Queensland Rifle Association
ROLL of HONOUR TRIBUTE

FATHER AND SON:
DUNCAN and NEIL BAXTER





REMEMBRANCE DAY 2024

Soldier and Rifleman in the
Great War 1914 - 1918

DUNCAN and NEIL BAXTER

As we gather here for Remembrance Day, today's Roll of Honour Tribute recognises and pays tribute to the lives of a father and son, Duncan and Neil Baxter, who are both listed on the QRA Honour Board acknowledging the supreme sacrifice made by Queensland rifle club members during World War I. They were both members of the Townsville Rifle Club, prior to their enlistment in the Great War. They were ordinary Queenslanders who answered the call to protect King and Country

Duncan Baxter was born on 20 August 1868, in the Central District of Glasgow, Scotland where he was educated and began his working life. He was a Sergeant with the 1st Lanark Royal Engineers Volunteer Corps from 1890 to 1903.

Duncan married Annie McDonald on 9 September 1892. Neil, their eldest son, was born on 1 June 1893, Angus in 1895, followed by 5 other children. Duncan and Annie decided to migrate to Australia with Neil arriving in 1903 with Annie and the children subsequently joining them in 1904. They made their home in Paxton Street, Townsville, and was the proud owner of a cabinet and furniture making business.

Duncan's eldest son, Neil attended Central State School in Townsville and Gatton Agricultural College, in Queensland and then worked on the Baxter farm at Alligator Creek in the Townsville area.

When World War I was declared, Neil enlisted in the A.I.F on 16 November 1914 in Townsville. He was allocated Service Number 1308, as a Private with 15th Infantry Battalion, aged 21 years 5 months. On 12 Feb 1915 he embarked with his Unit, travelling from Brisbane to Alexandria, Egypt.

Corporal Neil BAXTER 'Died of Wounds' on 26 April 1915 at Gallipoli, on the second day of the landings on the Peninsula. The sad news was published in the local paper of "the death in action of Corporal Neil Baxter.....He was a prominent member of the City Football Club, of the Oddfellows and a member of the Rifle Club. His parents only a fortnight ago received a lengthy diary of the incidents of his voyage to Egypt. He was an adherent of the Presbyterian Church and had a wide circle of friends. Public sympathy is extended to the bereaved parents."

At the same time, Neil's father Duncan, underwent surgery and while under sedation, experienced a 'visitation' from Neil, which convinced his father that he was still alive, and hopefully a POW of the Turks. He began writing to the authorities and other AIF members to gain the truth. After receiving a letter from Sergeant Craven, he accepted the inevitable. The letter states that "Neil went missing from the affair on the 27 April, and that there is very little hope of him being alive. Neil went out with George Rogers, on the outpost and men were seen to drop everywhere, but it was impossible to see who they were." George Rogers was one of the few to make it back, only to die in Sgt Craven's arms.

On 17 January 1916, Duncan (Service Number 1200) and his second eldest son Angus, enlisted in Townsville together. Both men were original members of C Company of the 42nd Battalion. Duncan had to reduce his age to enlist and because of his pervious British Army experience he was promoted to Company Quarter Master Sergeant, 42nd Battalion.

On 5 June 1916, he and Angus embarked from Sydney, NSW, disembarking in Southampton on 23 July 1916. On 25 November 1916 they proceeded to France.
In February 1917, Duncan was advised that he was to be posted from France to Salisbury, England, to the pay office. However, the unit diaries held by the Australian War Memorial, show that on the 15 March in bright clear weather his unit was ordered to march from Armentieres to Pont de Nielle. On the 17 March, while standing next to his son Angus, a shell landed, severely wounding Duncan's feet. The force of the blast blew the belt from his son Angus.
Duncan succumbed to his wounds on 31 March 1917, at the hospital in Boulgone, France, aged 48. Angus had applied for leave to see his father, but unfortunately did not see his father again.
Lieutenant Angus BAXTER returned to Australia
Some years after the Great War, a soldier from Western Australia returned to the Mayor of Townsville, the bible he had found on the battlefield at Gallipoli, with Neil Baxter's name and home address inscribed by his father.
Neil has no known grave but is commemorated at the Lone Pine Memorial, Gallipoli and the Gatton Agricultural College Honour Roll. Duncan's grave is at the War Cemetery, Bologne, and part the inscription reads "Only Goodnight Beloved, Not Farwell". Duncan is also commemorated on the 42nd Infantry Battalion AIF Roll of Honour. They are both commemorated on the Australian War Memorial Roll of Honour, and at the Townsville Cenotaph.
Griffith Street in Townsville was renamed to Baxter Street in honour of the two soldiers killed in action, Duncan and Neil Baxter.

We will remember them.