

Angus Doak

“He gave his life that we might be free”



Image courtesy of Australian War Memorial

Early Life

The Doak family migrated from Scotland in 1855, a family of ten. Angus' father, William was the fourth eldest child and 11 at the time. They settled in Lilydale, northern Tasmania and built a two room cottage which, according to the newspapers found in the walls, was completed in the 1870's. The property was called Glendoon and consisted of one hundred acres. It would later be inherited by William's eldest brother, John, who established his own property on the southern side, leaving the original farm to the youngest brother James (Jimmy).

William Doak moved off Glendoon and following the lead of his eldest brother, established his own, slightly smaller property on the Northern boundary. This he called Logan Brae. Located on a steep slope, the homestead looks down over the original farm and further into much of Lilydale.



Of the three Doak sons, William was the only one to have children and carry the name forward. He was married twice, first to Margaret Horsburgh on the 24th of March 1869 in Campbelltown. Together they had four children including Stephen Holly Doak who would be the only brother to enlist alongside Angus when the call came up for the First World War. Margaret died at age 26 in 1877, the eldest of the four children being eight and the youngest only two at the time. For the following four years, William raised his children on his own before remarrying in 1881.

His second wife was Emma Baker and together they had a further seven children. Angus Doak (affectionately known as Bob) was the second youngest and was born in 1893. He grew up on Logan Brae and attended North

Lilydale School which was believed to be situated on the Glendoon property however records are scarcely available. Angus was dearly loved and particularly close to two of his sisters; Hannah, the youngest of the eleven and Agnes who the seventh eldest.

Service



Angus Doak (service number 3278) enlisted with the 26th Infantry Battalion on the 28th of July 1915 at Claremont, Tasmania. Prior to his enlistment, the 26th Battalion had briefly served at Gallipoli where they were involved in defensive operations from September until the evacuation of the peninsular in December when they returned to Egypt to reorganise and expand troops. It was here that Angus Doak joined their strength.

His eldest brother, Stephen, enlisted with the New Zealand Expeditionary Forces. He joined the Wellington Regiment, 1st Battalion. It is unknown when he enlisted however he embarked from New Zealand on the 26th of June 1916 bound for Devonport, England.

Angus was a laborer by trade and was 22 at the time of his enlistment. His Next of Kin was his father, William who was living on Cemetery Street, Launceston which seems not to exist anymore as it cannot be found on any maps. It was later recorded that he moved to Elphin Rd and then, according to Stephen's enlistment papers, Wellington Street. Angus embarked from Hobart aboard the HMAT *Ajana* on the 13th of December and arrived in Abbassia, Cairo the following year. On the fifth of February he was admitted to the 4th Auxiliary Hospital for mild mumps. A month later, on the 21st of March, he boarded the H.T. *Orana* in Alexandria, Egypt, bound for France. After six days of travelling the 26th Battalion arrived in Marseille, Southern France. From here they travelled up to Étapes where they arrived and were administered on the 29th of March. Angus then spent the next 27 days assembled in Étapes in preparation for the 26th Battalion to be taken on strength in France on the 25th of April 1916.





On June 6th 1916, the 26th Battalion, along with the 28th were involved in the first Australian trench raid on the Western Front, attacking German Trenches at Bois Grenier, France. Three Prisoners of War were captured and twenty enemy soldiers killed.

The first major battle that the battalion was involved in was the Battle of Pozieres

Ridge. On the 28th of July 1916 the Second Division relieved the First Division and capturing the major German defences, the OG line, became the priority. This took two attempts as the troops struggled to make head way through the barbed wire and anticipating German defence. On the 4th of August, it was successfully captured and held in a defensive position. From here the focus of operations shifted towards Thiepval until the Second Division was relieved by the Fourth on the 7th of August, after having suffered 650 casualties.

Among these was Angus Doak who had suffered a gunshot wound to the ankle on the 30th of July. He was immediately taken to the 13th General Hospital in Boulogne, on the East Coast of France. From here he was transferred to England on the 2nd of August. He spent the next two months recovering in hospital before being discharged however he was assigned only light duties and did not return to his unit for another two months. On the 19th of December 1916 he rejoined his battalion in France. After only a month he was again admitted to hospital having contracted scabies but returned to his battalion 12 days later.

In January 1917, the 26th Battalion was involved in the follow up of the German withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line. They attacked at Warlencourt and Lagincourt over the first and second of March and the 28th of March respectively. On the third of May they were involved in the Second Battle of Bullecourt, an attempt to breach the Hindenburg Line. Here they performed mainly a support role, being held back as part of the Second Division's reserves. Later that year, the focus of the AIF's operations switched to Belgium. There, the 26th Battalion



fought in the battle of Menin Road on the 20th of September.

It was during this battle that Angus Doak was injured for the second time. He was admitted to the Beaufort War Hospital in Bristol, England six days later with a gunshot wound to his neck and face. He spent the next three months recovering before being discharged on the third of December 1917. He was assigned light duties for another three months before rejoining his battalion in Belgium on the 18th of March 1918.

Only weeks after being injured, Angus would have received the devastating news of his eldest brother's death on the fourth of October. He was killed near Ypres, Belgium in the battle of Broodseinde, the third operation launched by British General Herbert Plummer as part of the Ypres offensive of 1917. He was buried in Tyne Cot Cemetery, Belgium after having served for little more than a year. I believe he was around forty years old at the time. No one is certain of why he ended up enlisting in New Zealand however family believe that he had an argument with his father William and left to create a new life. He was not married and had no children as William was listed as his Next of Kin. Stephen did not live an easy life and it is devastating to think that he would never see his father or younger siblings again.

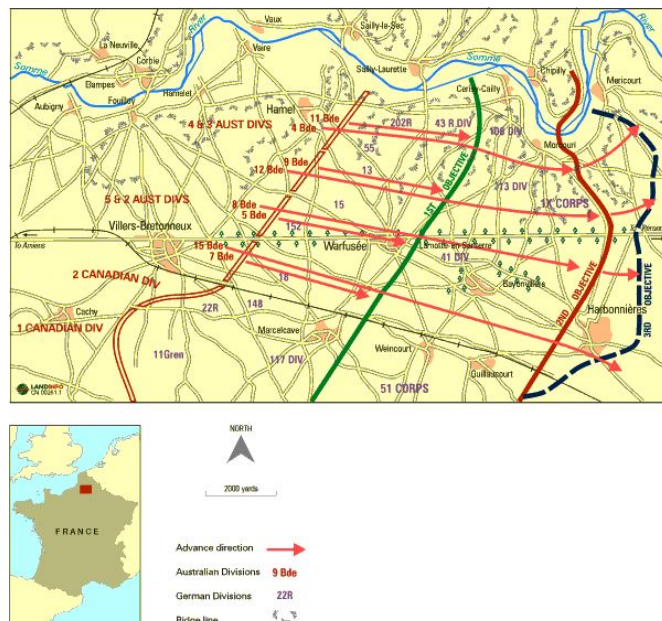


In April, after the German Spring Offensive had pushed the Allies steadily back, the 26th Battalion was transferred from the Messines sector where they were fighting at the time, to the Somme where they continued to fight alongside a number of other Australian units. Here they undertook defensive tasks throughout April and May in locations including Baizieux, Camon and Ribemont. More than 100 casualties were suffered before the German offensive was eventually halted.

Throughout June and July, a number of “peaceful penetration” operations were launched by the 26th in order to take small amounts of the German front line during the lull in action that preceded the final allied offensive of the war. One of these

operations occurred on the 10th of June around Morlancourt, another around Monument Wood, near Villers-Bretonneux on the 17th of July. On the eighth of August 1918, the Allies launched what would come to be known as the One Hundred Day Offensive, ultimately bringing an end to the war.

There would only be three more months of fighting left of the Great War when the terrible news of Angus' death reached his family at home. He was killed in action on the 9th of August, after the first attack of the offensive, the Battle of Amiens. This battle proved to be crucial for the allied victory that was to follow. In the two hours that it took for the Australian forces to achieve their objectives, 29, 144 German prisoners and 338 guns were captured. 116 towns and villages were also liberated and the 8th of August was later described by Ludendorff, leader of the German forces during WWI, as "*The black day of the German army*".



After having reached the second objective, Doak and 12 others, were killed outright by a shell a mile from Harbonnieres around 4:30pm as reported by Private L.O. Clayton on the 18th of August 1919. He was only 25 years old. His body was then taken to Harbonnieres where he was buried and a cross was erected.

Angus was later reburied in Heath Cemetery where the inscription on his grave reads; "*He gave his life that we may be free*". He is also commemorated on the Lilydale War Memorial and Honor Board alongside his eldest brother Stephen.



The story of Angus Doak holds such a special place in my heart. Although we are not related, he feels like family and it has been such a privilege to piece together his story. The Doak family were very much like any other and through my research, I have begun to get yet another perspective on the extent to which WWI impacted Australia. It is one thing to read statistics and numbers of casualties but one cannot really fathom the impact of war until you look into the story of just one of the 60, 000 and see how they are so much more than just a number. So many families, just like the Doaks', were torn apart by the loss of brothers and sons. Each one a thread in the tapestry of devastation that was the Great War. I would like to say a huge thankyou to the Doak family for sharing their stories and photos of both Angus and Stephen and to the many people in the Lilydale community that contributed to this project.



Image 1 - William Doak aged 72

Image 2 - Angus Doak and nephew Tom Doak

Image 3 and 4 - Angus prior to embarking

Image 5 and 6 - cards sent home by Angus whilst in hospital in England

Image 7 - Stephen Doak, Angus' eldest brother

Image 8 - Stephen's grave, Tyne Cot Cemetery, Belgium

Image 9 - Map showing the Battle of Amiens, during which Angus was killed

Image 10 - Grandchildren of Angus' youngest sister, Hannah at his grave

Image 11 - Heath Cemetery, Harbonnieres, France

Image 12 - Myself at Angus' grave

