12<sup>th</sup> Btn. Died of wounds, Messines, Belgium, 22 September 1917. Aged 28. Son of Christopher and Margaret Calvert, Sandy Bay, Hobart.

PTE Lynn Thomas Joseph (No. 760A) Engine-driver working Nubeena, b. Carlton, 12<sup>th</sup> Btn. 4<sup>th</sup> Machine Gun Co. K.I.A. Harbonnierres, France, 23 August 1918. Aged 23. Son of Walter Thomas and Emily Kiam Joseph, Nubeena.

PTE Mark William Richardson (No. 8052). Farm-hand, b. Hobart, working Saltwater River, 12<sup>th</sup> Btn. K.I.A., 23 August 1918, Chuignolles, France. Aged 19. Son of James Edward and late Ellen Richardson, Saltwater River.

PTE Norman Greatbatch (No. 7277) Farmer, b. Nubeena, D.O.W. France 18 September 1918, Aged 24. Son of James and Lottie Greatbatch, Nubeena.

Thirty six soldiers who enlisted from Nubeena area returned. Ironically the lives of those who died are better documented than those who survived. Their records reveal not only personal detail, but an insight into life at the time. Some were not born on the Peninsula. As a newly opened area, this is not surprising. Many were farmer/orchardists. Harold Rumney is typical. Extracts from a diary (which are included in the magazine) give an insight into the life of a small farmer living on the Peninsula, and show the importance of local records in fully understanding the impact of the war.

Two other soldiers on the Carnarvon memorial also died at Gallipoli. W. Davis aged 44, a bushman and mill-hand from Brighton who had been through the Boer War, D.O.W. and Leonard Hawkins of Hobart aged 35 who died at Lone Pine too.

The effect of war on families is shown by the Stacey family. Of five brothers who volunteered, John Davis and William were killed. The latter enlisted in New Zealand (where his records will be still). The Allen family lost three brothers from the five who volunteered. W.T. Freis buried at Sierra Leone, West Africa, then a coaling port for ships heading for

Europe. His ship-mates aboard the HMAS *Seang Bee* contributed to a head-stone, and forwarded photos of the grave to his family.

The battles which raged across Belgium and France in 1917 and 1918 took their toll on Peninsula men. Batchelor, Curran and Calvert died in Belgium; Joseph, Richardson and Greatbatch in France. The Red Cross conducted enquiries into the fate of soldiers on behalf of relatives, as the official telegram gave little information. Interviews with mates from the front-line tried to verify cause of death, some very graphic descriptions were with-held. These are now retained by the Australian War Memorial and are available to researchers. Richardson was 'instantly killed by shell' according to witness PTE G.S. Richards, who saw "his body in the trench sitting up dead".

Calvert was hit by a shell's explosion on a very dark night at Messines. PTE F.M. Salter described how Calvert's "left leg was blown off; bit of shrapnel in the head and his left arm was broken. I saw him carried down. I heard he died at the 2<sup>nd</sup> casualty clearing station".

SGT Curran was wounded in the stomach but refused help, walking out as he thought the stretcher-bearers were busy and he thought it would be better to let them take the other cases. He later died of his wounds. Curran, like Free, was a member of the all-Tasmanian 49<sup>th</sup> Battalion which embarked for Europe in 1916. Albert Curran fought in the same platoon as his brother J. Curran, who although wounded three times, survived the war.

The Honour Roll card filled out by relatives after the war for the A.W.M., Canberra, gives details on each soldier. Mark Richardson who was killed six months after enlisting, at age 19, had according to his father, show "wonderful grit and determination to join the A.I.F. as he had to undergo two painful surgical (sic) operations (at) Roseneath Hospital before he was accepted".

On the Menin Gate, Ypres, Belgium, are the names of three Peninsula soldiers among the 6,176 Australians who disappeared without trace:

PTE Frederick F. McGuinness of Bond St., Carnarvon, son of William Thomas and Katherine McGuinness. K.I.A. 7-6-1917 Aged 21.

PTE Sidney G. Locke, 12<sup>th</sup> Btn of Premaydena, son of Thomas F. and Elsie Jane E. Locke. K.I.A. 20-8-1917, aged 22.

PTE Alfred R. Cahill, 40<sup>th</sup> Btn. Son of John R. and Lila Cahill, and husband of Helen, 385 Liverpool St., Hobart K.I.A. 13-10-1917, aged 31.

The effect of the war on Tasman Peninsula is revealed in letters to the "children's corner" of the *Tasmanian Mail*. The letters record how social activity was geared to assist the war effort, whether by fund-raising or farewelling soldiers and how the economy was altered. Mill-hands volunteering resulted in the closure of Price's saw-mill, Taranna, and Lacey's cheese factory, Koonya closed also. Wives and the youngest and oldest family members turned to milking, pruning and fruit-picking. At school, children played "prisoner's base" and jokes were told ridiculing the Kaiser: Q. Why does the Kaiser save all the old boots and palings? A. For defeat and defence.

The letter-writers from the Peninsula were usually girls, writing under pen-names such as "Nubeena Lassie", "Moss Rose" (from Premaydena) and "Cassie". Occasionally real names were used (Alice and Leah Nuroo from *Luffra*, Eaglehawk Neck), or slipped through – "Cassie" was Cassie Dodge, and "Godetia", Ivey Allan from Taranna. Others, like "Pozières", "Beryl" (of Koonya) and "Rabbit" (of Taranna) are still a mystery.

These letters evoke a poignant picture of life on the Peninsula, of relying on river ferries, walking to school, going to stock sales at Koonya and of the war's effect on everyone.

The *Tasmanian Mail*, May 11, 1916

Nubeena

Dear "Fairy Godmother,"

Seeing my letter in "The Mail," I thought I would write again. How did you enjoy yourself at Easter time? I enjoyed myself really well. There was a fair held in the Koonya hall on Easter Monday, and a dance at night for the Belgians. I went down to the fair, but didn't stay to the dance because we were giving three of our soldiers a farewell the same night, and, of course, I came back for that. We had a lovely dance, and on Tuesday night at Carnarvon they were giving some of their soldiers a farewell dance, but it was as wet as wet could be. I was going through if it hadn't been wet. Our soldiers went away yesterday, and some more of our boys are going away to Claremont next week. I had a letter from one of the soldiers in Egypt last week. Thanks very much for the verse, "Fairy." We are having a concert at Nubeena for the Belgians, and may it be a success. "Fairy," isn't the war dreadful? All the boys are going from everywhere. I don't have much time for writing, as we have been busy picking apples. It is getting late, so I will close with best love to you and your "Godchildren" from a

"Nubeena Lassie"

The impact of the Western Front on a village such as Taranna is shown in a letter reporting the death of the writer's brother, Leslie Allen, one of three killed from the same family, by "Godetia". In an earlier letter she had explained, "I am the oldest left at home now out of 6. Two of my brothers have gone to the war. One is at Broadmeadows (i.e. Melbourne) and the other must be in Egypt by this.... I never look at the news".

Eight months later Ivey Allen ("Godetia" wrote

The *Tasmanian Mail* November 10, 1916.

Taranna

Dear "Fairy,"

Since I last wrote to you one of my brothers was killed in France. We got letters and cards from him nearly a month after he was killed. This is a piece he put in one letter - "I hope you get this letter, as I might not have a chance to write another one, for we are going to go over the parapet tonight to have a look at Fritz. You can bet we will get a warm welcome, but that won't matter so long as we succeed in capturing their trenches." My brother must have been killed that night or next day after he wrote that letter. Dear "Fairy," the wild flowers on the Peninsula are beginning to look most lovely now. Sunday fortnight my sister and I went to the back of Mr. Quarrell's old

tram, and the scenery up in those gullies is magnificent. The laurel, clematis, and dozens of other different trees and flowers are all nicely out. We got quite a collection of them for the vases.

"Godetia"

The full effect of W.W.I. could only be judged if the decade following 1919 was studied. What happened to the widows and their families? Some returned men, like Eric Benjafield, fitted into life apparently with ease, founding the Returned Servicemen's Club. Others recall the local doctor, a jovial personality pre- 1914, but returned a sombre man. The Council minutes record returned servicemen working on road-works. Ill-feeling over their plight caused local residents to try to remove the Council Clerk at a public meeting, so a returned soldier could apply for the position. The Parade for Peace at Nubeena was marred by the outbreak of the flu epidemic brought home by returning soldiers which stopped some locals from attending.

The Memorials are a reminder not only of those who fought but of the non-combatants who suffered also. Only now is the full impact being realised.

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