

AWM 30 November 2024

Last Post
Ceremony

①

Family request - LPC scheduled

6304 Private Peter Maclean

Unit: 16th Australian Infantry Battalion

Fate: KIA 11/04/1917

Photograph: Family image in MediaBin

Today we remember and pay tribute to Private Peter Maclean [*pron mac-lane*].

Peter Maclean was born in 1878 in the village of Crowlista on the Isle of Lewis in the remote Outer Hebrides of Scotland. He was the second youngest son of nine children born to Peter and Jane Maclean. Little is known of Peter's early life.

After finishing at the local public school, Peter Maclean [*pron mac-lane*] joined the Seaforth Highlanders, an infantry regiment associated with the Highlands of Scotland. As part of the 3rd Militia Battalion, Maclean embarked from Scotland in February 1900, and was stationed in Egypt for garrison duty during the end of the South African War. Maclean spent six years serving with the Seaforth Highlanders, and was followed into service by his youngest brother, Roderick.

In 1911, Maclean decided to leave Scotland and emigrate to Australia. He arrived in Western Australia later that year, and found work as a miner in Kalgoorlie.

Peter Maclean enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force on the 16th of February 1916 at Blackboy Hill Camp. He was assigned to the 20th reinforcements of the 16th Australian Infantry Battalion with the rank of private in March. Maclean remained training at Blackboy Hill for most of 1916. He left Fremantle in HMAT *Suffolk* on the 13th of October 1916, bound for the United Kingdom.

He arrived in Plymouth in December, and continued training at Larkhill Camp. Over Christmas, he was able to take leave to travel to Paisley in Scotland to visit his oldest brother Kenneth and his wife. He returned to

camp shortly afterwards, and left England for France in the *Princess Victoria* on the 16th of January 1917.

Maclean marched into the 4th Australian Divisional Base Depot at Etaples [*pron* ay-tap-luh] before joining the 16th Battalion at Mametz [*pron* ma-mets] on the 21st of January. The battalion spent most of January there. Throughout February and March, the 16th alternated between front-line service around Flers [*pron* flur] and work behind the lines. By the end of March, the battalion was preparing for open warfare.

In early April, the battalion moved to near Bapaume [*pron* bah-pome] in preparation for a planned attack on the Hindenburg Line near the village of Bullecourt [*pron* bully-cor]. General Gough decided to employ a dozen tanks to lead the troops through the enemy's barbed-wire. The attack was postponed when it became clear the tanks would not arrive at their starting points in time.

On the night of the 10th of April, Maclean met his youngest brother, Roderick, who had been fighting with the British forces around nearby Arras [*pron* a-rass]. The brothers agreed to meet again after the battle the following day; but it was the last time they would see each other.

At 2:15 a.m. on the 11th of April, the men of the 16th Battalion moved into their jumping-off positions in Sunken Road, and were all ready to attack by 3:30 a.m. The first three tanks moved out at 4:30, followed fifteen minutes later by infantry. Only half-way to the first objective, two of the tanks stopped and opened fire on the enemy, "thus giving away the positions" of the infantry and "almost telling the enemy that an attack was in progress." The infantry decided to push forwards without the tanks.

The battle was a disaster. Although the 16th Battalion managed to reach their first objective, they were exposed to heavy machine-gun fire and artillery shelling. With the tanks either too far from the objectives or quickly put out of action by the enemy, the men were forced to retreat back to their own lines. The first battle of Bullecourt [*pron* bully-cor] cost the Australians 3,000 casualties.

One of these casualties was Private Peter Maclean, who was killed in action on the 11th of April 1917.

He was 39 years old.

After the battle, his brother Roderick spent the night searching field hospitals and casualty clearing stations for his missing brother, without success.

After news of Peter's death reached his family back in Scotland, the family came together to share in their grief and sorrow. Kenneth's wife wrote to his sister Annie that "Words cannot express our deep sorrow in the loss of a noble and dear brother. I have no brother of my own ... but I always looked upon your brothers as my own."

Peter MacLean's body was never recovered from the battlefield; his final resting place remains unknown. He is commemorated on the Villers-Bretonneux [*pron villas-breton-oh*] Memorial alongside the names of over 10,000 Australians who were killed in France and who have no known grave.

Peter MacLean's name is also listed on the Roll of Honour on my right, among almost 62,000 Australians who died while serving in the First World War.

This is but one of the many stories of service and sacrifice told here at the Australian War Memorial. We now remember Private Peter Maclean, who gave his life for us, for our freedoms, and in the hope of a better world.

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