Robert Sinclair, WWI Soldier

More than 140 brave men from the Maleny district served in the Australian Imperial Force in WWI. Most were driven by loyalty to the "mother country" and a belief in defending the British Empire. One young volunteer was Robert Sinclair, born in Maleny on 29 April 1892. His father had selected land on the Blackall Range in 1887 and later established a successful dairy farm.

Robert enlisted with three other local men (Jack Beacom, Ronald Lebon and Henry Weitemeyer) in October 1916. They were farewelled together in the Maleny Hotel but would not come home together. Two would return from war, two lie in foreign soil.

Private Robert Sinclair joined the 15th Infantry Battalion. Weeks later, he sailed to England aboard a military transport ship. We can only imagine the anticipation and dread on that slow voyage. Soldiers of the 15th trained in Wiltshire before travelling to France to fight on the Western Front. But influenza delayed Robert's training, and he did not rejoin his battalion in France until June 1917.

The 15th Battalion moved to Belgium during 1917 when the focus of British operations shifted to the Ypres sector to draw German attention away from the French. On the front line in August 1917, Robert was wounded in action. He returned to the 15th at Ypres six weeks later. Robert survived another three weeks of bitter trench warfare before he was killed in action on the 21st of October 1917. His family were told of Robert's sacrifice a week later.

In the aftermath of WWI, honouring war dead with permanent headstones took time. It was only in 1922, four years after the war ended, that Robert's father sent authorities the inscription he wanted carved into his son's military headstone:

They laid our hero down to rest
In the flag with a Southern Cross
And we mourn for him as one of our best
For his death was Australia's loss

In reply, Robert's father was told the inscription was too long. Rather than change it, he wrote back saying his son would have no inscription at all. Yet more sorrow was to come. Since Robert's death, the Sinclair family had undoubtedly taken comfort that he lay in peace. But in 1925, the Imperial War Graves Commission advised the Australian Government that land clearing near Ypres had uncovered Robert's body in a small, isolated mass grave. His parents were informed that their son would be re-interred in a military cemetery and his identity disk returned to them.

Though Robert left no descendants, many members of the Sinclair family still live on the Sunshine Coast today.

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Sinclair's Balmoral Rd Homestead with Eagle's Nest in the distance