

A LOCAL BOY WHO GAVE HIS ALL

Patrick Joseph Bugden was born on St Patrick's Day, 17 March 1897 at Tatham, in the Northern Rivers of NSW. His mother Annie (nee Connolly) was a Grafton local and his father Thomas and his young family resided initially at the Bugden family dairy farm at Tatham before moving to the Farmers' Home Hotel at Gundurimba. Three more children, Barney, Rose and Monica were soon added to the family. Tragedy struck the young family when Patrick was six when Thomas Bugden passed away leaving Annie a widow with four small children. At the time Thomas was the licensee of the Farmers' Home Hotel and was to move to a new hotel near Bangalow. Thomas was a well-known sportsman.

Paddy initially attended the local convent school at Tatham and later he attended the Gundurimba Public School. From Gundurimba the family moved to the New Brighton Hotel at Billinudgel after the marriage of Annie Connolly to Mr J.J Kelly the licensee of the Billinudgel Pub. It is believed that at some stage Paddy attended Bangalow school. Paddy played cricket and rugby for Billinudgel from 1911 to 1914. He also worked at the Mullumbimby Post Office (now a museum) before the family moved yet again to Alstonville in 1914 as Annie Bugden (now remarried to Mr J.J. Kelly), bought another hotel, the Federal. Another four children were added to the extended family: Ellen, Bridget, Bill and Anne (known as Nancy) and a family portrait of the Bugden-Kelly family clearly shows the closeness of Paddy and his syblings.

When Patrick Bugden signed up as a volunteer on 25 May 1916 (he added two years to his age), there was considerable knowledge of the death rate in the Great War. Like so many of his peers this did not deter the young Patrick from his decision to enlist, nor is there any evidence of attempts to dissuade him from enlisting, though discussion on the dangers is likely given his closeness to his mother and family. No comparison can be made to the Australia of 1916 and today, as the values of that time in Australia and now are radically different. Of note six Bugdens volunteered for active service in World War 1, and only one returned.

Paddy left Alstonville in 1916 for four months training in South East Queensland and then sailed for England becoming a reinforcement for the 31st Battalion (a Queensland unit) Australian Imperial Force (AIF). He had already completed twelve months reservist training under the compulsory system introduced in 1911. In England, six weeks training on the Salisbury plains (still a major training location for the British Army) saw Paddy's unit proceed to France in January 1917.

Paddy Bugden was a frequent letter writer to his family. From his correspondence we know that he felt a strong sense of camaraderie with the men of his unit. He knew boys from Tatham, Casino, Billinudgel and Alstonville who were also in his unit. To his mother he wrote that 'I fear nothing', a fact which his record of service supports. He also talked about every day occurrences such as 'I am going strong with a French girl. We can't understand each other, only sit down and wink at one another'. Many Australian soldiers were billeted at French farms during periods of respite. It is clear that Paddy was able to separate his life into compartments so that a degree of normalcy could be made in the midst of the chaos that surrounded him.

Paddy Bugden was athletic, religious and committed to his family and country. From Ypres in Belgium the 31st Battalion was committed to the attack on Polygon Wood in Belgium (26-28) September 1917. We know that Paddy Bugden survived the actions for which he was

recommended and then awarded the Victoria Cross. A few days later, on 28 September 1917, Paddy Bugden was killed by shrapnel. Accounts of the young Bugden's courage under fire and his tenacity show that he could have been nominated for the VC for a number of actions in which he participated. Paddy Bugden was 20 years old when he died and is buried with many of his fellow soldiers at Hooze Crater cemetery, Zillebeke, Belgium (Hooze is a small hamlet two and a half miles from Ypres along the Menin Road).

It does not take much to imagine the grief that the Bugden-Kelly family went through upon the death of their son and brother. Family life was central to most young people at the time, with community and church strong influencers. As a relatively new country Australia's ties to Great Britain were strong. That commitment can be measured in the fact that out of a population of about four and a half million people, sixty thousand Australians died in World War 1, and countless thousands had their lives shortened as a result of injuries and even more were scarred psychologically. As a comparison with the Australian population today, the death toll would translate to in excess of three hundred and fifty thousand based on our current population of twenty four million. Our ability as a nation to deal with this death rate today I leave to the speculators.

Annie Kelly gave her eldest son to the nation, as did many other mothers (later her other son Barney Bugden died of war wounds received in World War 11 in 1948). She was presented with her son's VC at Admiralty House by the Governor-General on 4 April 1918. She and her husband sold the Federal in Alstonville and moved to the Tweed in the 1920s where she was a familiar sight at Tweed Heads ANZAC Day ceremonies over the years. She kept the VC in her purse.

We get an insight into what Annie Kelly and her family thought of Paddy's sacrifice in the Memorial Wreath (Alstonville: 28 Sep 1997, 80th anniversary of Paddy's death) message from her two daughters, Nance and Ettie:

"In memory of a Wonderful Brother. We remember your love of God, of our family, and our Country. We remember our pride in you, the fears for your safety, the joy of your letters and then the shock of the news of your death, which turned back to a lifelong pride in a wonderful and heroic young man. Your sisters, Ellie and Nance".

A sad postscript to the story of the Bugden family was the death of Annie Kelly and her husband Mr J.J. Kelly and eldest grandson Billy Elliott in a car crash at Mount Gravatt in 1949, just six months after the dedication of the memorial column and plaque to Paddy (1948) in Alstonville. Initially the Victoria Cross was not found; however after a search by the family it was discovered in the grass by the side of the road. Paddy's sister, Mrs Rose Elliott had custody of the VC until 1980 when it was donated to the Queensland Museum which also holds two other Victoria Crosses. All were from members of Queensland units.

One hundred years is a significant period of time for a country. Events that occurred in 1917 are remembered by few, although ANZAC Day could be said to be a time of remembrance of that time. To remember an individual after that length of time is rare. Alstonville NSW (population 5648) is an unlikely place to sustain a living tribute to its greatest hero. Indeed if it were not for the diligence of Mr John Barnes, a record of Paddy Bugden's life might have been reduced to a historian's research project. I am indebted to John for his book "So I Fear Nothing: The Story of Paddy Bugden VC' from which I have drawn so much documentary evidence. The book is currently being reprinted and can be obtained at a cost of \$25 through Crawford House (Alstonville Historical Society).

Each year before the main service on ANZAC Day in Alstonville, there is a ceremony conducted at the Bugden memorial located on Bugden Avenue prior to the march to the memorial in Elizabeth Anne Brown Park.

Vale Paddy Bugden.

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