

Mapping our Anzac History

Our Soldiers & Volunteers



There were 57,700 Queensland service men and women who enlisted in the First World War. At the start of the war, Mareeba's population was only 1,200 yet over 460 volunteers from our district volunteered for service—most of our young male population. Across the Atherton Tablelands, a total of around 1,000 men and women volunteered to serve Australia.

Our volunteers travelled by horse, on foot and by train to enlist in Cairns Townsville. Joining the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) gave them an opportunity to travel abroad and serve their country. There was also the promise of adventure—or so they thought—however reality proved very different. Sadly over one hundred of our soldiers never returned. Some died in action or from wounds, and many from illness. Influenza, tuberculosis, and pneumonia were prevalent among the men who were forced to endure horrific conditions whilst fighting.

In Mareeba, we recognise the important contribution and sacrifices that our local volunteers made during the First World War. The Mareeba Shire Council named the following streets in honour of our First World War soldiers who lost their lives:

Barrett Street (George Ernest Barrett)

Bowers Street (John Charles Bowers)

Colquhoun Street (Harold Robert Colquhoun)

Gibbins Lane (Robert Henry Gibbins)

McDowall Street (Thomas Leslie McDowall)

Owens Street (John Joseph Owens)

Toll Close (Frederick Vivian Toll)

Wallace Drive (James Angus Wallace)

Bourke Street (William Bourke)

Brodziak Close (Edward Remilton Brodziak)

Donlen Street (Owen Donlen Jnr)

Leswell Street (Jack Leswell)

Maher Street (Charles Leo Maher)

Slade Street (Henry Arthur Slade)

Totten Street (Robert Joseph Totten)

Anzac Avenue in Mareeba was named in 1953 in memory of all soldiers who served in both World Wars.

The following are the stories of some of our local volunteers from Mareeba, Kuranda, Mount Molloy, Irvinebank, Stannary Hills, Watsonville, Chillagoe, including indigenous soldiers from our area. Lest we forget.



Lest we forget

www.msc.qld.gov.au/mapping-our-anzac-history

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Jack Leswell (1895-1916)

Jack Leswell was a labourer who enlisted in December 1914 and joined the 11th Light Horse Regiment. He was posted to Egypt but was killed in action on 15 October 1916 from a gunshot wound in the back during the battle of Maghara, on the Sinai Peninsular. He is remembered on the Jerusalem Memorial in Palestine. Leswell Street is named in his honour.

Photo: Mareeba Historical Society



Robert Joseph Totten (1896-1916)

At only 19 years of age, labourer Robert Joseph Totten volunteered for the First World War and joined the 15th Battalion in France. By the end of his first year in service, he was hospitalised with the mumps. After a month of care he returned to his battalion only to be fatally wounded in the abdomen a few months later in April at Bullecourt. He is buried at the Bapaume Australian Cemetery. Totten Street in Mareeba is named in his honour.

Photo: Cairns Historical Society

Dr William Millett (1886-1948)

William Leonard Millett was born in Charters Towers and studied medicine in Sydney. He married in Sydney before heading back to North Queensland as a Medical Practitioner in Stannary Hills, Chillagoe, Atherton and Mareeba. He was working in Mareeba when news of the war broke. As a country doctor, he had been badly injured by a runaway horse whilst attending to a patient, but his injury did not deter him from enlisting in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) in 1917. He was 30 years of age when he volunteered and was appointed the rank of Captain. Whilst serving in France with the field ambulance, he sustained a gunshot wound to his shoulder.

After returning to Australia in 1919 he continued practising medicine in Charters Towers, Gympie and Willuna, as well as in New Guinea. During the Second World War he worked at the Herberton Hospital, where he helped to keep it operational through the war. His strong work ethics, fearlessness and dedication to his patients earned him widespread respect. He passed away at the Atherton Hospital in 1948 after a short illness.

Photo: Mareeba Historical Society



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William Crothers (1887-1969)

William Crothers, a teamster from Kuranda, was 28 years old when he enlisted in 1916 and was posted to France with the 12th Battalion. A year into his service he sustained a serious gunshot wound to his leg and was evacuated to England to recover. He rejoined his unit in France some months later.

After the war, William's Division was billeted in Châtelet, Belgium from late December 1918 to April 1919. He was billeted with a local family by the name of Bayens. Whilst waiting to return to Australia, he kept a daily diary that demonstrated his dry sense of humour and noted the tedious nature of his duties. His diary is peppered with; "quiet, nothing", "nothing doing", "ditto", "nothing to speak of", "nothing of any consequence". In February 1919, the Mengeot brothers (professional photographers in Chatelet) photographed William in their studio along with 250 other Australian soldiers. He returned to Australia in mid-1919. Whilst he was serving overseas, his father sadly passed away in Kuranda in 1918.

Photo: Collection Historical Society Le Vieux Châtelet, Fonds Mengeot, Belgium



Frederick Vivian Toll (1895-1915)

F. Vivian Toll moved to Mount Molloy from his birthplace in Charters Towers in 1906. His father, Lt. Colonel Frederick William Toll, became the manager of the Mount Molloy Timber Mill Company. Vivian's mother had died when he was only six years of age, and his father remarried in 1904.

In August 1914, Vivian was one of the many Tableland men who embarked on the "SS Kanowna" as part of the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force (AN & MEF) to seize German New Guinea. However the ship was forced to return to Townsville when the crew refused to enter a war zone. A year later Vivian, working as a clerk at the

Jack & Newell Store in Mount Molloy, enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) at age 20 years.

He was posted to Gallipoli where on 6 August 1915, the 15th Battalion 4th Infantry Brigade—of which Vivian was a member—was ordered to charge and capture Hill 971. Turkish fire decimated the Anzac ranks who counter attacked under shrapnel fire with fixed bayonets. Vivian died during the attack although his fate was still unconfirmed for several months. His officer father desperately sought news of his son aware only that Vivian had been injured. Eyewitness records state that Chaplain Power buried Vivian where he fell. His memorial is at the Lone Pine Memorial at Gallipoli. Toll Close in Mareeba is named in his honour.

Photo: Mareeba Historical Society



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Frederick William Toll DSO (1872-1955)

Vivian was the son of Frederick William Toll (1872-1955), an accountant and decorated army officer who served in both the Boer War (in 1900) and the First World War. In 1914, Frederick led the 3rd Battalion in the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force (AN & MEF) in the capture of German New Guinea. He was then given command of the 31st Battalion and posted to Egypt in November 1914, briefly serving in the Middle East (when news came of his son's death at Gallipoli) before being posted to France in June 1916. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Order at Fromelles. In 1917 he was seriously injured and gassed at Bapaume and Polygon Wood then evacuated to London to serve at the AIF Administrative Headquarters, before returning to Australia in 1919. He died aged 83 years.

Photo: Anzacs Online



Ion Llewellyn Idriess (1889-1979)

Ion 'Jack' Llewellyn Idriess was born in Sydney but spent much of his young adult life in North Queensland and Mount Molloy working as a miner searching for gold, tin and sandalwood.

When war was declared, Idriess was working 200 miles north of Cooktown—he walked to Cooktown and caught a boat to Cairns then Townsville to enlist. He was 27 when he joined the 5th Light Horse Regiment. He was wounded twice and returned home in March 1918. His war diaries provided the basis for his book "The Desert Column". Idriess went on to become one of Australia's most prolific writers—writing 47 books. Mount Molloy locals recall that he wrote one of his books whilst sitting on the veranda of the Mount Molloy Hotel.

Photo: The Queenslander Pictorial 1914

Henry Dalziel (1893-1965)

Henry 'Harry' Dalziel was from Irvinebank and was a railway fireman. He is the sole Victoria Cross recipient from North Queensland. In 1915 just before his 22nd birthday, he joined the 15th Battalion. He saw action in Gallipoli and France, but in the battle of Hamel, while suffering a gunshot wound to the hand and under heavy fire, he attacked an enemy machine gun while he killed or captured the entire crew. He continued until he was severely injured in the head. He was transferred to England for extensive medical treatment. For his bravery and courage he was awarded the thousandth Victoria Cross in 1918.

In January 1919 he returned to Australia. He married in 1920 in Brisbane and moved to Tolga to take up a soldier settlement block, but he was still nursing his war injuries and found working the land difficult. He then lived a transient life until being employed in military recruitment during the Second World War. He died in Brisbane following a stroke in 1965.

Photo: Loudoun House Museum



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Monica O'Callaghan (1887-1960)

During the First World War, nurses were recruited not only from the nursing profession, but also civilian services. They served overseas in Lemnos, Egypt, England, France, Belgium, Greece, Palestine, Mesopotamia, and India, with a smaller contingent serving in military hospitals in Australia. These dedicated and sometimes unprepared nurses, worked in field hospitals, ships and trains, and clearing stations very close to the battlefields. Twenty-five Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS) nurses died.

In 1917, Monica O'Callaghan, from Irvinebank, joined the AANS at age 29 and was one of 500 AANS nurses to serve in India. She was posted to the King George War Hospital in Poona where she served until 1919. A month after she arrived, she contracted measles.

Following her return to Australia and discharge from the service in 1919, she married local Herberton man and chemist, William Collins, who went on to be a long-serving mayor of Cairns (1927-1949). In the early 1920s, William and Monica Collins had a grand house on Collins Avenue, Edge Hill known as "Collins Estate" – Collins Avenue is named after them.

Monica's continuing concern for the well being of returned servicemen, is reflected in her donation three blocks of land to the Cairns RSL as a 'haven' for ex-servicemen who had nowhere to go. This property became known as "Warhaven" and housing units were eventually built.

Photo: Cairns Historical Society



William Joseph Speirs (1894-)

William Joseph Speirs was born in Irvinebank and initially volunteered with the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force (AN & MEF) on "SS Kanowna" in October 1914. He subsequently enlisted with the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) joining the 15th Battalion at age 20 years. He was a well-travelled soldier and saw much action, but in 1915 he received a gunshot wound to his thigh. In a letter home, he wrote about the landing at Gallipoli and how a soldier near him was hit and killed by shrapnel. A piece of shrapnel also hit William and was imbedded in the rising sun badge on his collar—he wrote that the badge saved his life. He returned to Irvinebank after the war.

Photo: Australian War Memorial



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Arthur Langborne MC (1893-)

Arthur Lewis Langborne was born in the Isle of Wight and moved to Irvinebank as a prospector. He was one of many North Queenslanders who sailed on the "SS Kanowna" as part of the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force (AN & MEF). He subsequently enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) with the 15th Infantry Battalion in September 1914 and was later promoted to Captain in the 4th Machine Gun Battalion.

Langborne was awarded the Military Cross (MC) in 1918 "For conspicuous gallantry and leadership during the attack on the Hindenburg Line on 18th September 1918 ne Le Verguier north-west of St Quentin". Before returning to Australia, Langborne married Lottie Jolliffe from his hometown of Shanklin, Isle of Wight, in February 1919. His brother Roy Langborne of Irvinebank received a cable announcing is imminent return to Australia (reported in the Northern Herald 20 February 1919). He disembarked in Melbourne 15 December that year and returned to Irvinebank in 1920.

Photo: Australian War Memorial



Victor Edward Morris (1891-)

Victor Edward Morris was a 23 year old miner and a member of the Watsonville Rifle Club. He and his brother Arthur (aged 18) enlisted in the 2nd Light Horse Brigade in 1915. During his service, he was frequently hospitalised with influenza, diarrhoea, enteric, and also suffered the agony of 'trench feet'. In April 1916 in London, Victor married Agnes Mary Ruffhead. He was discharged and returned to Australia in 1919.

Photo: Cairns Historical Society



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Thomas Graham (1879-1922)

At the mature age of 37, Thomas Henry Graham enlisted for the First World War and joined the 47th Battalion. A real bushman, he was born in Maytown and worked on the Mt Mulgrave Station at Chillagoe—he had never travelled before the war.

In April 1917 he sustained a gunshot wound to his lower back whilst fighting in Bapaume, France. He suffered serious spinal damage and was admitted to the Reading War Hospital, England. Whilst escaping with his life, his mental health deteriorated—believed to be a direct result of his injury. In July 1917 Thomas embarked the hospital ship “Karoola” to return to Australia. Whilst still in care on the ship, he attempted suicide by taking a razor to his throat. Sadly his medical records are filled with disturbing statements such as suffers hallucinations, attempted suicide, paranoia, melancholia, delusions of persecution. By November, he was showing some signs of improvement with a reduction in hallucinations. He was discharged in January 1918.



Thomas returned to the Chillagoe area at Wrotham Park. Unfortunately his delusions and paranoia continued and they drove him to wander off into the bush frequently. Indigenous trackers would search for him, but often discover that Thomas was intentionally covering his own tracks to foil any search efforts. On one such occasion, he disappeared for many days and a large search was undertaken.

Evelyn Maunsell's written recollections and her conversations with Hector Holthouse for the book “S'pose I Die: The Evelyn Maunsell Story” remembers...

“Everyday hopes of finding Tom alive became less. He was obviously completely out of his mind by then, and was just running blindly away... But at last, even the will to run deserted him, and he was found by one of the blacks, miles away from the homestead, just wandering aimlessly. He did not even know where he was or how he got there.”

After that, Thomas was hospitalised in Chillagoe and later at Mareeba where he passed away in 1922.

Photo: Mareeba Historical Society



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Indigenous Soldiers

Records indicate that over one thousand Indigenous Australians volunteered in First World War. At the time, neither Aboriginals nor Torres Strait Islanders were considered as citizens nor were they allowed to vote. The Defence Act of 1903 actually excluded them from joining the military. Some enlisted by 'changing' their ethnicity. Then in October 1917 after many war casualties were recorded and enlistments were fewer, an amendment was passed: "Half-castes may be enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force provided that the examining Medical Officers are satisfied that one of the parents is of European origin." Enlistment forms do not record ethnicity thus making it difficult to identify Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander service personnel, although a few from the Atherton Tablelands are known.

Jack Pollard (1895-)

Jack Pollard was born in Atherton and enlisted in 1917 at the age of 22. He was living and working in Cairns at the Sandpits when he enlisted, and his enlistment records show his next of kin as Jack O'Donnell - the Police Protector of Aboriginals at Innisfail. Jack joined the 11th Light Horse Regiment and disembarked at Suez. He was discharged in 1919 and is believed to have resettled in Atherton.

Photo: Cairns Historical Society



David Molloy (1896-)

Born in Mount Molloy, David Molloy volunteered with the 11th Light Horse Regiment and was posted to Egypt in 1917.

In November 1918 he was diagnosed with clinical malaria, then lobar pneumonia. His treating doctors noted in his records that he "hears the voices of his sisters and mission boys. Makes impulsive rushes and strikes at people". After receiving a sign from 'above' he threw his bedclothes in the rubbish and imagined that he was a Major. During one episode, the doctors recorded "Can give no history - says his father was a white man". He was declared mentally unfit and returned to Australia in April 1919.



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William Perrott (1883-1918)

William Perrott is actually recognised as one of the few indigenous soldiers on the war memorials at Herberton and Evelyn. His father, Robert Perrott, was the owner/operator of Evelyn Station where William was the manager/stockman. In 1916, William was granted an exemption from the Protection of Aborigines Act. He enlisted in 1917 and was placed in the 49th Battalion in France. Soon after arrival, he became seriously ill with pleurisy that developed into bronchitis. After two months in hospital he rejoined his unit, only to fall ill again in October 1918 with influenza—following months of fighting in cold and wet conditions. He passed away three weeks later. He is buried at the Wimereux Communal Cemetery, near Bologne, France.

Photo: State Library of Queensland



Tommy Purcell (1894-1918)

In 1917 at the age of 21, labourer Tommy Purcell enlisted with the 15th Battalion and was sent to France. After recovering from both mumps and measles, he sustained a gunshot wound to the abdomen and died on 19 September. He is buried at the Doingt Communal Cemetery near Peronne, France.

It proved difficult to locate Tommy's next of kin (his sister Emily) who was entitled to receive his war medals. In 1923 Tommy's nephew was eventually located in Yungaburra. It is believed that some years later, the Chief Protector of Aborigines found that Tommy had two half sisters at the Mona Mona Mission near Kuranda.

Photo: Steve Purcell

