

FORMER 5RAR MEMBEFRS PROVIDE ESCORT AT MENIN GATE, YPRES, BELGIUM

Back in January 2013, I received an email, as follows – *“I'm J... V.... out of Belgium and organizing a historical project of World War I in which Rex Warneford won a Victoria Cross for destroying a Zeppelin in 1915 above the city of Gent in Belgium. I'm searching for relatives of Rex Warneford. Perhaps you can help me further on this? I'm teaching in a technical high school and we replicated the plane with which he flew around an original still running motor. Greetings and thanks for any help”.*

After responding to the message, I ascertained that the sender had obtained my name from one of many genealogy websites I have posted family details on. I am writing a separate article on this matter, but my wife and I made arrangements to travel to Belgium for the centenary of Warneford's heroic escapade. While in our travel agents office, my eye caught sight of a brochure offering “Anzac Trips” in Europe. Further enquiries revealed that an “*All Quiet on the Western Front*” Tour commenced in Paris on the very day we planned to arrive there, so we elected to join it.

In Paris, on 16 May this year, we met up with the other tour members (another 26 Australians) and the tour leader (Steve Roberts, a former member of the Royal Military Police, now a WW1 historian – see <https://uk.linkedin.com/pub/steve-roberts/35/938/555>), and we all enjoyed the evening meal together. I learnt that there were three other Vietnam Veterans in our group, including Tom Yeo, a one-time fellow 5RAR member, who had made two tours of duty there, although neither with 5RAR.

The next day, after breakfast, we were all on the bus heading for Ypres, the only city in Belgium not captured by the Germans in WW1, although they came very close to the city outskirts. This was to be our base for several days while exploring the surrounding former battlefields and war cemeteries. Steve proved to be a very capable and informative tour guide, and in the days we spent with him, we all learned a great deal about the victories and sacrifices of our WW1 service personnel.

On the first evening in Ypres, most of us visited the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing - is a war memorial in Ypres, Belgium, dedicated to the British and Commonwealth soldiers who were killed in the Ypres Salient of World War I and whose graves are unknown.

Following the Menin Gate Memorial opening in 1927, the citizens of Ypres wanted to express their gratitude towards those who had given their lives for Belgium's freedom.



Hence every evening at 20:00, buglers from the local fire brigade close the road which passes under the memorial and sound the "Last Post". Except for the occupation by the Germans in World War II when the daily ceremony was conducted at Brookwood Military Cemetery, in Surrey, England, this ceremony has been carried on uninterrupted since 2 July 1928. On the evening that Polish forces liberated Ypres in the Second World War, the ceremony was resumed at the Menin Gate despite the fact that heavy fighting was still taking place in other parts of the town (from Wikipedia).

The ceremony there was very moving, and conducted with great dignity. A number of wreathes were laid by various people honouring (possibly) a family member who fought, fell, and whose body was never recovered. Hundreds of people attended the event – people of all ages, many of them young school age children.

On the next day, Steve Roberts enquired if any one of the bus would like to lay a wreath at Menin Gate during the next two nights that we were staying in Ypres. One lady (Kayleen McGuire) had lost her great uncle in the area, and requested Steve's help to organise a wreath for her. Her relative was 4035 Sergeant Thomas Joseph DUGGAN, 15th and 47th Battalion, MM, killed in action 12 October 1917, Zonnebeke, Belgium, age 22, no known grave - his name is recorded on the Menin Gate.

A search through the Australian War Museum records revealed –

Roll of Honour: **Thomas Joseph Duggan**

Service Number: 4035

Rank: Sergeant

Unit: 47th Australian Infantry Battalion

Service: Australian Army

Conflict: First World War, 1914-1918

Date of death: 12 October 1917

Place of death: Belgium

Cause of death: Killed in action

Age at death: 22

Place of association: Huon, Australia

Cemetery or memorial details: Menin Gate Memorial, Ypres, Flanders, Belgium

Source: AWM145 Roll of Honour cards, 1914-1918 War, Army

Two days later (20 May), Steve Roberts announced that the wreath laying Kayleen had requested would be conducted that evening. Kayleen asked both Tom Yeo and myself to act as escorts for her – an honour we both accepted with gratitude.

After the evening meal, Steve guided a group of us to Menin Gate, and we were introduced to the officials there, who explained the procedure to Kayleen, Tom and myself. The rest of our party took up strategic positions for photographic opportunities.

From memory, the three of us were the fourth party to move forward to lay the wreath, with possibly three more following us. When our turn came, the three of us moved in line abreast from one side of the Gate to the opposite side, laid the wreath, then in single file, returned to the side from whence we had come. It was a very stirring and proud experience for me, and I thank Kaleen for asking me, and Tom Yeo (a former soldier with much service experience) for being my escort partner.



Tom Yeo (left), Kayleen McGuire (centre) and author (right)

Awaiting our turn to move forward

I was wearing my miniature medals, and answered many questions from locals and tourists as to the origin of the medals. It was very much a night I will remember for ever.

Ian A McDougall

Former Corporal 4717396, RAAMC Company Medic, 5RAR 66/67 Tour