

TOO DARK FOR THE LIGHT HORSE: Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people in the defence forces

When the tiny town of Goombungee on the Darling Downs unveiled its memorial to the war dead of the district on Saturday December 11, 1920 there were the usual ritual proceedings with prayers, hymns, and a bugler who played the Last Post. When the names of all the fallen soldiers were read out, many people became emotional.



Major General Thomas Glasgow KCB CMG DSO, unveiling the Goombungee Fallen Soldiers' Memorial on Saturday 11 December 1920, in the presence of about 700 people.
<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-page2524724>

At the back of the crowd stood a solitary dark woman. Her son had also been killed and she stood weeping throughout the whole ceremony. However, not one person sought to comfort her or bring her forward into the throng. She was, according to Eileen Parlour who witnessed the proceedings as a child, ostracised.



The Aboriginal mother's name was Rose Martyn (left) and her son, Charles, had been killed during an assault, led by two Australian Divisions, east of Ypres on 20 September 1917. The battle became known in British military history as the Battle of Menin Road and was the first time that two Australian Divisions had attacked side by side, employing a rolling barrage of artillery fire to cover their advance(...)

5959 Private Charles George Martyn (pictured below left) was a member of the 26th Battalion.



His section leader, 3854 Corporal James Thomas Montgomery (pictured below right), wrote to Charlie's mother shortly after his death. Corporal Jim Montgomery also saw to it that Charlie Martyn was given the best possible burial under the conditions that the Queensland battalion was experiencing at the time and ensured that Charlie's personal effects, were sent home to the correct address.

Corporal Montgomery, who also came from Goombungee, was killed the following year. Sadly, the other Goombungee residents were not to follow Jim Montgomery's example and publicly show any compassion or friendship towards his dark comrade's mother.



The name C.G. Martyn does appear on the Goombungee War Memorial and on one of the thousands of white concrete headstones in the Hooge Crater Cemetery near Zillebeke in Belgium.



J.T. Montgomery and C.G. Martyn memorialised on the Goombungee Fallen Soldiers' Memorial.

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