**Anzac Day 2019**

**Michael Rathborne**

*Editor’s note: Michael wrote this for the local Mayor to assist with preparations for Anzac Day 2019.*

Salutations to dignitaries and guests present.

Much has been made over the last few years of the centenary of the Great War, and in 2019 we will mark the centenary of the official end of that conflict with the anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in June 1919. We meet today to commemorate the beginning of Australia’s part in that conflict 104 years ago in the early morning darkness, on a beach ringed by steep cliffs 15,000km from Australia. In 1921 the principal of Uralla Public School, Mr McAlpine, declared that it was in this event that:

**“Australia was baptised as a nation, not by water, but in blood and fire, and its sons had made a name for themselves of imperishable glory.”**

The history of nations can be seen in this heroic light, but at its very core it is made up of the countless small actions of individuals. Today I wish to speak of three such individuals – Everard Claude Lonsdale, Robert Wise and Monaghan Raymond Hayes. Who are they? All three were country boys – Monaghan was from Cooma, Robert from Young and Everard was born here in Uralla. All three enlisted in the first month of the war in August 1914 and were members of the 1st Australian Light Horse Regiment of the Australian Imperial Force. They left Australia in October 1914 and made their way to Egypt.

Trooper Lonsdale (Army Number 137, ‘A’ Squadron) came from Methodist stock and was a 22 year old carpenter, son of James and Elizabeth Lonsdale. He had grey eyes, brown hair and a fair complexion. He had a scar on his right knee and stood 163cm tall and weighed 55kgs – not a big lad then.

Trooper Wise (Army Number 286, ‘B’ Squadron) belonged to the Church of England and was a 28 year old labourer, son of George and Louisa Wise. He had brown eyes, dark hair and a dark complexion. He had a scar over his right eye and stood 177cm tall and weighed 66kgs.

Trooper Hayes (Army Number 330, also of ‘B’ Squadron) was a 19 year old painter, son of Catholic parents William and Sarah Hayes. He had blue eyes, brown hair and a tan complexion. He had a scar on his left knee and stood 175cm tall and weighed 59kg.

These three men weren’t there in the grey dawn of Gallipoli 104 years ago today, but they weren’t far away. Belonging to the 1st Light Horse Regiment, they had expected to fight from horseback, but when the call came to support their AIF mates on the beach and cliffs at Gallipoli, they readily volunteered to give up their horses and fight as infantry. By the middle of May 1915 they had joined the fray. Whilst their time at Gallipoli was brief their stay has become eternal.

Uralla son, Everard Claude Lonsdale, was killed in action in Monash Valley on Tuesday 18 May. His comrade Robert Wise was killed two days later on Thursday 20 May. Monaghan Raymond Hayes was wounded on Wednesday 26 May and evacuated off Gallipoli. He was back with his mates by late June – only to be killed in action on Saturday 31 July 1915. They were among the 8,141 Australians killed at Gallipoli, and a further 26,000 were wounded.

The march of time is relentless and silent – it creeps upon us all. Today we meet to continue to honour a sacred promise to those that served all those years ago – and especially to those that paid the ultimate sacrifice and lie so far from home, from family, friends and communities left forever bereft.

I spoke of Trooper Everard Claude Lonsdale for obvious reasons – he is one of our sons – immortalised on the Honour Roll at Uralla Central School and also at Glen Innes where his parents later resided. But why of Trooper Robert Wise and Trooper Monaghan Hayes?

If we were to visit Gallipoli today, a little under half a kilometre to the south-east of Anzac Cove we would find the cemetery at Shrapnel Valley. In Plot 3, Row E, Grave number 11 lies Trooper Lonsdale, native of Uralla – the inscription on his headstone reads ‘Thy Will Be Done.’ In Grave 10 to his left lies Trooper Robert Wise and to his right in Grave 12 lies Trooper Monaghan Hayes. Did they know each other? It is hard not to believe that at some point their paths had crossed. An Anglican, a Methodist and a Catholic, three country boys from Cooma, Young and Uralla – so far from home and never to return.

In September 1922 Elizabeth Lonsdale wrote to the Australian Army and respectfully requested:

**“Would you kindly forward me a pamphlet entitled ‘Graves of the Fallen’ for which I have enclosed sixpence in stamps.”**

Seven years after her son’s death she longed for an image of his final resting place, as she no doubt turned her eyes to the north west of her Northern Tablelands home, desperate for some small keepsake of her son who lay so far away, who would never return and who she could never forget.

And that is also our task and duty.

Lest We Forget.

**Contributor details**

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