



Captain Joseph Peter LALOR

[1884 – 1915]



12th Infantry Battalion

Joseph Peter Lalor was born on 12th August 1884 at Richmond, Victoria, the eldest of four children of Dr Joseph Peter Lalor (medical practitioner) and Agnes Lalor (nee McCormick).

The family was very well known. His grandfather, Peter Lalor, was leader of the 1854 Eureka Stockade insurrection, and later a Minister and then Speaker of the Victorian Legislative Assembly. His father was a medical practitioner, and his brother was also a medical practitioner, later the first Medical Officer at Royal Military College Duntroon.

We thank the History Interest Group and other volunteers who have researched and prepared these Notes. The series will be progressively expanded and developed. They are intended as casual reading for the benefit of Members, who are encouraged to advise of any inaccuracies in the material.

Please do not reproduce them or distribute them outside of the Club membership.

He was educated at Xavier College, Kew Victoria until 1893. He claimed to have matriculated from Melbourne University in 1899 but his name does not appear on the list of matriculants.

Joe Lalor has a story with more than a touch of romantic mystery

His mother stated that he served in the Royal Navy (*HMS Royal Arthur*, the flagship of the Australian Station 1897-1904) before reputedly deserting before joining the French Foreign Legion in 1905. This service is undocumented. There is also an unsubstantiated story that he served in a South American revolution.

Newspapers described him as: *immensely popular with all ranks...was fully 5ft. 2in. high, and his features were of the characteristic Anzac type - bronzed and aquiline. His close-cropped hair was a feature and his mannerisms were expressive of the parade ground at all times. His geniality off parade was a stimulant to junior officers. Dr CEW Bean referred to him as a fiery little officer ...all for pushing ahead.*

Lalor served in the militia unit, 1st Battalion, Victorian Rangers and on 20 July 1910 he was appointed as lieutenant on probation to the Administrative and Instructional Staff (Officers) - part of the permanent forces. Two days later he was en-route from Melbourne to Fremantle to take up an appointment in Western Australia.

Soon after arrival in WA, he married a Melbourne girl, Hestor Loughrey, at Subiaco on 4 January 1911. They had a daughter who died soon after birth and a son, Peter Bernard Lalor, who was born in Perth on 17 April 1913.

He served in 21st Brigade in Kalgoorlie and then as Brigade Major in 22nd Brigade in Perth. On 7 November 1913 it was announced that Lalor was leaving for a similar appointment in 2nd Brigade in Queensland.

On the outbreak of war, he joined the AIF, being appointed Captain, 12th Battalion and sailed with the unit from Fremantle on 2 November 1914.

At dawn on 25 April 1915 the 12th Battalion landed on the Gallipoli Peninsular. At 8.30am, Captain Lalor led his men in an advance up Baby 700. Baby 700 was won and lost twice during the day and during the fighting the Commanding Officer was killed and Major Elliot was wounded. Lalor was then the senior officer of 12th Battalion in this action.

Against all regulations, he carried with him a treasured family sword, the hilt of which was wrapped in khaki cloth to prevent it glistening in the sun. Lalor dropped the sword at The Nek where it was later retrieved but it was lost again later.

At about 3.30pm another attempt was made to retake Baby 700 by moving across Malone's Gully and attacking around the north shoulder. The story is told in the 12th Battalion's history:

Lalor then moved forward on to the seaward slope of 'Baby 700' where the fighting was thickest. Although the mental strain and anxiety, which he had experienced since landing early in the morning had been enormous, he nevertheless rallied his men and, waving his arms, shouted, 'Come on, the 12th'. The words had hardly passed his lips when he fell dead, and 'the 12th' (the last words he uttered) lost one of its most gallant and capable officers.

The Official History states:

Fire was coming from the lower knolls down by the beach. Lalor stood up to see, and resolved to charge forward. "Now then, 12th Battalion," he cried; and, as he said the words, a Turkish bullet killed him.

He was 30 years old when he was killed about 12 hours after the Landing on 25 April 1915. He left a young wife and two-year old son. Lalor was one of 12 USC members killed at Gallipoli, and one of three killed in the same action. (Fellow USC members Major Robertson and Lieutenant Rigby, both of the 9th Battalion, were also killed nearby and their stories also appear in this series.)

Captain Lalor now lies in Baby 700 Cemetery at Anzac, Turkey.



Sources included:

- Australian War Memorial
- National Archives of Australia
- Various web pages
- *United Service Club, Queensland: The First Century, 1892-1992* by Flight Lieutenant Murray Adams and Lieutenant Colonel Peter Charlton
- Club Meeting Minutes, Annual Reports and sundry documents