

Private Kenneth Laird

Regimental number: 2036

2nd Australia Light Trench Mortar Battery

born: 1889 – died: 2 Jul 1916

Kenneth Laird, son of Donald Craig and Isabella Elizabeth (Ditcham) Laird, was born in Serpentine Creek, Victoria, Australia, in 1889.¹ Kenneth's father was born in Caithness, Scotland;² his mother was likely born in Tasmania, although proof has not been found to date.

Donald and Isabella had been married in Launceston, Tasmania, 30 June 1875.³ Their children included John Leonard (born 1876), Isabel Mary (1878), Sinclair (1882), Donald Craig (1883), Lewis William (1886, died age 11 months),⁴ Janet (1888), Kenneth (1889) and Norman Ditcham (1897, who died in Mitiamo, Victoria, in 1917).⁵ From the ancestry.com index to births in Australia, we learn that Kenneth's siblings were all born in the state of Victoria.

Both of Kenneth's parents died before war was declared in Europe. His mother's death was registered in Ulverstone, Tasmania, in 1900.⁶ His father, at age 75, died in Mitiamo, Victoria, in 1913.⁷

Kenneth Laird joined the 22nd Australian Infantry Battalion (AIF) on 13 July 1915. He was already married at the time of enlistment to Mary (Brown) Laird of 203 Neale Street, Bendigo, Victoria. Private Laird left Melbourne at the end of August 1915, and by the end of October he was in Gallipoli. By that time, his brother Sinclair had begun to worry. From Calivil, Victoria, on 13 October 1915, Sinclair Laird wrote to Senator Pearce, the Minister for Defence (Australia), asking about a rumour of a boat being sunk that would have been the ship Private Laird was on. Sinclair and the family had not heard of Kenneth's whereabouts since he left Australia in August.⁸

In the meantime, Private Laird was safe, relatively speaking, in Gallipoli and would soon be proceeding to join the British Expeditionary Force in France. After landing in Marseilles in March, Private Laird was transferred to the Australian Light Trench Mortar Battery, 6th Infantry Brigade, on 13 May 1916.⁹

According to the official war history, on the last night of June 1916, all battalions of the 6th Brigade were engaged in raids of the German lines southwest of the Armentières-Wavrin railway. These raids involved 8 officers and 240 men. Eight members of the raiding parties were killed. The official history describes the night experienced by members of the 22nd Battalion.¹⁰

"The centre party (22nd) found the wire partly cut, and the scouts hacked a way through it. The "borrow-pit," however, was deep and sticky, and contained wire on spiked stakes. This caused five minutes' delay, and only half the party crossed. The bombing parties entered the trench and turned right and left, bombing the enemy. Some of these were in their dugouts, where one of them who showed fight was killed. It was thought that the Germans were driven by these parties into the fire of the trench-mortars . . ."¹¹

From actions on the night of 1 July 1916, with shell wounds to the abdomen, his bowels protruding, his right leg shattered and his left arm wounded, Private Laird was admitted to the 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station in Bailleul, France. He died at 4:40 a.m. on 2 July 1916.¹²

Bailleul had become an important hospital centre for not just the 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station but also for the 1st Australian and five British Army casualty clearing stations.¹³ In July 1916, the 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station war diary records that the station received 2,810 admissions, of whom 70 died.¹⁴ The station was likely too busy for more detailed entries in the unit's war diaries.

Private Laird was buried in Bailleul Communal Cemetery Extension (Nord), section II, row E, grave 102.¹⁵ This cemetery contains 4,403 Commonwealth burials of the First World War, 17 Commonwealth burials of the Second World War and 154 German burials from both wars.

As late as the 1919 electoral rolls, the widowed Mary Laird continued to reside at 203 Neale in Bendigo.¹⁶ She wrote to the army many times, seeking her husband's kit. When Mary finally received his belongings, his kit included a French book.¹⁷ Private Laird had been prepared.

¹ "Australia, Birth Index, 1788–1922," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 22 August 2016), entry for Kenneth Laird, Registration place: Victoria, Australia, Registration number: 26157

² "1851 Scotland Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 23 August 2016), entry for Donald Laird, Enumeration district: 2A, Household schedule number: 36, Line: 5, Roll: CSSCT1851_10

³ "Australia, Marriage Index, 1788–1950," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 22 August 2016), entry for Donald Craig Laird, Registration place: Launceston, Tasmania, Registration number: 472

⁴ "Australia, Death Index, 1787–1985," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 22 August 2016), entry for Lewis Wm Laird, Registration place: Victoria, Registration number: 4254

⁵ "Australia, Death Index, 1787–1985," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 22 August 2016), entry for Norman Ditcham Laird, Registration place: Victoria, Registration number: 6032

⁶ "Australia, Death Index, 1787–1985," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 22 August 2016), entry for Isabella Eliza Laird, Registration place: Ulverstone, Tasmania, Registration number: 0807

⁷ "Australia, Death Index, 1787–1985," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 22 August 2016), entry for Donald Craig Laird, Registration place: Victoria, Registration number: 10701

⁸ "First Australian Imperial Force Personnel Dossiers, 1914–1920," *National Archives of Australia* (recordsearch.naa.gov.au/NameSearch/Interface/ItemsListing.aspx: accessed 22 August 2016) entry for Kenneth Laird, Series number: B2455, Control symbol: LAIRD KENNETH, Barcode: 7374514

⁹ "First Australian Imperial Force Personnel Dossiers, 1914–1920," *National Archives of Australia* (recordsearch.naa.gov.au/NameSearch/Interface/ItemsListing.aspx: accessed 22 August 2016) entry for Kenneth Laird

¹⁰ Bean, C.E.W. Chapter IX – The Raids at Armentieres," *The Australian Imperial Force in France, 1916, Vol. 3* (12th edition, 1941) *Australian War Memorial* (www.awm.gov.au: accessed 23 August 2016)

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² "First Australian Imperial Force Personnel Dossiers, 1914–1920," *National Archives of Australia* (recordsearch.naa.gov.au/NameSearch/Interface/ItemsListing.aspx: accessed 22 August 2016) entry for Kenneth Laird

¹³ *Commonwealth War Graves Commission*, (www.cwgc.org: accessed 23 August 2016)

¹⁴ "War Diaries – 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," Library and Archives Canada (collectionsCanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=2005082: accessed 23 August 2016)

¹⁵ *Commonwealth War Graves Commission*, (www.cwgc.org: accessed 23 August 2016), entry for Laird, K., Service No: 2036

¹⁶ "Australia, Electoral Rolls, 1903–1980," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 23 August 2016), entry for Mary Laird

¹⁷ "First Australian Imperial Force Personnel Dossiers, 1914–1920," *National Archives of Australia* (recordsearch.naa.gov.au/NameSearch/Interface/ItemsListing.aspx: accessed 22 August 2016) entry for Kenneth Laird