



Shire of Mt Marshall

— THE SANDALWOOD SHIRE —

ANZAC Day 2021 - Bencubbin

Read by Deputy President Nick Gillett

ANZAC DAY is observed on the 25th of April each year, and was devised to honour the members of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) who served in the Gallipoli Campaign, being their first engagement in the First World War (1914 – 1918). ANZAC DAY has grown as a National Day of Remembrance for all those Australian and New Zealand soldiers who have served for their country. We especially remember all those who have fallen and all those who have suffered in wars, conflicts and peace keeping operations.

The War Memorial has been relocated to Monger Street, the main street here in Bencubbin. New plaques have been placed as there were some errors on the old ones, including some omissions. We have been selecting one of the fallen at the service here, and this year we will focus on one of the persons whose name has been added to the new honour plaque from World War 1.

OSCAR COOK 2361

Oscar Cook was born in 1893 to Charles and Annette Cook in the town of Bedwin, Aldbourne, Wiltshire in England.

He served with the 3rd Battalion, Wiltshire Regiment but bought his discharge after seven and a half months prior to coming to Australia.

Oscar's occupation was listed as a farm hand in Australia and his address was listed as the Duke of York Restaurant, Perth, W.A.

He owned the land at Ninghan Location 711, just North of Bencubbin, now owned by the Putt family.

He enlisted on 28th July, 1915 as a 23 year old Private.

Oscar was with the 28th Battalion, 5th Reinforcement. The unit embarked from Fremantle on board HMATA32 Themistocles on 13th October 1915.

Setting the scene on 29th July 1916 at the "Battle of the Somme", France. An assault by elements of three Brigades goes in at midnight and is subjected to very heavy machine gun and artillery fire. Some ground was made on the extreme left and extreme right. At 10am a conference of Corps and Divisional Commanders was held. It was decided to repeat the attacks (with better preparation) as soon as possible.



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Private Oscar Cook was killed in action on 29th July 1916. His grave is not known

His two brothers, Albert and Henry were also killed in action.

He is honoured at the Australian National Memorial, Villers- Bretonneux, France. His name is located at Panel 112 in the Commemorative Area. Villers – Bretonneux is a village about 15 km East of Amiens.

The Australian National Memorial stands on high grounds ('Hill 104'). It is located behind the Villers-Bretonneux Military Cemetery and honours the Australian soldiers who fought in France and Belgium, and who lie under the battlefields. The Memorial consists of a central tower, with spectacular views of the surrounding countryside, flanked by wing walls commemorating the 10,719 Australian casualties who died in France and who have no known grave.

During the Second World War the Memorial was used as an observation post by the French and was extensively damaged by German aircraft and ground fire. Although repairs were carried out, some scarring was retained and can still be seen on parts of the Memorial.

Oscar Cook's name will be added to the Bencubbin Honour Roll at the new War Memorial. His name is currently on the Kununoppin Honour Roll.

On the 1st July, 2016, and just 29 days before Oscar was killed in the same area of France, the Battle of the Somme commenced. Here are some excerpts from a Memorial Article written in 2011 by Emma Campbell at the Australian War Memorial.

"In the early morning of 1 July 1916, more than 100,000 British infantrymen were ordered from their trenches in the fields and woods north of the Somme River in France, to attack the opposing German line. Within 24 hours, the British army would suffer almost 60,000 casualties, a third of whom were killed, and record the most costly day in its history.

Today marks the 95th anniversary of the start of the Somme offensive, a series of fierce and ultimately futile battles that consumed the British, Australian and Dominion forces for much of 1916. The offensive was eventually abandoned on 18 November with staggering troop losses and little ground gained."



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In his memoir “The old front line”, British poet laureate John Masefield, who spent months at the front, includes a German’s account of the start of the assault, at 7.30 am on July 1:

They came on at a steady easy pace as if expecting to find nothing alive in our front trenches ... a few minutes later, when the leading British line was within 100 yards, the rattle of machine-guns and rifle fire broke out from along the whole line of craters..

The advance rapidly crumpled under this hail of shells and bullets. All along the line men could be seen throwing their arms into the air and collapsing never to move again. Badly wounded rolled about in their agony, and others less severely injured crawled to the nearest shell-hole. The noise of battle became indescribable ... Again and again the extended lines of British infantry broke against the German defence like waves against a cliff, only to be beaten back. It was an amazing spectacle of un-exemplified gallantry, courage and bull-dog determination on both sides.

All along the 30-kilometre front, the same annihilation was taking place. In his book, “The first day on the Somme”, Martin Middlebrook records the experience of Private W. Slater, 18th Battalion, West Yorkshire Regiment (known as the 2nd Bradford Pals):

For some reason nothing seemed to happen to us at first; we strolled along as though walking in a park. Then, suddenly, we were in the midst of a storm of machine-gun bullets and I saw men beginning to twirl round and fall in all kinds of curious ways as they were hit – quite unlike the way actors do it in films.

The first day of the Somme offensive has a relevance to the British today that is akin to the landing at Gallipoli for Australians.

“It was a day of high hope and expectation, and it ended in disaster,” Burness says. “To a new generation, that realisation had a real impact. There was so much expectation that was destroyed on the battlefield.”

“Despite the enormous losses of that first battle at the Somme, the offensive continued through summer and a particularly wet autumn until the first snow fell on 18 November 1916. The Australian Imperial Force, consisting of men who had fought at Gallipoli and fresh volunteers from home, arrived at the Somme in late July.



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The major contribution of Australian troops to the Somme offensive was in the fighting around Pozières between 23 July and 3 September. The 1st, 2nd and 4th Australian Divisions suffered more than 24,000 casualties at Pozières, including 6,741 dead. Official war correspondent C.E.W. Bean described the small village as “more densely sown with Australian sacrifice than any other place on earth”.

When the Somme offensive ended, the allied forces had managed to advance only 12 kilometres. It had come at a cost of 430,000 British and Dominion troops and 200,000 French casualties. The offensive destroyed Britain’s mass volunteer army, and for the rest of the war it would be reliant upon conscription for reinforcements. It had also resulted in heavy German casualties, about 230,000 according to current scholarship. The German army never recovered from its loss of experienced junior officers and non-commissioned officers on the Somme. To those who fought there, and for the present generation, the Somme was synonymous with slaughter.”

On this day, 25th April 2021, here at the Bencubbin War Memorial, we remember all those who have fallen, and all those who have suffered and served in wars, conflicts and peace keeping operations.

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