

Dawn Service speech 2016

Mr George Perini.

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like you to imagine the unthinkable. Your beloved son or brother goes off to war across to the other side of the world, but even worse, you never hear from him again. You believe he may be dead but there is no body, there is no closure, you are told that he is missing in action and then believed to have been killed. What emotions must be running through your mind?

This is the story of Private Frank Oliver Loader, Regimental number 2064.

Son of Timothy and Hannah Loader, Frank had 4 brothers and 1 sister.

- 2 of his brothers, Clifford and Percival served in the Great War
- Sadly, Pte Percival Harold Loader, 8th Field Company Engineers, died of wounds, 20th August 1916

When Frank Oliver Loader signed up to the Australian Imperial Force in Adelaide on 10th September 1915, he could never have imagined that he would simply vanish for 95 years, only to be found and identified using scientific method way beyond his time.

After leaving Adelaide, aged 30, on the 7th of February aboard the 'Militiades', he disembarked in Suez, Egypt on the 11th of March 1916.

Frank was taken on strength, by the 32nd Battalion AIF at Duntroon Plateau on the 8th of April.

On the 17th of June he left Egypt, embarking in Alexandria aboard the 'Transylvannia' bound for France.

Private Frank Loader along with the rest of the 32nd Battalion AIF arrived in Marseilles on the 23rd of June, before being sent by train across France to the Western Front.

On the night of the 19th of July 1916, Frank, along with the rest of the 32nd Battalion were involved in the infamous Battle of Fromelles, the first major battle fought by Australian forces on the Western Front.

On that fateful night the battalion took the offensive at Fromelles.

The German front had been bombed for most of the day but that deprived the attack of any hope of surprise.

As well, unfortunately the damage to the well-entrenched German frontline was heavily overestimated. What ensued has been described as "The worst 24 hours in Australia's entire history".

When the infantry went over the top into 'no man's land' at 6pm on the 19th of July they suffered heavily at the hands of the German machine gunners.

By 8am the next morning the battle was over but,

- The 5th Australian Division suffered. 5,513 casualties
- and the 32nd Battalion AIF, suffered 718 casualties, almost 75% of its strength. One of those casualties was Frank Loader.

Allied soldiers killed in that area were buried shortly after the battle by the Germans. The burial pits were photographed from a British reconnaissance aircraft on the next day but marked as dugouts or trench-mortar positions.

This information was sent to the Australian War Office via Red Cross and Private Frank loader was listed as, 'Missing in Action'.

Later when his identification disc was returned by German authorities, who also mentioned that he had died, Frank's record was amended on the 13th of March 1917 to read "Killed in Action".

Hannah, his mother received his memorial scroll on the 27th of January 1922, his memorial plaque on the 27th of July that year and his Victory Medal on 22nd of February 1923.

For over 90 years Frank was one of the missing, with his name on the wall of the VC Corner Memorial at Fromelles.

In 2003 a history teacher from Melbourne, Lambis Englezos, listened to a lecture from eminent WW1 historian Peter Barton and later implored him to investigate what he thought to be grave sites at Pheasant Wood in Fromelles.

After years of German archival research by Englezos and Barton, a Glasgow university geophysical survey was commissioned by the Australian government in 2007 and it concluded that the suspected gravesites contained the remains of approximately 337 soldiers.

From 2008-2009, an exploratory dig found human remains, personal effects, webbing, brass fittings, uniform badges, buttons and British .303 ammunition in five of the six pits.

Finally in 2009, 250 bodies were exhumed from a mass grave at Pheasant Wood near Fromelles, and DNA was recovered from as many as possible. Relatives of soldier's missing from this battle were asked to supply DNA samples as well so that identification of individual remains could be carried out.

Frank Loader was one of the first 64 soldiers to be identified in this way and he was finally laid to rest in the Fromelles (Pheasant Wood) Military Cemetery.

On the 20th of July 2010, the 94th anniversary of the battle, the last of the 250 soldiers was laid to rest and the new cemetery was dedicated.

Shortly after that service one of Frank Loader's descendants wrote:

"It is surprisingly emotional to know that a relative who was thought to be lost 'somewhere in France' has been found.

Sadly his head stone at Pheasant Woods Cemetery in Fromelles is the only picture known of him. There are no military head shots, nothing from the family albums, even the Army has no visual records of him. Whilst there is a brilliant shot of Frank's brothers, who both served in the Great War, it is hoped to one day to find a photo of Frank.

Many thanks to Lambis Englezos and his crew, who never gave up!"

For Private Frank Oliver Loader and the other soldiers buried at Fromelles or in fact for any of our gallant soldiers killed in action I would like to read this brief poem.

He gave his life for his country,

For honor, faith and right.

With us his memories live,

He fought a noble fight.

'Midst the roaring of the battle,

and the rain of shot and shell,

Fighting for home and country,

He like a hero fell.

The commitment and sacrifice of every service man and woman that has fought to protect our country must never be forgotten.

Today we honour them all.

Lest we forget.

