Captain Joseph Peter Lalor (XC 1893-9)

AWM ~ Roll of Honour

Joseph Peter Lalor

Rank: Captain
Unit: 12th Australian Infantry Battalion
Date of death: 25 April 1915
Place of death: Gallipoli, Turkey
Cause of death: Killed in action
Age at death: 30
Occupation: Professional Soldier
Place of association: Perth, Australia
Memorial details: Baby 700 Cemetery (Special Memorial No. 4), Gallipoli Peninsula, Turkey

From “The Xaverian” 1914 p. 34

Captain Joe Lalor is once more on active service. He was summoned rapidly from Queensland when war broke out, and flashed through Melbourne, leaving only a message to mark his path. Joe is thoroughly familiar with the French Army and its methods, so that his experience should stand to him well in his new campaign. Joe was rising rapidly in our home forces when the call came. We wish him safe back.

From “The Xaverian” 1915 p. 34-38

The tributes to Captain Peter Lalor at the time of his death, on that first ANZAC Day April 25, 1915, fill 4 double-column pages of “The Xaverian” and cannot be included here. Mr. Guy Innes, of the “Herald,” wrote some touching verses on “The Lalor Line” also published in “The Xaverian.”

Below just some sample extracts of those tributes:

Joseph Peter Lalor was of such exceptional personality, and his heroic death attracted so much attention throughout Australia, …

Joe Lalor was a Xaverian in a special sense, as practically the whole of his school-days was spent at the college. He was a boarder for seven years, and then left school for over a year, returning again in 1900,…

The epitaph chosen for Captain Lalor’s Special Memorial is a quotation of the Roman poet Horace:

Dulce Et Decorum Est
Pro Patria Mori
Lord Thou Knowest Best
Lalor was a boy of small build, but with a lot of energy in his character, to say nothing of a certain amount of bottled-up ferocity, in his composition, which he used to let loose as a barracker at the school football matches and other contests. He had a lot of the 'wild Irishmen' in his blood. His subsequent life was filled with extraordinary adventures, but the most remarkable characteristic of his strange career was the deep religious earnestness which he retained to the last.

… in Ballarat where stands the statue of Peter Lalor, leader of the miners at Eureka, and afterwards Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Victoria. He was the grandfather of Captain Joseph Peter Lalor, who, having served in the Foreign Legion of France, espoused, as a captain in the Third Brigade of the Australian Expeditionary Force, the glorious cause whose call no one bearing his name could hear unmoved. At the age of 30 years he fell, shot through the head, while stemming, with a handful of the Eleventh and Twelfth Battalions, a Turkish counter-attack at Sari Bair, in Gallipoli.

Fragmentary as is the account of his death, enough is known of the manner of the passing of this young knight of the last Crusade to thrill Xaverians with pride in their old schoolmate.

Joseph Lalor’s story was told in the 12th Battalion’s history:

Lalor then moved forward on to the seaward slope of ‘Baby 700’ where the fighting was thickest. Although the mental strain and anxiety, which he had experienced since landing early in the morning had been enormous, he nevertheless rallied his men and, waving his arms, shouted, ‘Come on, the 12th’. The words had hardly passed his lips when he fell dead, and ‘the 12th’ (the last words he uttered) lost one of its most gallant and capable officers.

[LM Newton, The story of the Twelfth, a Record of the 12th Battalion, AIF, during the Great War of 1914-1918, Hobart, 1925, p.73]

Later, at dusk, Lance Corporal Freame lost Lalor’s sword in the confusion of the battle. Captain Lalor’s death was, in the words of the battalion history:

… a severe blow to his men with him at the time, as it was to his whole company when they afterwards re-formed. Although small of stature, Little Jimmy’s heart was large, whilst his vitality was almost inexhaustible.

[LM Newton, The story of the Twelfth, a Record of the 12th Battalion, AIF during the Great War of 1914-1918, Hobart, 1925, p.92]