



THE PIONEER

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Walter (Wal) Patrick O’Keeffe – No. 2826 – Australian Imperial Force (AIF)

This is the first in a series of *Pioneer* articles which will remember our men and women that went to The Great War and fought for our country, Mother England, and our freedom. A number of our community lost their lives on the various battlefields. Wal O’Keeffe paid this ultimate sacrifice.

It is thought that Wal was born in Stroud in March 1892. The family lived at “Lynwood”, 13 Cowper Street, Stroud. Wal’s family included father Michael Francis O’Keeffe, mother Maria O’Keeffe (nee Bowden), and siblings Alice, Lena, Thomas, Jack, Frank (a barber in Stroud), and Nell.

Wal signed up to join the AIF on 29th June 1915 in Melbourne, aged twenty-three years and three months. He was five foot five inches in height, weighed 10 stone 3 pounds, and had blue eyes. This is part of the medical examination description on enlistment day. It is unknown what took Wal to Victoria though it is known that he spent a lot of time in Sale, Victoria.



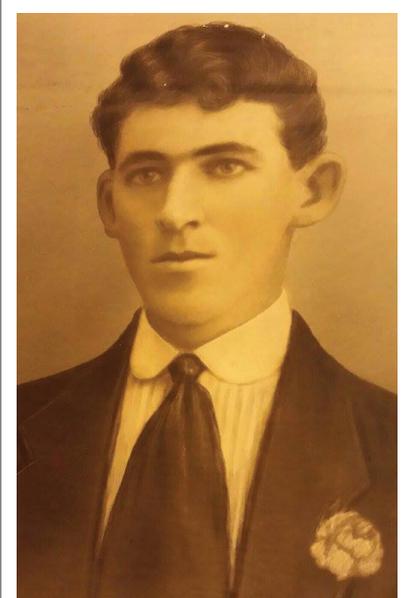
Many Australian men and women joined the First World War, like Wal, because they wanted to do their bit for Australia and the Empire. They were encouraged to do so by propaganda posters with slogans such as “Australians! The Empire Needs You”¹.

O’Keeffe served in the 59th Infantry Battalion after having been in the 6th Battalion and the 58th Battalion. Sadly, Wal was killed in action in the fields of France on 19th July 1916, just

over a year from when he enlisted. The war records state that there was a court of enquiry on 29th August 1917, over a year after his death. The enquiry found that Wal was buried in No Man’s Land. Wal’s mother, no doubt distraught and worried for her son’s welfare, sent a telegram on 5th September 1916, seeking

an update on Wal. On 6th September 1916, the Major was unable to update the most recent information that Wal had been missing since 19th July 1916.

The uncertainty for Wal’s family continued. On 27th July 1921, correspondence stated that the forces had not received ‘any trace of the last resting place’ of Wal. The author of the correspondence sought advice as to any knowledge that the family had from ‘any letters or communications that contain any reference to the circumstances surrounding his death, particularly the exact locality at which it occurred, or where he was last seen alive’. Wal remains unidentified.



This photo of Walter was a favourite of his mother’s. It is uncertain when it was taken. It could be his 21st or at a wedding given the flower on his lapel.

LEST WE FORGET

By Sharon Burke ©2015

Many thanks to Helen Campbell for her assistance and the photograph of Walter. Thanks to Stroud & Districts Historical Society for access to their files. Walter’s war records were accessed through the National Archives web site. All WW1 records are freely available online.

¹“Australia’s Imperishable Record ... Australians! The Empire Needs You”, accessed 11/3/15 at <http://anzaccentenary.vic.gov.au/wwi-pictures-13/>



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