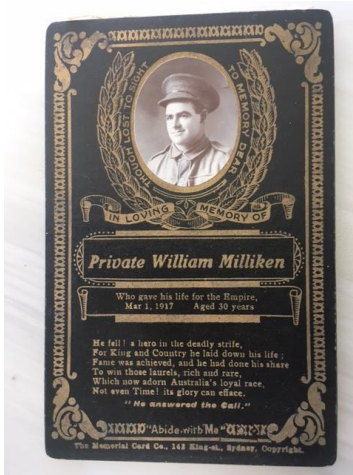


5614 PRIVATE William Millikin



20th BATTALION AIF

William Millikin was born in Hurstville NSW early in 1887. His father was Robert Millikin who had a business driving hansom cabs in Hurstville and his mother's name was Mary. He had three sisters Jenny, Kate and Mary. He attended Hurstville Public School. When he was about 10 his mother died and his father remarried and another son Robert who also served during WW1 and a sister Iris were born.

After school Billy worked in a number of jobs and for a time was the station master at Orange. He arrived in Greenethorpe and began work at Redbank in 1912

Billy enlisted in the AIF in Sydney on 24 March 1916. On his Enlistment Form he states that he was a farmer and that his home address was Greenethorpe NSW. He was allotted to the 20th Battalion, part of the 5th Brigade of the 2nd Division AIF. He spent his first month as a soldier in Cootamundra undertaking his initial training as part of the 15th Reinforcements for his battalion. The 15th Reinforcements were then transferred to Liverpool in Sydney for further training and to await transport to France to join the 20th Battalion then serving on the Somme.

On 9 September 1916 Billy embarked on HMAT Euripides along with the rest of the 15th Reinforcements and departed Sydney. His father Robert, his step mother and his younger sister Mary saw him off. While at sea Billy wrote to William Hodges and described the emotional farewell:

"It was a memorable sight – I am fairly hard hearted but women's tears moved me somewhat. I was glad when we were out of sight."

The Euripides arrived in Plymouth on 26 October 1916 and Billy spent a short period training in the United Kingdom and then embarked for France from Folkestone on 13 November 1916. He joined his battalion, then fighting in the vicinity of Montauban near Pozieres on the Somme, on 17 December 1916. His Battalion moved to the front line near Flers three days later. He spent the next 2 months moving with his battalion between the front line, support and rest areas in the same vicinity.

It was winter at this time and the weather was harsh with snow and mud present at all times. This winter is remembered as one of the coldest and wettest experienced by the AIF and in a letter to William Hodges, written on 15 February 1917, Billy describes the conditions as:

“The snow is thawing here and the mud something awful, talk about Black Par Buggery at Warragong - not in ??? with this”.

In the same letter he mentions that he had run into a number of friends from Hurstville and from around Grenfell and his brother, Robert who was serving in the 4th Australian Field Artillery Brigade, also part of the 2nd Division.

In late February 1917 the 20th Battalion moved back to the front line near Le Sars and the Butte de Warlencourt on the road between Pozieres and Bapaume. On the night of 1 March 1917 Billy, along with a number of other soldiers from the 20th Battalion, was sent a short distance to the rear of the Battalion area to a railhead known as Horse Shoe Dump. They were a fatigue party tasked with bringing forward rations and supplies for the Battalion. While waiting with the fatigue party a German shell fell among them killing Billy and eight other men and wounding fourteen.

Billy was 30 years old and had been in the Army less than 12 months. The date of his death is recorded as 2 March 1917. He had served with his Battalion for only two and a half months before being killed.

Billy was buried by members of the 6th Australian Infantry Brigade near where he was killed. After the war his body was moved to the Warlencourt British Cemetery. Here he lies in a beautiful setting with other members of his battalion killed on the same night and many other Australian and other Commonwealth soldiers.

Billy's service and sacrifice is commemorated at the Warlencourt British Cemetery in France, at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, the Hurstville War Memorial in Hurstville and in Greenethorpe which he considered his home. Billy appointed William Hodges as his executor in the event of his death which again shows his connection to the Greenethorpe area.

Billy's brother, Robert, served through to the end of the war and returned to Australia in 1919. He had been wounded three times, the last so severely that his left leg had to be amputated. He was awarded a Military Medal (MM) for bravery. Billy died 100 years ago in March this year. Regrettably, there is no one alive today who knew Billy but the Hodges family has always remembered Billy and his time at Redbank. With great respect they also remember his service to Australia and will continue to do so.

ANZAC Day 2017