

Mark Anthony Walsh



27 May 1895 – 4 August 1916



Introduction

Mark Anthony Walsh was my great-great-uncle on my mother's side of the family. I have spent many hours researching him, his family and the battle of Pozieres in the hope of getting to know Mark and finding out exactly how and where he died. It has been a very difficult, but rewarding task. I wish I could say that I have all the answers, but unfortunately I don't. What I can say is that I have read all of the unit diaries, the Red Cross reports for everyone who was killed on the same day as Mark, rediscovered Trove and feel like I have some idea of who Mark Anthony Walsh was and how he died. The Frank MacDonald Memorial Prize has provided me with this amazing opportunity and for that I will always be thankful. It has reignited my passion and my love of history.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the death of my great great uncle on the battlefields of the Western Front. The Battle of Pozieres began on the 23 July 1916 and concluded on the 7 August 1916. 23,000 troops were killed in two weeks. Many of the bodies were not recovered; as Mark Walsh was injured and made it to a Casualty Clearing Station, he is buried at Puchevillers British Cemetery. He, unlike many, did receive a funeral, but he did not receive a eulogy. That is why I have decided to give him the eulogy he deserves at his final resting place. I have to accept that this was a terrible waste of a young man's life, a man who had his whole life ahead of him. I also have to accept that the only people who know exactly what happened to him are no longer with us. To use the words of Charles Bean, "The Pozieres ridge is more densely sown with Australian sacrifice than any other place on earth."

By Karen Pape, Tranmere, Tasmania, Australia



Mark Anthony Walsh's Eulogy

Mark Anthony Walsh was born on the 27 May 1895 in Deloraine. He enlisted on the 3 January 1916 and died on the 4 August 1916. He was five feet, five and a quarter inches tall, weighed 133 pounds (60.3 kilograms), had a dark complexion, brown eyes and brown hair. He had scars on his right knee and left wrist. He was the son of Maria Laredo and William Edward Walsh. The grandson of Epaminondas Laredo, who was born in Mexico in 1833 and Catherine Galvin, who was born in Ireland in 1830. He was one of 17 children. They were, from eldest to youngest: Mary, William (Christopher), Emanuel (Manwell John), Mary (Doll), Barbara (my great grandmother), Frank, Eleanor (Helen/Nellie), Margaret (Maggie), Martha (Matty), Maria, Epaminondas (Uncle Boy), Catherine (Kate), Mark, Ivy, Valentine (Val), James and Hazel.

Mark lived in Parkham, a small farming community, 20 kilometres from Deloraine in Tasmania, Australia. He attended Parkham State School, a small rural school with an average enrolment of 25. It was opened on September 17 1883. His parents owned a farm and Mark worked as a labourer until he enlisted on 3 January 1916. In 1914, the population of the Parkham district was 228. Some 25 men, or just over 10% of the population, volunteered for service. At least four men were killed; Mark Walsh, Henry Cox, Arthur Radford and Bert Walker. Seven were wounded, some more than once and two were awarded Military Medals; Peter McDonald and Jack Walker. The loss of so many men from the tight knit farming community must have placed a tremendous strain on those left behind to work the farms. Added to which would have been the constant worry over the safety of their loved ones overseas.

Although I do not know much about Mark's life before World War 1, I do know what Parkham was like. Parkham had a post office (opened on 19 March 1885), St Alban's Anglican Church (1902), where Mark's name is on the honour board, and a Methodist church (1889). Sport played an important role in the lives of the people of Parkham. There were annual cricket matches between Parkham and Latrobe, badminton, indoor bowls, wood chopping, horse racing and a football team that was active from about 1900 to the 1930s.

Mark kept a diary and for this I am thankful. It has allowed me to get to know him better and to see that he was an articulate young man who was in search of adventure. His diary includes details of where he trained, where he travelled and what he did. It begins on 18 January 1916 when he went to camp. I learnt

from this that Mark had many early mornings and many drills, usually three a day. He sailed from Melbourne, then onto Adelaide and then Perth. On Thursday 14 March, the group were given leave to spend the day in Perth. Mark was a bit of a larrikin, as the group's "...leave was up at 5 o'clock that evening but more than half stayed till the following evening. I was one of them. We left Fremantle at 8:30 on Friday evening, 15 March. After we got out there was a roll call and 110 men were left behind."

Mark mentioned that from the boat, whales and a shark could be seen. The trip was calm at times, but there was quite a bad storm and "a lot of the lads were scared and would not keep quiet, but it all passed off by morning." On Monday morning, 27 March, at 9:15am, they pulled into Colombo. Mark described this as "...a very queer place, I can tell you." The locals "...had all sorts of things to sell us. Well we had a lot of fun with them...we marched all around town...for an hour...then we halted for an hour or so having drinks and fruit and the band played to the Tommies."

From Mark's diary, "Then at about 6pm we left again for the boat. Marching about a mile to the wharf. We got back about 9:30pm. I was very tired when we got back so I went straight to bed. Next morning, I felt pretty ill so I went on sick parade and then was admitted to the hospital, I didn't see much but Wednesday 29th I looked out and saw a boat going in the direction of Melbourne. It looked like a troop ship from where we were but I do not know. Well on the Thursday I saw nothing at all, only what I didn't want to see. On Friday at 12:11 pm, I came out of hospital. I felt very funny for a while but it wore off in time."

On Saturday 1 April, Mark participated in a variety of sport and a grand concert was held. "So we put in the 1st of April very well." On Wednesday 5 April, the ship "...passed Aden and then into the Red Sea. We passed Aden very close and could see it was well fortified and then we passed very close to the West Coast of Africa...it was very rough country. At three pm we went through what they call Hells Gates and into the Red Sea. At 8pm we passed the twelve Apostles but it was too dark to see them well. Thursday...(we) passed about one dozen ships. So there was plenty to look at." "On Sunday morning at 9am, we at last pulled into Port Suez but anchored out all day...on Monday morning, 10th, we were up early for disembarkment. Breakfast 6am and then we all fell in with all equipment ready to go ashore. I, with a lot more, were on baggage guard and at 9am we landed. At 10:25 the first train moved off for the camp and at 1:30pm the second train left, landing at camp at 6:30pm. We were all supplied

with iron rations for twenty-four hours for we were not recognised for that time. We had to manage the best we could.”

On Tuesday 11 April, “...I met a cousin and went to the circus on Wednesday night with him. On Thursday we started to go to the pictures but when we got there they were closed so we went to the circus again.”

To use Mark’s words again: “After staying at Tel-el-Kabir one month we sailed for France on board the SS Scotain.” We arrived at “...Alexandria at 5 next morning...We had a good trip...On Tuesday night, May 16th, we pulled into Marseilles at 11:30pm. Thursday 18 May went ashore to the isolation camp in Marseilles. June 3rd we left Marseilles for the north of France, arriving on Monday 9 June. From then till 30 July it was nothing but military training. 30 July 1916 arriving at our destination at 11:30pm. Disentrained and camped in the field. Leaving next morning at 8:15am, arriving at our destination at 12:30pm and leaving for the trenches at 5:30pm, Monday 31 July, 1916.” These are the last words written by my great great uncle, Mark Walsh. So what were the 22nd Battalion doing between Monday 31 July 1916, and Friday 4 August 1916, the day that Mark was killed?

The 22nd Battalion AIF was formed on the 26 March 1915 and was deployed to Gallipoli in early September 1915. Its first major action was in Pozieres. On the night of the 29 July, there was heavy bombardment. “The Battalion then moved back to Sausage Gully, and during the next five days reorganised and “rested” in the scanty intervals between fatigues. Another attack on OG1 and OG2 had been decided on, and the fatigues included the digging of a jumping off trench...within 300 yards of the German lines.” (With the Twenty-Second- A History of the Twenty-Second Battalion, A.I.F, page 35).

Sergeant Smythe, before the attack on the evening of 4th August stated that Major Mackay, addressed his Battalion with the following words: “Boys, we’ve got to take that ridge tonight, the word retire must not be used, —and some of us aren’t coming back.”

There was confusion. First World War Official Histories (AWM) states: “The night of August 4th-5th was followed by days so overwhelming in strain, anxiety and eventual relief, that even the bare outlines of its true story were left unascertained; nor was it realised how nearly the operation came to disaster.”

The 22nd Battalion moved forward at two minute intervals. They were delayed by the 26th Battalion who cut through the 22nd Battalion at Centreway. "Further north the 22nd Battalion experienced problems getting to the jumping off trenches due to an organisational mistake allocating two units to the same communication trenches. In the moment of crisis Major M. Mackay ordered his men out into the open to by-pass the hold up and so start their starting positions...The delays meant that their assault did not take place until 9:40 pm, by which time a German machine gun had been set up on the Owillers-Courcelette track (Brind's Road). It took heavy toll of the 22nd Battalion, including Major Mackay, but the survivors captured both objectives" (page 51-52, Pozieres, Graham Keech). They travelled along K Trench, this trench was under continuous shell fire which resulted in many casualties.

Mark received multiple gunshot wounds and was taken to the Third Casualty Clearing Station. He died on the same day that he was shot.

An extract from the History of the 22nd Battalion states, "In Pozieres sleep more of our Brigade than in any other spot in France, and the casualty list of this Battalion was the heaviest in the Brigade. It might well be so, for the 22nd lost 33 officers and 763 men." (page 33)

Mark's family received a letter dated 24 January 1917, stating that, "With reference to the report of the regrettable loss of your son...I am now in receipt of advice which shows that he died at 3rd Casualty Clearing Station, France on 4 August 1916, of wounds received in action and was buried in the Military Cemetery, Pouchevillers...France". On the 21 March, 1923, Mark's family received a letter stating that "...the site of his grave ...is now officially registered at Plot 2, row B, grave 73." Mark's family received his belongings consisting of two identity discs, three buttons, a ring, two coins, badge, ivory souvenir, rosary, watch, two notebooks, testament, prayer books, postcards and photos. These were sent from Melbourne on the 6 June 1917. On 21 June, 1918, Mark's family were sent more effects, this time from London. This included opera glasses, an abdominal belt and a leather armlet.

Mark Anthony Walsh was a son, an uncle, a friend and a soldier. One hundred years later, he has not been forgotten. His memory lives on through his diary, through his family, through the Australian War Memorial and, thanks to the Frank MacDonald Memorial Prize, on the Western Front where he was killed at such a young age and with his whole life ahead of him.

I would like to conclude Mark's eulogy with two notices that were placed in the *The Daily Telegraph*, Launceston, Tasmania. These were placed three years after his death, on 4 August 1919, by the people who knew him and loved him the most, his family.

In loving memory of our dearly beloved brother, Private Mark Anthony Walsh, 22nd Battalion, killed in action in France, 4 August 1916: aged 21 years.

When we see the boys returning,
And our hearts they throb with pain,
To think you are not there dear Mark.
And you will never come home again.
Always happy and cheerful,
With a heart that had no fear.
He went to face life's battles,
For all he loved so dear.

Inserted by his loving sister and brother-in-law, M and H Sherriff, Meander.

WALSH – In loving memory of our dearly beloved son, Private Mark Anthony Walsh, 22nd Battalion, killed in action in France, 4 August 1916, aged 21 years.

I can always see a smiling face
Through a mist of sorrowing tears
But a mother's part is a broken heart
Through many a lonely year.
When flags are o'er the roadway,
And the troops are marching home,
Oh! God have pity on the watching ones
When boys can never come.

Inserted by his loving mother and father, M and W Walsh, Parkham.

Lest we forget.



Puchevillers British Cemetery



3rd Casualty Clearing Station Nurses Quarters July 1916



Battle of Pozieres Ridge 1916. A captured German pill box nicknamed 'Gibraltar' in the ruins of Pozieres.

