

Lancelot Joseph Wollard Payne MC



By Ivor Leonard

Little is known about Lancelot Joseph Wollard Payne's early years. He was born on 2 January 1897 and his birth was registered on 10 February the same year. His parents John Wollard and Katherine Payne (nee Giles) are listed on the record of birth and it is assumed he initially lived at Hamilton Street, Latrobe. He was the youngest of three brothers. His father was a doctor and Hamilton Street is located on the south side of La Trobe close to the Mersey River and is still bordered by open land on the west. It can be concluded that he would probably have had a somewhat comfortable childhood. Given his sporting prowess in his teenage years, it can be assumed he would have spent a considerable amount of his time at home swimming, playing football and cricket. Nonetheless, Lancelot was something of an allrounder and in December 1910 received a score of 88 in the Trinity College, London Musical Knowledge Examination, Preparatory Division ¹.

For reasons unknown, the Payne family made the decision to send the three boys to school in Hobart. Given the family was still living in Devonport, it is interesting that he was sent to Hobart and not Launceston. However, his brothers Kenrick and Charles were also schooled in Hobart. Originally, Lancelot was enrolled as a boarder at Queen's College in Hobart where he studied for a number of years. When Queen's College closed and merged with Hutchins he enrolled as a boarding student at The Hutchins School. Hutchins at this time was located on Macquarie Street in the centre of Hobart. The original Hutchins building still exists today and is presently occupied by the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR).

Details about his time at Queen's College are sparse. Nonetheless, there is considerable information available about his later years at Hutchins. On his arrival at the school in January 1913, at the age of

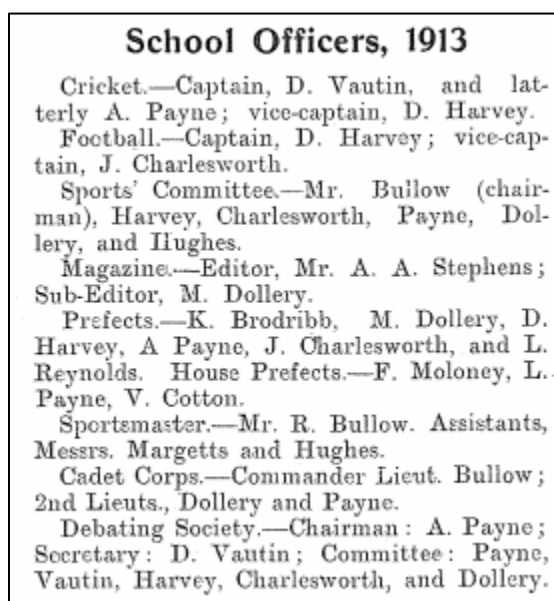


Figure 1- LJW Payne Announcement as Prefect
(Hutchins School Magazine)

sixteen, Lancelot was made a Prefect² and a Boarder Prefect³ and it can be pondered if this was where he began to develop his leadership skills. He went under the nickname of 'Bill' for unknown reasons.⁴ The boarding house was part of the main building and Lancelot would have spent the majority of his time in this building. It was finished in September 1913 and he would have been one of forty boarders. Lancelot was a strong sportsman throughout his time at Hutchins. It is also recorded that in his first year at Hutchins he finished in first place in diving for objects at the swimming carnival and also won the 50yds backstroke in the Combined Schools Swimming Carnival ⁵. Lancelot's involvement in the Cadet Force is noted in the School Magazine of September 1913 when his efforts as a Lieutenant are acknowledged. Interestingly, his name as a 'School Officer' in December 1913 is in the same list

¹ The North Western Advocate and the Emu Bay Times - <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/64446077>

² Hutchins School Magazine December 1913 p 3

³ Hutchins School Magazine April 1913 p 4

⁴ Hutchins School Magazine April 1913 p9-10

⁵ Hutchins School Magazine April 1913 p 7

as Ivor Margetts, later Captain, a sports master who gave his life at Pozieres and is regularly mentioned in Tasmanian World War One commemorations.

It was not until his second and final year at Hutchins that we learn about how involved Lancelot was in school life. During 1914 and 1915 his list of sporting achievements included: victories in a number of swimming and athletics competitions as well as being an active rower, Captain of Football (1915) and a member of the 1st XI at cricket.



Figure 2- First XVI 1915- LJW Payne Front Centre (Cpt)

It is worth noting that during this time his sporting activities gained many plaudits. During the Combined Schools Carnival it was noted that 'Some good swimming and diving was witnessed, L Payne and K Atkins being the best performers of the day'.⁶ Likewise, 'The chief prize-takers were Harvey, Payne, and Atkins, the two latter taking seven medals each for swimming. Next came the presentation of the shields held for this year. The first was the Sharp Swimming Cup, which has been held by us for four years in succession. The Headmaster called upon Lance Payne, as our chief swimmer, to receive this on behalf of the school. Amidst thunders of applause he received it from the hands of Mrs Lindon.'⁷

⁶ Hutchins School Magazine March 1914 p 7-8x

⁷ Hutchins School Magazine June 1914 p 12

It is worth noting that despite his sporting achievements, Lancelot did have his foibles. His batting average, for the 1st XI Cricket Team on leaving Hutchins was 3⁸!

As well as being a sportsman Lancelot continued to show an interest in the military. Coincidentally, it was in 1914 when he passed the NCO exams and became a Colour Sergeant in the School Cadet Force, the highest ranked student at the time.

Lancelot's sense of humour, or perhaps lack of, is mentioned in the School Magazine of June 1914 when Dorm 3 complains of his ability in playing the mouth organ. The sympathy of the reader is requested as the dorm members are said to be undergoing a 'terrible strain'⁹. Likewise, in December of the same year the 'Boarders Notes' hint that 'Bill' 'spends hours on top of the nets so that he can a-Dor(e)the garden next door'. It does not require too much in the way of code breaking skills to deduce the name of the object of his desires.



Figure 3- Hutchins Prefects 1915 - Lancelot Payne Senior Prefect. (Front Centre)

Symbolically, Lancelot is credited with speaking in a debate on 22 August, 1914. The topic was "Does war, as carried on in our own days, entail a greater loss of human life than was formerly the case?" It is not clear which side Payne spoke for however, the debate was tied and the Chairman gave his casting vote to the negative.

In his third and final year at Hutchins in 1915, Lancelot demonstrated many skills that would have set him on a good path to be an effective soldier. Significantly, it is worth noting that he was appointed as Senior Prefect. The name given to School Captain at that time in the school's history.

On leaving Hutchins, Lancelot went straight into the army, enlisting on the 31st January 1916, joining the 10th Infantry Brigade, 40th Infantry Battalion. He was the only leaver of his cohort to do so¹⁰. His appointment was confirmed on 1 May 1916.

⁸ Hutchins School Magazine December 1915 p16

⁹ Hutchins School Magazine June 1914 p 11

¹⁰ Hutchins School Magazine March 1916 p16

He was originally posted to Claremont Camp on 31 January 1916, which was the second training camp to be established in Hobart. The original camp had been located at Brighton but it was moved as there was a shortage of water.

Claremont was a good location of the camp as it was close to the railway and the embarkation point of Hobart. It was also not too close to the city. At its peak the camp housed up to 2,200 soldiers and provided 'realistic' training conditions with trenches and dugouts. Notwithstanding, it is unlikely that any training camp would be 'realistic' given what the soldiers were being prepare for. The camp was referred to as 'Tent City'¹¹ and was effectively a small town. There were many facilities provided, including laundry, dentist, barber and post office. The camp now lies on land owned by the Cadbury Estate and is commemorated there. Nothing is known of Lancelot's thoughts on training and what lay ahead. It would have been apparent at this stage that the war was unlikely to be 'over by Christmas' and his mind must

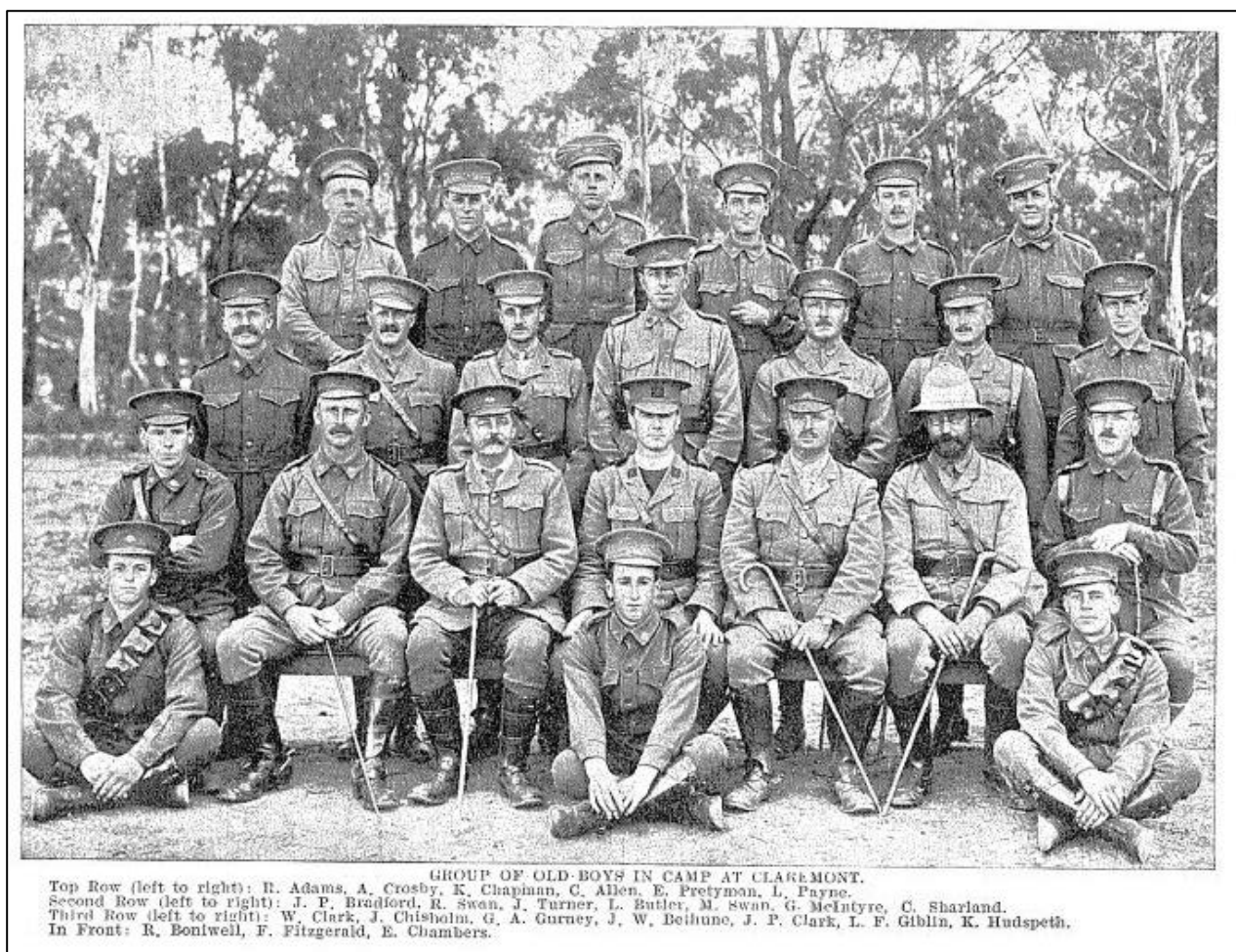


Figure 4- Hutchins Old Boys at Claremont Camp 1916 - Lancelot Payne (Back Right)

have been racing with thoughts of excitement and concern as he departed from Hobart docks on 1 July 1916.

Lancelot left Hobart on the Troop Carrier 'Berrima'. The departure on 1 July was the first time that men from the 40th left Australia for the war. The ship made three transport voyages from Australia between December 1914 and December 1916. It had a somewhat interesting time during the war. Most significantly it was torpedoed in the English Channel by a submarine and was badly damaged with four lives lost. It was eventually repaired in Portland Harbour before being scrapped in Osaka in 1930¹².



Figure 5-HMAT Berrima, circa 1917. (Allan C Green, State Library of Victoria)

On arriving in England on the 23 August 1916 the men of the 40th, including Lancelot were encamped at Lark Hill, in Wiltshire on Salisbury Plain. Immediately upon arrival approximately 200 men were transferred from the battalion to other Australian units that were already in France. Lancelot remained with his original battalion but was transferred at a later date. From mid-1916 Lark Hill was occupied largely by Australians. This does not mean that it was popular amongst them. On 3 September 1916, WJ Sinney wrote in an unpublished letter:

¹² <http://www.navy.gov.au/hmas-berrima>

'It has been raining like fun here and things about Larkhill are pretty sloppy. It's a rotten place when it rains and a jolly sight worse if it keeps fine for any length of time. The dust is that fine that it will get in anywhere; do what you will you can't get away from it.'¹³

Nonetheless, the time spent at Lark Hill subjected the men to intense training to prepare them for life in the trenches. He was selected for Officer School in Oxford in September 1916¹⁴. It was during this period of training that Lancelot must have impressed his senior officers and he was promoted to Second

Lieutenant on 7 November 1916.

Since our last issue we have learned that three more of our old boys have gained this distinction. They are Captains L. F. Giblin and Wendell Clark, and Lieut. Lance Payne. With reference to the lastnamed, his mother writes from Devonport:—"Lance was chosen by Colonel Lord to attend an officers' school at Oxford. He went there in September, 1916, obtained his commission in October, and went to France in December. Since gaining the M.C. he has been made first lieutenant. I would like to add that my other two sons are over there, too; they were both Queen's College boys. The eldest is a surgeon on H.M.S. Calgarian, and the second in the 12th Battalion, A.I.F. My last letter from Lance was written from London, where he was on special leave to get his decoration from the King. I enclose a copy of the letter he received from General Birdwood:—

(Copy.)

"1st Anzac Corps,
"14th April, 1917.

"Dear Payne,

"I write a line to congratulate you most heartily upon the award to you of the Military Cross in recognition of your good work during the operations in the vicinity of Noreuil on the 25th of last month. I know that when your small patrol was driven back you at once volunteered to take out a stronger party, which, under your skilful leadership, pushed forward close to the village, in spite of the heavy machine-gun and shell fire to which you were subjected, while your action in remaining behind on the withdrawal of your patrol and carrying in a badly wounded man is, indeed, praiseworthy.

"Thank you so much for this, and wishing you all good fortune in the future,

Yours sincerely,

"W. R. BIRDWOOD."

A little over two weeks later on the 15 December 1916, Lancelot, together with other members of the 40th proceeded overseas to France. Originally, they were stationed at Etaples. This was the main infantry base of the BEF and had a population of up to 100,000. As well as being a training base there were a series of hospitals. It was also a detention centre and was described by Wilfred Owens in *Collected Letters* as:

A vast, dreadful encampment. It seemed neither France nor England, but a kind of paddock where the beasts are kept a few days before the shambles ... Chiefly I thought of the very strange look on all the faces in that camp; an incomprehensible look, which a man will never see in England; nor can it be seen in any battle, but only in Étaples. It was not despair, or terror, it was more terrible than terror, for it was a blindfold look, and without expression, like a dead rabbit's.¹⁵

The first serious action that the 40th Battalion saw was in June 1917 when they fought at the Battle of Messines. By this time Lancelot Payne had farewelled a large number of his Tasmanian mates and had transferred to the 25th Battalion. The reasons for his transfer are unclear. It is not known if it was requested or imposed. Nonetheless, on the 29 January 1917 he was transferred to the 7th Brigade and on the 10 March 1917 transferred to the 25th Battalion.

Almost immediately on his arrival with the 25th he was involved in the thick of the action and on the

Figure 6 Hutchins School Magazine September 1917

¹³ <http://www.diggerhistory.info/pages-conflicts-periods/ww1/salisbury.htm>

¹⁴ Hutchins School Magazine September 1917

¹⁵ Wilfred Owen [*Collected Letters*. Oxford University Press]

25 March, he took part in an operation which resulted in him being awarded his Military Cross and was promoted to Lieutenant. According to the records kept in the Hutchins School Archives and his war record, Lancelot took part in fighting around Lagnicourt, specifically in the village of Norieul. This action preceded the Battle of Lagnicourt which took place on 15 April 1917. The patrol was driven back, and Lancelot volunteered to go out again with a stronger patrol, which he did, and pushed forward close to the village under heavy shell and machine gun fire. Eventually when the patrol was driven back by very strong opposition, he remained behind and carried in a badly wounded man.¹⁶

Despite extensive research, the location of the action and the fact that Lancelot volunteered to go with a stronger patrol are unable to be confirmed. It is interesting to note that there was very little in the way



Figure 7- Trench Map 57C NW Scale: 1:20000 Edition: 7A Published: May 1917

of trenches established in and around these locations at this time. The trench map published in May 1917 shows a small number of German trenches to the north-east of Lagnicourt. Given that, the same map, suggests both towns to be 'in ruins' it is possible that they were both in 'no mans' land.

The promotion and medal were formally recognised on 4 April 1917 and recorded in his war record on 17 April. He also received a personal letter signed by General William Birdwood. The original citation, complete with Birdwood's pencil signature, still exists and is stored in Ipswich, QLD and is in a very fragile condition. Lancelot was then granted, what was probably a well-deserved break from action when he went to England for nearly a month for his investiture and to receive the medal. The award was mentioned in the London Gazette of 25 May and then appeared in the Commonwealth of Australia Gazette on 11 November.

¹⁶ Documents sourced from The Hutchins School Archives

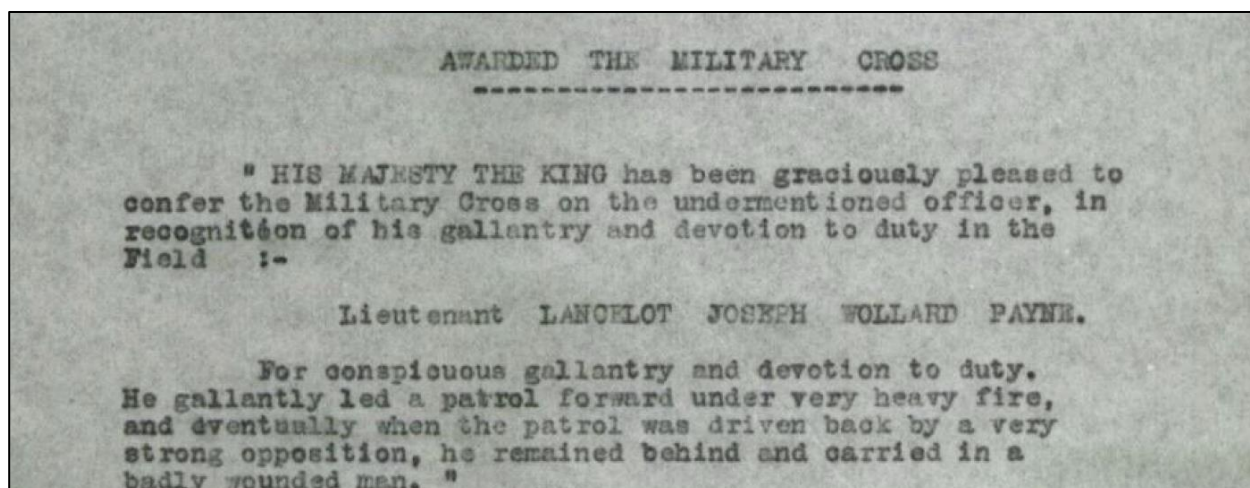


Figure 8- Text in London Gazette taken from War Record p22

Lancelot's specific movements from late 1917 to early 1918 are not recorded. The 25th Battalion was involved in some significant battles including playing a supporting role at the Battle of Bullecourt in September and Broodseinde Wood in October. One source speculates that the winter of 1917/18 was largely spent recovering and regrouping in Belgium. Notwithstanding, Lancelot was fortunate enough to travel on leave to England again in March 1918 for two weeks leave from the 9th until the 23rd. This proved to be his final trip away from the battlefields of France and Belgium.

On 29 May 1918 Lancelot was involved in action around Morlanourt. It was here he received two gunshot wounds to his abdomen 'in the early morning, just before day break'¹⁷ which ultimately resulted in his death. The exact circumstances of his death, like many events of war, are blurred by the eyewitness accounts. One report suggests he was shot in the head, but this can probably be discounted as most accounts describe wounds to the stomach and abdomen. Likewise, one account suggests he was killed by 'a bomb' yet the majority describe two gunshots.

Capt W. Buttner, also of the 25thBn, reported that he was wounded in the stomach and also listed the soldiers who were present. One of whom was Cpl F.T Evans, whose home address was Castray Esplanade, Hobart. Evans was one of the soldiers who carried him to the trench to the stretcher bearers¹⁸. It is quite moving to think of what they possibly spoke of whilst his wounds were being dressed and he was carried back to the trench.

Sgt. C.S Raison suggested that Lancelot was shot during a gunfight, which, he believed to be, friendly fire, whilst he was stood at a listening post. This is confirmed by several other reports. He was conscious after the incident and stretchered away to the 20th Casualty Clearing Station at Vignacourt. It is telling to note that in his report, Evans described Lancelot as being 'very popular with the boys'¹⁹. He was also described as being 'pretty merry' by 'Burliss 5982' who carried him to the dressing station. Poignantly, he added 'they always are that way when they are badly wounded'²⁰.

¹⁷ Australian Red Cross Society, Wounded and Missing 1914-18 War - Lt LJW Payne Report from Cpl FT Evans

¹⁸ Australian Red Cross Society, Wounded and Missing 1914-18 War - Lt LJW Payne Report from Cpl F.T. Evans

¹⁹ Australian Red Cross Society, Wounded and Missing 1914-18 War - Lt LJW Payne Report from Sgt C.S. Raison

²⁰ Australian Red Cross Society, Wounded and Missing 1914-18 War - Lt LJW Payne Report from Burliss 5982

"Died of wounds - 30-5-18."

"About May 30th at Morlancourt Sector we were out on patrol at night and met a German patrol in a wheat crop. Mr. Payne was shot twice - two rifle bullets - I was beside him. He was conscious and I carried him in with the help of a couple of others. When we reached our trench he was taken away on a stretcher. He told me to tell Sgt. McKay. The platoon Sergeant to get some papers, etc., out of his kit and send them to an address in England, the address I don't know. Sgt. McKay is with IX Platoon Coy., now. Mr. Payne was wounded through the groin and asked me to take off his puttees and keep them myself. He was taken to a C.C.S. (don't know number) and was buried in Vignacourt Cemetery. I have not seen grave. He was very popular with the boys.

Informant:- Cpl. Havans, F.T., 629,
IX C. 25.
A.I.F.

Figure 9- From Australian Red Cross Society, Wounded and Missing 1914-18 War - Lt LJW Payne Report of Cpl Evans

Lancelot Joseph Wollard Payne died very shortly after he was hit. He was 21 years of age. His body was moved to 'a small cemetery at Vignacourt' with a 'cross on it'²¹, with the inscription 'IN THE LAND OF ETERNAL SUNSHINE WE SHALL HEAR THAT SONG AGAIN'. He remains there to this day.

Vivit Post Funera Virtus – Virtue Outlives Death



Figure 100- Military Cross Awarded to LJW Payne (Andrew Payne)



Figure 19- Lt LJW Payne (Andrew Payne)



Figure 12- Lt LJW Payne - Vignacourt British Cemetery, France (Ivor Leonard)

²¹ Australian Red Cross Society, Wounded and Missing 1914-18 War - Lt LJW Payne Report from Pte R.E Mutton