

# William Samuel Maynard



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January 1890 – April 1917

Tom Watson

## Preface

When I was selected to take part in the 2016 Frank MacDonaldd MM Memorial Prize, I had no real idea what it was all about. Despite months spent researching and writing an essay, I did not actually know what would happen were I to be selected. Once I found out I had won, I was of course ecstatic, but I did not really know why. I knew I was going to France, but that was about it. At the presentation given by the previous year's participants, I began to get a picture of the purpose of the Prize, and my place within it. I then knew that I would be researching one soldier and following their journey through the First World War.

The next question to answer was who that soldier would be. To my knowledge, none of my family fought in the First World War. Lacking a family connection, I wanted to research someone with a story that would intrigue me in other ways. Personally, I have always been against the notion of unnecessary war, and the mass influx of volunteers that enlisted to join the Australian Imperial Force – even after Gallipoli – was something I found astonishing. With this in mind, I decided that I would research a Tasmanian Aboriginal soldier, someone who had to fight not just at war, but even to be let into the army in the first place. Indigenous Australian service in the First World War, and specifically Tasmanian Aboriginal service, is something that is not often considered, and this was also an aspect that appealed to me.

This reasoning brought me to William Samuel Maynard. William Maynard (known to his friends and family as Will) was an Australian who fought in the First World War. He was also a Tasmanian Aboriginal man, one of less than 100 to enlist and fight for Australia.

Born in a time of entrenched racism and mistreatment of the Indigenous peoples of Australia, Will was always going to have it tough. When I came to research him, I found myself lost, unable to empathise with a man who had lived and died so long before I was born. This lack of empathy was something that remained with me right up until my pilgrimage, at Louverval British Military Cemetery, France. Suddenly, the significance of where I was, and what I was doing, hit me. It did not matter that I stood there 100 years after Will did, because I was looking across the same fields, standing in the same place – in the same soil – in which he had stood. In a letter to Will, which I read out as my pilgrimage, I said:

*“Why enlist in the first place? Why fight for a country that did not even recognise your people as existing, and when it did, claimed you were an ‘inferior race’? That question I may never answer, but I hope that in my research, I might come just a little bit closer.”*

Of course, this is something that I cannot answer with absolute surety, but the process of finalising my research and putting it together has led me to what I believe may be the answer. All in all, my research of Will and his story has raised many such questions, and it would be a lie to say that my research is finished. A project like this is ongoing, but what I have put together here is a summary of what I have discovered to date.

## Early life and family

William Samuel Maynard was born in the January of 1884, on Cape Barren Island. He was among seven children born to John and Eva Maynard, with his older brother Frank also fighting in the war.<sup>1</sup> There was only one school on Cape Barren Island, and it is here that Will and his siblings likely received their first formal education. The schoolmaster at Cape Barren Island School was a position that changed hands numerous times around the time of Will's attendance.<sup>2</sup> One of these teachers was Captain James Bladon, an English expatriate.<sup>3</sup> Captain Bladon held his position there for 17 years, and his importance to Will's story, and that of the other islanders who enlisted, will become apparent later on.

At some point after leaving school, Will gained employment on board one of the many ships in the waters of Bass Strait at the time, and remained in this job until he enlisted for the army in 1916.<sup>4</sup> Frank had enlisted a year earlier, and was already over in Europe when Will followed suit.<sup>5</sup> Family ties must have been close for the Maynards, for Will made the journey to the recruiting station at Claremont accompanied by a group of nine young men from the Furneaux Islands, including his cousin, Roy Maynard.<sup>6</sup>

The Maynards are a perfect example of the devastation that World War One had on many Tasmanian families. The extended Maynard family lost three young men to the war<sup>7</sup> and Cape Barren Island as a whole lost nine.<sup>6</sup> In a community of just 170, the deaths of nine men, all fit and of working age, and the invalidation of more, would have had a resounding impact. For the Maynards, especially, their world was turned upside down in less than two years. The father of the family, John Maynard, died in 1912, so when Frank and Will were lost to the war, the entire male line of the family was dead, leaving Eva and her children alone.<sup>8</sup>

The risk of this happening was always going to be high, and it is unlikely that Will would have signed up for war without an understanding of the potential consequences were he to die. Despite this, he did so, along with many others, some in similar circumstances. The Furneaux Group (Flinders Island, Cape Barren Island and surrounds) was home to 28 young Aboriginal men who fought in the First World War.<sup>6</sup> For such a small community, this is an extraordinarily high enlistment rate. Frank Maynard enlisted in the AIF on the 24 April 1915, and Will followed suit a little over a year later on the 19 June 1916.

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<sup>1</sup> King, A. (2013)

<sup>2</sup> Skira, Irynej. (1993)

<sup>3</sup> OBITUARY. (1938)

<sup>4</sup> NAA: B2455, MAYNARD WILLIAM SAMUEL

<sup>5</sup> NAA: B2455. MAYNARD FRANK

<sup>6</sup> Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. (2015)

<sup>7</sup> Department of Veterans Affairs. (2015)

<sup>8</sup> Tasmanian Archives: Will no. 8838, Maynard John.

## Aboriginality

Officially, Will, his family, and many other men from the Furneaux Group were not to be accepted into the AIF. The 1903 Defence Act exempted Indigenous Australians from compulsory service,<sup>9</sup> and the 1916 'Instructions for the Guidance of Enlisting Officers at Approved Military Recruiting Depots' stipulated that: "*Aboriginals, half-castes, or men with Asiatic blood are not to be enlisted – This applies to all coloured men.*"<sup>10</sup> This cut a very clear message, but the situation was confused in Tasmania, where the misconception that Tasmanian Aborigines were an extinct race was taken as fact.<sup>11</sup> While the significant community of people of Tasmanian Aboriginal descent on the Furneaux Islands was common knowledge, this was not seen to be contradictory to the idea of ethnic extinction. As accredited historian Russel McGregor notes, people like Will were not ordinarily considered 'Aborigines', because "*inclusion demanded that the individual possess all the characteristics supposedly distinctive to the race*".<sup>12</sup> In fact, the government supposedly held this view as well, referring to the islanders as "half-castes" to distinguish between them and the supposedly extinct 'natives'.

So what did all this mean for Will? Well, one thing the confusion between different government stances meant was that Tasmanian enlisting officers had more discretion over who they declared as fit to serve. This may have been a factor in Will's acceptance, despite his 'dark' complexion being noted. Another thing that made it possible for Will to enlist was the relaxed requirements at the end of 1915. Previously, his height of five feet and four inches didn't meet the requirement of five feet and four inches.<sup>13</sup> In 1917, the requirements would be relaxed even further: "*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.*"<sup>14</sup> This saw a further enlistment of Aboriginal people.

Once in the army, all evidence indicates that Aboriginal soldiers were treated equally to their white comrades. Crucially, they received the same pay.<sup>9</sup> This may have been one of the greatest motivations for Will to join the army. The average rate of pay in Australia prior to the outbreak of war was less than £2 every week<sup>15</sup>, and less for Aboriginal employees, against whom discrimination was legal and commonplace.

## Enlistment

Ultimately, it seems money may have been the main motivation for Will to join the army. Soldiers in the AIF earned 6 shillings a day,<sup>13</sup> amounting to £2.2s weekly, which is likely higher than he would have been paid as a mariner.

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<sup>9</sup> Australian War Memorial *Aboriginal service during the First World War*

<sup>10</sup> Australian Army (1916); as cited by the Australian War Memorial *Aboriginal service during the First World War*

<sup>11</sup>Gerrard, A; Harman, K. (2015)

<sup>12</sup> McGregor, R. (1997); as cited in *Aboriginal History*, volume 39 (2015)

<sup>13</sup> State Library of Victoria (2012)

<sup>14</sup> Australian Army (1917); as cited by the Australian War Memorial *Aboriginal service during the First World War*

<sup>15</sup> Hutchinson, D; Ploeckl, F (2016)

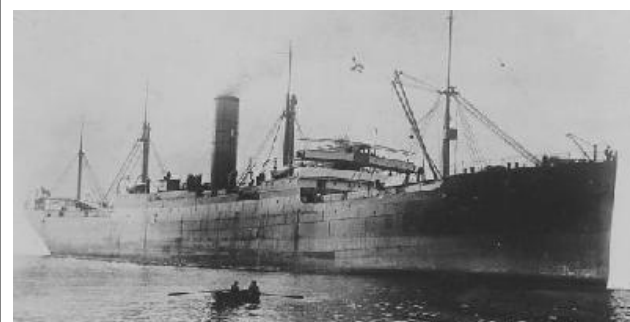
Another factor in Will's decision to enlist was almost certainly the influence of peers and other senior figures in his life. Specifically, Captain James Bladon, the schoolmaster on Cape Barren Island. Captain Bladon arrived on the island in 1911 and immediately began to bring about changes to the school and community.<sup>2</sup> While Will, aged 27, would certainly have left school by this time, the schoolmaster was a job central to the Cape Barren community, also in charge of other governmental duties for the police, public health, and the lands and works department.<sup>16</sup> He was also a licensed lay-reader for the Church of England,<sup>3</sup> a church community counting Will and the Maynard family as parishioners.<sup>4</sup> As such, Will and the other young men on the island would have felt his influence in many areas of their lives. This is important, because Captain Bladon was an English patriot, and, according to the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG), encouraged the men to enlist.<sup>6</sup> At the same time as Bladon was appointed as schoolmaster, new legislature introduced compulsory cadet training for males aged 14 to 15 nationwide.<sup>6</sup> While Cape Barren Island did not have the population to qualify a cadet training unit, TMAG claims that Bladon nevertheless wrote to the then Tasmanian Premier Elliot Lewis, requesting and receiving funding to establish a cadet outfit on Cape Barren. I stress 'claim' because I was unable to find documentation of this myself. However, it is known that Bladon was a military man, involved in the formation of a military detachment in Bangor, in Tasmania's south.<sup>3</sup> This, along with his English roots, supports the claims of TMAG.

Sometime in 1914, a man named Charles Littler arrived in the Furneaux Islands. He was then a Lieutenant in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF), and before embarking for Gallipoli, he took time to tour around regional Tasmania, taking upon himself the role of a recruitment officer even though at that stage of the war there was no real need for such a position to exist.<sup>6</sup> Captain Bladon's influence on Will and the other young men on the island meant that they were susceptible to the message put forward by Charles Littler.

### **Travelling to the Front**

Regardless of the reasons for or legality of their enlistment, Will and his cousin Roy were accepted into the AIF and assigned to the 20th Reinforcement of the 12th Battalion.<sup>4, 17</sup> They embarked for England from Melbourne on the HMAT A59 *Botanist* on the 24th of August.<sup>4, 17</sup> Just under two months later, on the 19th of October, they arrived in Devonport, Plymouth.<sup>4</sup> This was Will's first time abroad, and would likely have been so for many of his comrades as well.

The first step in Will's journey was a training period in England, where he spent less than two months at Fovant Camp before marching out on the 10 December 1916 to join the 3rd Training Battalion AIF, presumably for further preparations for the front.<sup>4</sup> It was with the 3<sup>rd</sup>



**Above:** The HMAT A59 *Botanist*  
(Photo courtesy of Australian Light  
Horse Research Centre)

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<sup>16</sup> Tasmanian Archives:

<sup>17</sup> NAA: B2455, MAYNARD ROY LEONARD

Training Battalion at Larkhill Camp that Will sent what may well have been his final letter home. It was an embroidered postcard addressed to his sister Mabel, a transcript of which is included on the next page.

Will spent another 3 months with the 3rd Training Battalion before embarking for France on the 15 March 1917, whereupon he joined the base depot at Étaples.<sup>4</sup> The next day, he arrived in Dernancourt and joined the rest of the 12th Battalion. Having enlisting in Claremont, Tasmania, 8 months of travelling and training later, Will had arrived in France.



**Above:** Some locations key to Will’s journey in England and France.  
(Image courtesy of Google Earth)

In the 12th Battalion’s Unit Diary for the month of March, it is stated: “the whole of the month has been spent in training.”<sup>18</sup> Remarks were also made about the reinforcements that arrived that month, Will among them: “The reinforcements obtained have been of good physique, intelligent and well-trained.” No matter how well-trained he and the rest of the 20th Reinforcement were, however, nothing could have prepared Will for what he was soon to face.

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<sup>18</sup> Australian War Memorial Collection: AWM4 23/29/25 - March 1917

Larkhill 1/3/17

Dear May just a few lines  
 to let you know that we  
 are all getting on all right  
 and still in England. We  
 are having <sup>loving</sup> weather lately  
 I got 5 letters to day from Flinders  
 and was glad to get some  
 news from home. It was bad news  
 about poor Lucy it <sup>broke</sup> poor old Jack  
 for a while did you get the small  
 parcel I sent you last mail  
 hope you will get it all right  
 and also get these cards. I think  
 I've told you all this time from  
 your loving Brother Will  
 e. to Frank

CARTONNETTE POSTALE - POSTAL CARD  
 Brodeuse "La Pensée" Paris

**Left:** The message on Will's postcard, sent from Larkhill Training Camp, England. (Photo courtesy of Furneaux Historical Research Association)

**Below:** A transcript of the postcard:

Dear May just a few lines to let you know that we are all getting on all right and still in England. We are having loving weather lately. I got 5 letters to day from Flinders and was glad to get some news from home. It was bad news about poor Lucy it broke poor old Jack up for a while. Did you get the small parcel I sent you last mail hope you will get it all right and also get these cards. I think I've told you all this time from your loving Brother Will.  
 TORN PAPER to Frank

**Right:** The embroidered postcard sent by Will to his sister Mabel. (Photo courtesy of Furneaux Historical Research Association)



## **Boursies**

In order to understand this next part of Will's story, it is important to have some context of the war at this point.

By February 1917, both sides of the war were on the ropes. Split between the Eastern and Western Fronts, the German war machine had begun to run out of fuel. On the Eastern Front, the Russians and their far superior numbers had finally broken through the German and Austro-hungarian lines with the Brusilov Offensive in September 1916, and on the Western Front, the casualties inflicted during the Battle of the Somme were beginning to take their toll. To give the German troops a defensible place to retreat to on the Western Front, in September 1916, the German Army's new chief of staff ordered the construction of a heavily fortified line of defence, running parallel to the active front but several miles behind it. It was to act as a last line of defence, should the German army come out of the Battle of the Somme in a disadvantage, as was becoming increasingly likely.

In 1917, the prudence of this decision became obvious, when the entirety of the German Army stationed on the Western Front was able to retreat to what they called the Siegfried Line – known to us as the Hindenburg Line.<sup>19</sup>

During the retreat, the Germans caused as much damage as they could, demolishing villages, obstructing roads and laying mines behind them, doing all they could to make things difficult for the Allied advance.<sup>20</sup> The Hindenburg Line was a strategic masterpiece by the Germans. It cut down the perimeter that required defending by 50 kilometres, by straightening and removing all salient points and fluctuations from the front.<sup>21</sup>

Despite renewed Allied attacks, the Hindenburg Line held from May 1917 to August 1918. The Germans, with their backs against the wall and an extra ten divisions of infantry and 50 batteries of heavy artillery freed up by the shortening of the front, managed to repel all major Allied offensives for over a year. When the Hindenburg Line did finally break, the war ended within months.

However, William Maynard never lived to see an Allied victory. He was killed between the 6 - 10 April, during the capture of a small French village by the name of Boursies. As previously mentioned, the Germans made the Allied pursuit as difficult as possible. One of their tactics was to occupy small villages and hold them, to slow the Allies down and allow as much work to be done on the Hindenburg line as possible. One such village was Boursies.

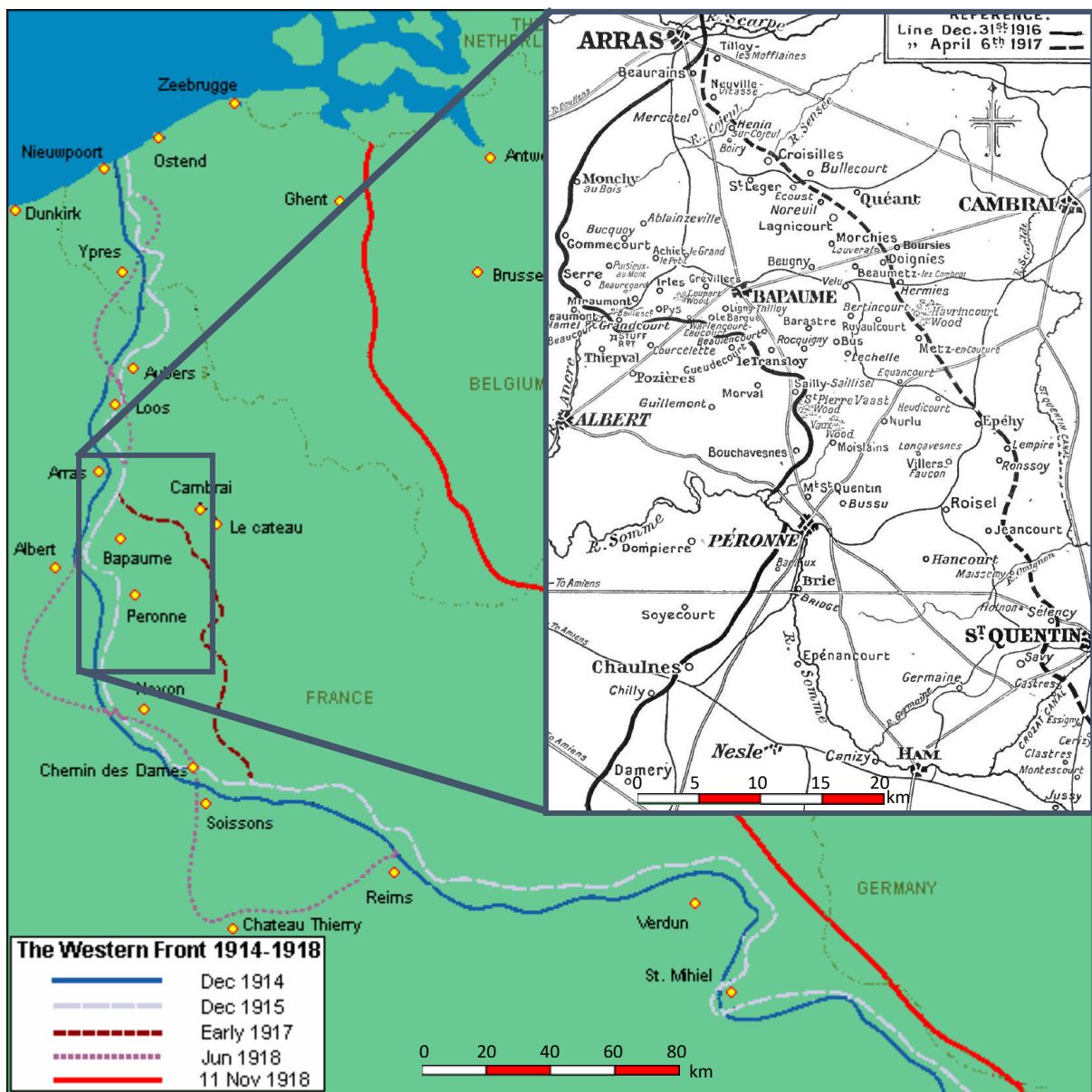
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<sup>19</sup> History.com (2010)

<sup>20</sup> Baker, C (2015)

<sup>21</sup> Western Front Association (2008)





**Above:** Map of the Western Front, showing the Hindenburg Line listed as “Early 1917”  
**INSET:** Map of the Bapaume/Cambrai area, showing Hermies (Southwest of Cambrai).

Boursies is located on the road from Bapaume to Cambrai, directly North of Hermies.

Hindenburg Line listed in inset as “Line April 6<sup>th</sup> 1917”

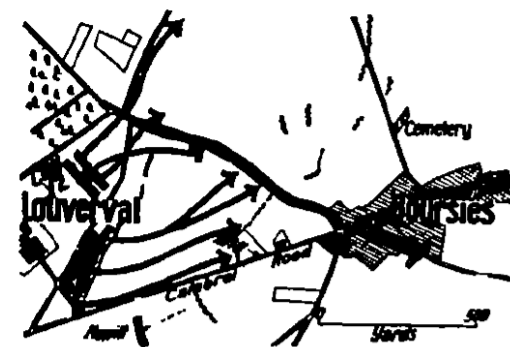
On the 8 April, 1917, the 12th Battalion was tasked with the capture of Boursies, in order to aid the capture of the nearby villages of Hermies and Demicourt. It was hoped that once all three were captured, the Germans would retreat from the area entirely, allowing the Allies to continue toward the Hindenburg Line. Out of the three villages, Hermies was the most formidable target. It had been a part of the original front and was heavily fortified with wire entanglements on all sides.<sup>22</sup>

Because of the difficulty involved in capturing Hermies, it was originally planned that the attack should focus only on Hermies, with Boursies and Demicourt to be captured later. This was changed when the Divisional Commander, Major-General Walker, decided that it would be easier to capture Hermies if a diversionary attack took place at Boursies. This role came down to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, of which Will and the 12<sup>th</sup> Battalion were a part.<sup>22</sup>

On the 6 April, the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade moved into the front line, and on the 8 April, the 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Battalions began operations, capturing a spur to the North of Boursies, despite staunch resistance from the German defenders. By the end of the day, they had secured the location (referred to as Louverval Spur) creating a small salient in the line from which the main attack was to be launched the next day. The 12<sup>th</sup> Battalion suffered 50 casualties during that preparatory attack.<sup>22</sup>

However, there is a possibility that Will did not even survive until then. The exact date of Will's death is unknown. The greatest specificity that any record of his provides is that Will died between the 6-10 April, meaning he could have died in action during the attack on Boursies, or beforehand, in capturing Louverval spur, or as one of the hundreds of thousands of casualties from anywhere on the front that occurred when no actual operation was taking place. There is no way of knowing his cause of death, but the uncertainty surrounding it is itself a clue. Will died in such a way that his death could not be established until the 10 April. This suggests that he was either killed in the confusion of an attack and not discovered until after the area was secured, or that he was killed in such a way that no body could be found. However, there is a piece of evidence that rules out the latter option, which will be explained later on.

Overall, the capturing of 'the Outpost Villages', as they are called in Charles Beans' *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918* was a success. Despite 649 casualties, more than half of which came from the 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Battalions during the capture of Boursies, the outpost villages were captured, and the Germans pushed further back toward the Hindenburg Line.<sup>22</sup> However, this fact would have come at little comfort to the families of those killed.



**Above:** Arrows showing the 12<sup>th</sup> Battalion's preliminary advance on Louverval spur.  
(Photo courtesy of Charles Beans)

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<sup>22</sup> Bean, C. (1941).

Eva Maynard had watched both her sons march off to war, and she would never see either return. For Frank and Will, the war was over, but Eva's battle was just beginning.

### Eva's Struggle

Eva Maynard's struggle with bureaucracy began the moment she was notified about Frank Maynard's death, and did not end until 1925 – 9 years later.<sup>4</sup>

During this time, finances would have been a problem for Eva. As privates in the AIF, both Frank and Will were paid 6 shillings a day. In 2017 Australian dollars, this amounts to roughly \$30 a day. Because they were unmarried and without children, neither Frank nor Will was required to send any money back to their family. Despite this, both did. Two days before he was due to embark, Will signed a form requesting that, thereafter, 3 shillings – half his pay – be sent home to Eva every day.<sup>4</sup> Frank had signed a similar form before he embarked; meaning Eva's combined income from the two was 7 shillings a day, coming to £4.18s a fortnight.<sup>5</sup> This lasted only until August 30<sup>th</sup> however, when Frank was tragically killed at Pozieres.<sup>5</sup> In Volume 39 of the 2015 text *Aboriginal History* it is remarked that:

*“At the outbreak of the war it was not uncommon for a son or sons to be supporting one or both parents when they enlisted. On the death of their son, it was up to the mother (or in some cases the father) to prove that they had been supported by their son for at least 12 months prior to enlistment.”<sup>15</sup>*

This is exactly what happened to Eva. Upon being notified of Frank's death, and while still in mourning, Eva was required to write to the District Pay Office and request a war gratuity. Despite writing multiple times, it was not until 1917 that she received this – and soon after, she once again had to pick up the pen. This time, for Will. Reading Eva's letters to the Army is hard. In them, her emotion is palpable, from the deep sense of loss after Will's death to the frustration in later letters.

*“...that is all I got of my poor old Will.”*

*“...I have written two letters for my sons paybooks and they say that I am not to get them.”<sup>4</sup>*

Eva's correspondence with the Army was lengthy, and must have been painful for her. Finally, in 1918, she received a package containing a few of his possessions. However, it took another four years for her to receive his British War Medal, and it was not until 1925, eight years after Will's death, that the final letter was sent. Eva had spent most of this time trying fruitlessly to receive any word of Will and Frank's wills or pay-books, writing once:



**Above:** A photo of Eva Maynard, from an unknown year. (Photo courtesy of Furneaux Historical Research Association)

*“I wanted to see about the wills that is all as nothing is settled yet and everything is being used and spent.... I have letters to show that there was a will made before they left for they wrote and told me all about it, what to do...”<sup>4</sup>*

In the end, it seems, Eva simply gave up. The last letter in Will’s military records is dated 25 August 1925. It repeats the message that pay-books cannot be sent to family members and that no wills were received from Frank or Will. There is no recorded reply from Eva. Eight years after Will’s death, his story finally ends.

### **Confusion about burial**

After all this, there was still one piece of the puzzle to be put in place, and that was something I never thought to be possible. All resources say that Will has no known gravesite. This is technically true. There is no grave bearing Will’s name anywhere on the Western Front. However, two entries in Will’s military records suggest it may be false to say that there is no known gravesite.

On page six of Will’s military records, a handwritten note scrawled in red pen reads ‘*Buried B5022*’. When I first noticed this, I felt like my research had reached a turning point. If that code revealed where Will was buried, then my research would have accomplished something. My first line of enquiry was that this might be some kind of map reference. However, the more I looked into it, the less likely this seemed. Generally, WWI Allied map locations were written in the form ‘28.U.22.C.3.2.’ (as an example). ‘B5022’ obviously doesn’t fit that format, and doesn’t contain enough information to accurately state a location anyway. The other possibility investigated was that ‘B5022’ was the name or serial number of an army document. This also turned up nothing – the AWM does not list “B5022” as a type of army document. However, this is not to say that nothing will ever be found. This is an intriguing and important part of Will’s story that, at this moment in time, cannot be pursued any further.

However, there is another entry that perhaps renders “*Buried B5022*” obsolete. On page 55 of Will’s military records, a small entry reads: “Extract from folder of photo of Mem. Cross. Mem. Cross erected in Hermies Hill Brit Cem.” For a long while, I overlooked this entry: it made no mention of a burial, so I thought that perhaps it just meant that Will was commemorated at Hermies Hill, because he fought nearby. However, the entry was brought to my attention again by Dr John Greenacre of the University of Suffolk. Earlier, I had emailed Dr Greenacre, who guided the 2016 Frank MacDonald MM tour of the Western Front, asking for his opinion on the “*Buried B5022*” note. Like me, John ruled out the possibility that this could be a map reference, and said: “...it is probably a reference to another form, which doesn’t appear to be in his record and at the moment I don’t know what form a B5022 might be.” However, John also noted the entry about Hermies Hill: “...it would make sense, given its location and history that Will’s body could have been originally buried in Hermies Hill.”

Hermies was the major objective in the offensive that saw Will die. It was captured on 9 April 1917 thanks in part to the diversionary attack at Boursies, and

Hermies Hill British Cemetery was begun there that November.<sup>23</sup> The cemetery included soldiers who died in and around the three villages of Boursies, Hermies and Demicourt, meaning it is possible that Will and other casualties from the 12<sup>th</sup> Battalion were buried there. In 1918, before the end of the war and before the standardisation and monitoring of Commonwealth War Graves, the cemetery was in the thick of the German Spring Offensive. It is therefore possible that the entry on page 55 of Will's military records refers to a burial site and marker that was destroyed during the Spring Offensive. This is a possibility supported by the fact that there is no Red Cross Wounded or Missing file about Will, which suggests that he was confirmed to be dead before the Red Cross became involved. If he was able to be confirmed dead, then the location of his body must have been known, and if it was known, then it would have been buried.

Hermies Hill British Cemetery is not the only possible gravesite. The nearby Louverval Military Cemetery is the location of two of Will's comrades from the 12<sup>th</sup> Battalion, both of whom died on the 6<sup>th</sup> of April.<sup>24</sup> However, Hermies Hill is a far likelier location: it contains 295 unidentified graves as opposed to six.<sup>25, 26</sup> While this is by no means a certainty, it is a possibility, and is definitely deserving of further research. For now, Will's final resting place, like those of so many hundreds of thousands of others, remains unknown – missing participants in a war a hundred years old.

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<sup>23</sup> CWCG. *Hermies Hill British Cemetery*

<sup>24</sup> CWCG. *search results*

<sup>25</sup> Heard, T; Whittam, B. *Hermies Hill British Cemetery*

<sup>26</sup> Heard, T; Whittam, B. *Louverval Military Cemetery*

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