

Durrington War Graves



Lest we Forget

World War I



2573 PRIVATE

T. T. BLAKE

1ST AUSTRALIAN PIONEERS

12TH DECEMBER, 1916

*Commonwealth War Graves Headstone for Pte T. T. Blake is located in Grave Plot # 128
of Durrington War Graves Cemetery*

Thomas Tait BLAKE

Thomas Tait Blake was born on 26th September, 1874 in Ochiltree, East Ayrshire, Scotland to parents Henry Charles & Margaret Blake (nee Denham). He came to Australia when he was 4½ years old – according to information supplied on Roll of Honour. Thomas Blake, aged 3 years & his parents Henry C. (aged 28, Coachman) & Margaret (aged 30) were recorded as passengers on the *Blair Athole* that had departed from Plymouth, England & arrived at Sydney, NSW on 10th March, 1879.

Thomas Tait Blake married Ruby October Pike in 1905. A birth was registered in 1906 for Nellie M. Blake (Parents Thomas T. & Ruby O. Blake). A birth was registered in 1907 for Harry C. Blake (Parents Thomas T. & Ruby O. Blake). A death was registered in 1908 for Henry C. Blake (Parents Thomas T. & Ruby O. Blake). In 1909, a birth was registered for Henry C. Blake (Parents Thomas T. & Ruby O. Blake). Leslie Thomas Blake was born after 1912 (100 year ruling).

Thomas Tait Blake was a 41 year old, married, Builder's Labourer from 17 Sturt Street, Darlinghurst, NSW when he enlisted on 4th April, 1916 with the 1st Pioneer Battalion, 5th Reinforcements of the Australian Army (A.I.F.). His service number was 2573 & his religion was Church of England. His next of kin was listed as his wife – Mrs Ruby October Blake of 17 Sturt Street, Darlinghurst, NSW. Thomas Tait Blake had previously served with D Company, 3rd Regiment Infantry for 12 months as stated on his Attestation Papers. At the time of enlisting – Thomas Tait had 3 children.

Pte Thomas Tait Blake embarked from Sydney on HMAT *Anchises (A68)* on 24th August, 1916 & disembarked at Devonport, England on 12th October, 1916.

Reinforcements were only given basic training in Australia. Training was completed in training units in England. Some of these were located in the Salisbury Plain & surrounding areas in the county of Wiltshire.

Pte Thomas Tait Blake was admitted to Fargo Military Hospital, Wiltshire on 7th December, 1916 & reported seriously ill on 11th December, 1916.

Pte Thomas Tait Blake died at 10 a.m. on 12th December, 1916 of Broncho-pneumonia at Fargo Military Hospital, Wiltshire.

A death for Thomas T. Blake, aged 42, was registered in the December quarter, 1916 in the district of Amesbury, Wiltshire.

Pte Thomas Tait Blake was buried on 15th December, 1916 at Durrington Cemetery, Wiltshire – plot number 128.

From the Red Cross Missing & Wounded File in regards to the death of Pte Blake 2573 – a letter from the Assistant Matron of Military *Hospital, Fargo, Salisbury Plain reads:*

In answer to your letters of Jan. 2nd and Jan. 4th Pte Blake 2573 1st Pioneer Batt. A. I. F. was admitted to hospital on Dec. 7th. He had two attacks of Haemoptysis, became delirious on Dec. 10th and died of Broncho pneumonia on Dec. 12th without regaining consciousness. He was very bright and cheerful the first three days and was a very good patient all through. The Rev. Skipper chaplain to the hospital saw him several times. Pte Blake was buried in Durrington, Wilts, 15.12.16 grave no. 128 Right hand side of cemetery path. Please do not apologise for asking for information. We all feel so very very sorry for this lad so far away from home and know how very worried his relatives must be. The Sister in whose ward an Australian dies always writes to his relatives if no friend or relatives have been with him at the time of his death, but I expect his people have not heard yet. It seems so sad to see these strong young men, going under with pneumonia, due I suppose to this changeable climate. They do not seem to have the resistive power that Englishmen have. We are so sorry for them and wish we could do more for them, but we do all we possibly can to help them pull though. Hoping the above is what you require.

Private T. T. Blake is commemorated in the Hall of Memory Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Australia on Panel 171.



(Photos by Cathy Sedgwick)



Roll Of Honour WW1 Australian War Memorial Canberra, Australia

A War Pension was granted to Ruby October Blake – widow of late Pte Thomas Tait Blake in the sum of £2 per fortnight granted from 16th February, 1917. Pensions were also paid for Pte Blake's 3 children – Nellie Margaret – 20/- per fortnight; Harry Charles – 15/- per fortnight; Leslie Thomas – 10/- per fortnight – all granted from 16th February, 1917.

A letter dated 16th June, 1923 to Postmaster, Post Office, Oxford Street, Sydney NSW from Base Records was written to ask that the Post Office advise the widow of the late Pte T. T. Blake – now remarried & known as Mrs McKiernan that they requested that she contact Base Records with her new address as they wanted to be able to send out the late Pte Blake's War Medals. Advice was received that Mrs McKiernan was now living at "Jesmond" Australia Avenue, South Randwick, Sydney, NSW. Ruby Blake's marriage to Edward McKiernan had been registered in 1919 in the district of Waverley.

Pte Thomas Tait Blake was entitled to British War Medal only. A Memorial Scroll & Memorial Plaque were also sent to Pte Blake's remarried widow – Mrs Ruby McKiernan (both received July, 1923).

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission lists Private Thomas Tait Blake – service number 2573 as being 41 years old & served with 1st Australian Pioneers. No family details are listed.

(68 pages of Pte Thomas Tait Blake's Service records are available for On Line viewing at National Archives of Australia website).

Information obtained from the Australian War Memorial (Roll of Honour, First World War Embarkation Roll, Red Cross Wounded & Missing) & National Archives

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Newspaper Reports

ROLL OF HONOUR

BLAKE – December 12, 1916, Thomas Tait Blake, of illness, Military Hospital, England. "We cannot, Lord, Thy purpose see; but all's done well that's done by Thee." Inserted by his sorrowing wife and children of 17 Sturt Street, Darlinghurst.

BLAKE - December 12, 1916, Thomas Tait Blake, of illness, Military Hospital, England, beloved and only son of Mr and Mrs H. C. Blake of 17 Sturt Street, Darlinghurst. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away.

(The Sydney Morning Herald, NSW Tuesday 19 December, 1916)

ROLL OF HONOUR

257th & 258th CASUALTY LISTS

DIED – OTHER CAUSES

New South Wales

T. T. Blake, Darlinghurst

(The Mercury, Hobart, Tasmania Thursday 28 December, 1916)

IN MEMORIAM

BLAKE – In loving memory of my dear husband, Private T. T. Blake, died on active service, December 12, 1916.

Greater love hath no man

Inserted by his loving wife and children.

BLAKE – In loving memory of our dear son, Private T. T. Blake, died on active service, December 12, 1916.

Peace, perfect peace.

Inserted by his sorrowing father and mother.

BLAKE – Died, Salisbury Plains, England. December 12, 1916, Private Thomas Blake. Rest in peace.

Inserted by his loving father and mother, H. C. and M. Blake.

(The Sydney Morning Herald, NSW Wednesday 12 December, 1917)

Commonwealth War Graves Commission Headstones

The Defence Department, in 1920/21, contacted the next of kin of the deceased World War 1 soldiers to see if they wanted to include a personal inscription on the permanent headstone at Durrington War Graves Cemetery. Space was reserved for 66 letters only (with the space between any two words to be counted as an additional letter) & the rate per letter was around 3 ½ d (subject to fluctuation).

The expense in connection for the erection of permanent headstones over the graves of fallen soldiers was borne by the Australian Government.

(Information obtained from letters sent to next of kin in 1921)

Pte T. T. Blake does not have a personal inscription on his headstone. The forms were not claimed as his widow had changed address & had not informed Department of Defence.

Photo of Pte T. T. Blake's Headstone at Durrington War Graves Cemetery, Wiltshire.



(Photo © Ian King - with permission)