

A SOLDIER'S STORY



Service No.: 1986
Name: Robert William LAKIN
Nickname: Bob



Medals and Decorations

British War Medal
Victory Medal

Rank: Driver
Service: Army
Enlisted: 18 Oct 1915
KIA: 21 Jul 1917

Bob was born on 23 Feb 1897 at Tumby Bay to Robert Robson Lakin and Isabella Lakin (nee Dorward). There were 12 children in the family, 6 boys and 6 girls, of which he was the 4th eldest. His was one of the pioneering farming families in the district, moving onto a farm just south of Tumby, Section 200 in the Hundred of Hutchison in 1894. As an aside a quote from the West Coast Recorder newspaper in 1904 gives some idea of the area at the time: “when one enters the scrub lands beyond Whites River it is very pleasing to see the improvements being made by farmers”. “Mr Lakin is an object lesson to anyone interested (in farming) in our district – as there is no land poorer than that at present farmed by Mr Lakin”. A backhanded compliment!

The family later moved onto a farm of 1965 acres (approx 800 Ha), “*Elitha*”, near Butler in the Hundred of Dixon in 1906. This block was later owned by the Davey family and is currently owned by Centrex Metals.

Bob went to school at Tumby Bay, commencing in 1904 and leaving at completion of Grade 5. On completion of schooling he worked on the family farm and other farms in the area until his enlistment in the Army at the age of 18. He had actually applied to enlist on 25 Sep 1915! At the time of enlistment he recorded his occupation as farmer.

On enlistment Bob had a fairly hectic time when he was first posted to 2nd Depot Battalion (Bn) on 18 Oct 1915 with the rank of Private, then 2 weeks later transferred to Base Light Horse at Mitcham with the rank of trooper and 2 weeks after that he was allocated to 14th Reinforcements/9th Light Horse Regiment (Regt) to complete his training. On 28 Mar 1916 he was transferred to 3rd Light Horse Regt and on April fool's day 1916 he was posted to 54th Field Artillery Battery, firstly with the rank of gunner and later with the rank of driver.

The 54th Field Artillery Battery was formed in Egypt in Mar 1916 as part of 14th Artillery Brigade; many of the recruits destined for other units and troops already serving in the area were also transferred to this battery. After the forming of the battery and the sister batteries, 53 and 55 Field Artillery Batteries – also part of 14th Artillery Brigade, the unit was shipped to France and the Western Front. Thus on 19 Jun 1916 Bob embarked at Alexandria aboard HMT “*Georgian*” bound for Marsailles (France) disembarking on 27 Jun 1916 with his new unit.

The unit served on the Western Front for the next 12 months supporting a number of battles and engaged in counter bombardment actions. On 18 Jul 1917, a heavy artillery barrage was launched on the German lines. This lasted for ten days. Three thousand artillery guns fired over four million shells. This was the precursor to the battle of Passchendaele, fought throughout Jul 1917; it is sometimes called the Third Battle of Ypres. For the soldiers who fought at Passchendaele, it was also known as the 'Battle of Mud'. Few battles encapsulate WW1 better than the Battle of Passchendaele.

During this battle, as a result of a counter bombardment by the German artillery, Bob was killed in action (KIA) on 21 Jul 1917. He was buried in the field in the vicinity of West-Vlaanderen (near Ypres) in Belgium; later being interred at Brandhoek Military Cemetery, 2 miles (approx 3.5 km) east of Poperinghe (France).

His name is recorded on the Tumby Bay Memorial.

Three of Bob’s brothers also served during WW1.



British War Medal Victory Medal

Right: Lakin’s initial burial site near Ypres, Belgium.



Left: Brandhoek Military Cemetery, Belgium.