



In Memory of

**Private**

**LIDLAW ERIC LESLIE**

**3581, 31<sup>ST</sup> Battalion, A.I.F.**

who died age 25

on 2 September 1918

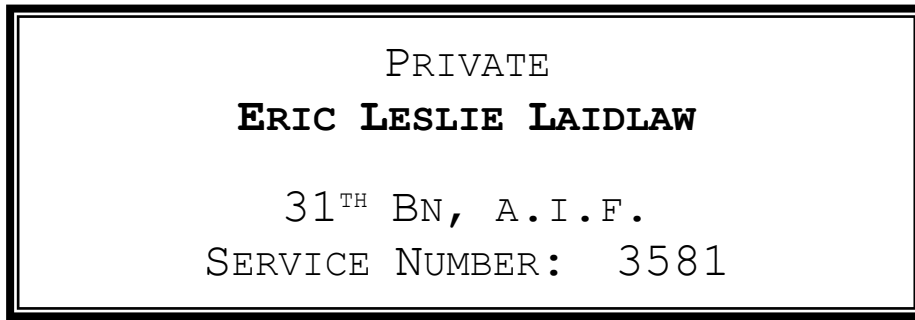
Son of John and Dora Magarry Laidlaw.

Born in Toowoomba, Queensland.

Remembered with honour

HOLLEYBROOK MEMORIAL, SOUTHAMPTON, ENGLAND





A graduate of the Toowoomba Grammar School in 1905, **Eric Leslie Laidlaw** has been a recent addition to our records and one that we have missed in the past. He was born in Toowoomba, Queensland on 5 August, 1892 to John and Dora Laidlaw. He enlisted in Toowoomba on 19 January 1916 aged 23 years old. He stated his occupation as a farmer. His medical records state that he was 5 foot 7 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches, weighed 140 pounds and had a chest size of 37 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches. His complexion was fair, he had grey eyes and brown hair. His religion was Presbyterian. He enlisted with the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 8<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements. He nominated his brother, George Hunter Laidlaw of Moola, Braeside, via Dalby, Queensland as his next-of-kin. This was later changed to Cecil Plains via Oakey, Queensland. He mentioned other siblings in his will which included George Hunter, John, Herbert John, Ronald Aubery and sisters Violet and Evelyn.

He trained at Enoggera until being posted to the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion Reinforcements (8/31<sup>st</sup>). He sailed from Sydney aboard A42 *Booraa* on 16 August 1916. He trained in England from October to December 1916 and then sailed across the Channel to be “*taken on strength*” by his Battalion in France, northeast of the Battlefields of Pozières. The Battalion was part of the 8th Brigade, 5th Australian Division.

The Battalion was operating in a relatively quiet, yet dangerous, sector around Flers and Gueudecourt. They were involved in trench maintenance and supplying the front line, which involved moving food and materials from dumps near the village of Montauban. The winter of 1916–17 on the Somme was notoriously harsh.

Eric attended No 3 Army Observers Course in July 1917 before returning to his unit. He was later given leave in England in January 1918 before returning to his unit on the Western Front. The unit was involved in fighting around Dernancourt in March and April 1918 together with fighting around Villers Bretonneux in April 1918.

He was wounded in action at Dernancourt on 27 July 1918 with head, thigh, shoulder and forearm injuries and was admitted to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian General Hospital on 29 July 1918. He embarked for treatment in England on 2 August. In 1918, on board the Australian hospital ship *HMAT Warilda* which was operating as an ambulance transport between France and England. The ship had sailed from Le Havre, France, bound for Southampton, England, with 660 wounded soldiers, 60 medical staff, and 115 crew. Early on August 3, 1918, the ship was hit by a torpedo from the German submarine UC-49 in the English Channel. 123 people died, including 15 Australians, with many fatalities occurring in the lower wards.

The Hollybrook Memorial commemorates by name almost 1,900 servicemen and women of the Commonwealth land and air forces\* whose graves are not known, many of whom were lost in transports or other vessels torpedoed or mined in home waters (\*Officers and men of the Commonwealth's navies who have no grave but the sea are commemorated on memorials elsewhere). The memorial also bears the names of those who were lost or buried at sea, or who

died at home but whose bodies could not be recovered for burial. Among those commemorated on the Hollybrook Memorial is Field Marshall Lord Kitchener, Secretary of State for War, who died when the battle cruiser HMS Hampshire was mined and sunk off Scapa Flow on 5 June 1916.

Toowoomba Grammar School Archive Records state that he started at the school in January 1903 and left in December 1905. He was part of the 1909 Year Group. His residential address was Neil Street, Toowoomba. The school magazine for 1905 states that he joined the school's swimming club and learned to swim. Mondays and Thursdays were fixed as swimming days at the school.

He is commemorated on the Australian War Memorial Roll of Honour, Hollybrook Memorial, Southampton, Kaimkillenbun War Memorial and Toowoomba St. Stephen's Presbyterian Church Roll of Honour.

Records show that his brother John Laidlaw (TGS Old Boy, Year Group 1903), Service No 3402 served with the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion, 11<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements AIF. John enlisted on 4 August 1915 and returned to Australia. John was a Toowoomba Grocer & Produce Merchant on Taylor Street before moving to Toowoomba Grocery/Produce Store in Ruthven Street, first as 'Laidlaw Bros' and later as 'Laidlaw & Peak'.

**External Links:**

[AWM Honour Roll](#)

[NAA Service Records](#)

[AIF Project](#)

[AWM War Diary 31st Bn, AIF July 1918](#)



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P06276.053

*8<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements, 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion AIF – AWM*



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P06276.071

*31<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 8<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements leaving camp for the front August 1916 – AWM*



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P06276.064

*31<sup>st</sup> Battalion 8<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements 'Smoko 1916' – AWM*



*HMAT Warilda – Birtwistlewiki*