



A Queensland Rifle Club member who made the supreme sacrifice
1914-1919

The Story Behind the Name



Lieutenant Colonel John Alexander MILNE DSO MID

23 September 1872 - 12 April 1918



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PRE-ENLISTMENT:

- John Milne was born on 23 September 1872 in Woodside, Cromar, Aberdeen, Scotland to parents, Alexander and Jane (Nee McCombie) MILNE
- He attended Torphins School
- He arrived in Brisbane in August 1890 as a free immigrant on the 'Dorunda', aged 19 years
- He worked as a farm labourer in the Wide Bay district, he was a miner in 1897 and then an engine driver on the Gympie goldfield and in 1903-1906 was a farmer at Kilkivan junction.
- He became a commercial traveller for hardware firms based at Maryborough and from 1908 at Bundaberg, where he established a commission agency in 1913 and was a dealer for the International Harvester Company.
- On 6 October 1898 he married Mary Elise May BULL of NSW. The marriage took place at Kilkivan Junction, Qld. They later lived in Burnett St, Bundaberg, Qld and had 3 sons. The eldest later enlisted and was on active service abroad during WWI
- His next of kin was listed as his wife, Mrs M E M Milne, Burnet Street, Bundaberg

RIFLE SHOOTING:

- He was an excellent rifle shot and a regular competitor at local prize meetings. He was a member of the Maryborough Rifle Club
- Many of his shooting results show just what an experienced and accurate shooter Milne was.
 - Lieut. J . Milne with a handicap of 4, 44 at 300 yards with eleven shots, and 44 at 600 yards with ten shots at 600 yards. Giving Milne a total of 92 in "A" - October 1910
 - Maryborough defeated Tiara in a competition when J.A. Milne shot 30, 35, 31 at 200, 500 and 600 yards respectively, coming second on the day for Maryborough
 - The Maryborough team defeated the Gympie ALH with J.A.Milne scoring 42 & 51 at 300 and 600 yards respectively, a total of 93 - March 1913
- When the President referred to the death of Major Milne at a club meeting, the members demonstrated a high level of respect for their fellow shooter, who was killed in action, and moved that a letter of condolence be sent to Mrs. Milne and family. This was carried in silence, the members standing.

PREVIOUS MILITARY SERVICE:

- From 1908 Milne was an officer in the Wide Bay's Regiment 1st Bn (later the 4th Infantry Bn).
- He was a member of Commonwealth Home Defence Forces



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MILITARY SERVICE:

- Service Number: Officer
- John Milne enlistment on 17 August 1914 as a Captain with the 9th Infantry Battalion, in Brisbane
- On 24 September 1914 he embarked with his Unit on HMAT Omrah, from Brisbane which was the first troopship to leave Queensland.
- On 3 March 1915 he embarked Alexandria to join the MEF, Gallipoli Campaign on board the 'Ionian'
- On 25 April 1915 Captain Milne took 'E' Company ashore on the first landing party of the first day of the Gallipoli landings; although wounded five times he continued encouraging his men until he collapsed and was dragged down to the beach where it was realized he was still alive. Two of his injuries are described in his Service Records:
 - At 2.40 he received shrapnel wounds to his left hand, (which required part of 1 finger to be amputated on 1 May).
 - Then at 3pm he received sever shrapnel wounds to his lower left arm lacerating muscle and soft tissue resulting in a great deal of blood loss which very much weakened him, and he had to be helped to shore.

AMONG THE FIRST ASHORE ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE GALLIPOLI LANDINGS

- After treatment in hospital, he returned to the front line at Gallipoli but on 11 November, two days after his promotion to Major, he was evacuated because of fever and in January 1916 was invalided to Australia per 'Ulysses' for time to convalescent. He was Struck off Strength from the Battalion's list on 20 January 1916.
- After enthusiastic civic welcomes in Maryborough and Bundaberg, Milne told in recruiting speeches, he told of his pleasure in leading such men as the Australians, he unveiled the honour board of St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Bundaberg, and enjoyed a short fishing holiday at Urangan.
- On 18 May 1916 he re-embarked as a Major, with the 41st Infantry Battalion, HMAT Demosthenes, from Sydney, aged 42 years disembarking at Plymouth on 20 July 1916
- He proceeded overseas from Southampton on 24 November 1916 disembarking at Havre, France the following day.
- On 24 February 1917 he was attached to the 36th Battalion in the Field to Command and granted temporary rank of Lieutenant Colonel, after Lt-Col J.W.A. Simpson was killed in action
- He was gassed at Messines, and injured by a shell at Passchendaele



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MILITARY SERVICE continued:

- **On 25 August 1917 Lieutenant Colonel John Milne was awarded DSO**

“His Majesty the King has been graciously pleased to approve of the appointment of the undermentioned officer, to be Companion of the Distinguished Service Order, in recognition of his gallantry and devotion to duty in the Field: Colonel J. A. Milne. For **conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty**. *He showed great capacity and initiative in commanding his battalion when on carrying party duty. He kept the front line well supplied with stores, ammunition, and water, and arranged for the relief of the parties in a most efficient manner, although constantly depleted by casualties and exhaustion.*”

- On 25 Dec 1917 he was mentioned in Sir Douglas Haig's dispatch of 7 November 1917 for distinguished and gallant services and devotion to duty in the field during the period 26 February to midnight 20/21 September 1917
- Lt-Col Milne attended a flying course in Belgium from 11 to 16 January 1918
- In March 1918 Milne successfully organized and executed two important raids on German defences near Warneton,
- Then, on April 4 and 5, the actions by Lt-Col Milne, not only led, but participated in a spectacular bayonet charge at Villers-Bretonneux, which proved crucial in helping to end the war. This was considered an “audacious, suicidal counter attack by an Australian brigade, that defeated a vastly numerically superior force of elite, battle-hardened German stormtroopers”. It was “The Anzac spirit, born just three years before at Gallipoli, that inspired the Bundaberg hero Colonel “Jock” Milne and his 36th Battalion to win an outstanding strategic victory of war-changing proportions at the most critical period of World War I
- His war service was in Egypt Gallipoli, and on the Western Front
- Lieutenant-Colonel was killed in action on 12 April 1918 by a shell into the Headquarters at Hangard, near Villers-Bretonneux, France, while he was dictating reports to his Adjutant. He was aged 45 years
- Generals Birdwood, Goddard, Monash and Rosenthal appreciated Milne's achievements at Villiers-Bretonneux but before receiving official recognition he was killed on April 12, 1918, near Villers-Bretonneux, Somme.
- After his death, Milne's belongings were shipped on the SS Barungo however, en-route the ship they were on was sunk as a result of enemy action and the whole consignment was lost
- John Milne was recognised as a strong, broad-shouldered, seemingly fearless, leader with a powerful voice and marked Scots accent, the sandy-haired Milne was well liked and respected by his troops. A rugged individualist, with little respect for formality though a rigid disciplinarian, he was an eminently practical and competent soldier with a strong sense of duty.



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LOVE FOR AUSTRALIAN DIGGERS

- In the Somme, the French people felt for the Diggers a deep love, a sincere respect, an admiration and an unflinching confidence which can be expressed in a testimony written by an Australian soldier as follows:
- "Strictly no civilian was allowed within 12 miles of the front line but, in spite of this, one old peasant and his middle-aged daughter continued to live and work their fields near our waggon lines. I was talking to our brigade interpreter, a Frenchman, one evening as we passed them. The interpreter stopped them and started yarning. He questioned him about being allowed to stay so close to the line and was he not afraid of being overrun by the Germans? He replied that everyone knew he was an honest and loyal Frenchman and there was no need to worry about the Germans getting through with Australian infantry in front of him ... "I know in my heart they will never cross this ground again. I know because a German Uhlan officer who billeted himself and his men on us told me laughingly that two battalions of Australian infantry were then marching through Amiens to drive back the whole German Imperial Army! We buried him that afternoon with several of his men while the Germans were being driven back through Villers-Bretonneux."
- The efforts of Lieutenant Colonel John Alexander MILNE DSO MID definitely contributed to this belief through his actions while carrying out his duty in service on the Western Front.

He gave his today for our tomorrow

CEMETERY &/OR MEMORIAL:

- Cemetery: Heath Cemetery (Plot VIII Row J Grave 19), Picardie, France
- Inscription: OUT OF THE STRESS OF DOING INTO THE PEACE OF DONE
- Australian War Memorial Roll of Honour Panel number 127
- Bundaberg War Memorial

MILITARY HONOURS & AWARDS:

- Distinguished Service Order (DSO)
- Mentioned in Despatches (MID) twice
- 1914-15 Star
- British War Medal
- Victory Medal



ARMISTICE CENTENARY WAR MEMORIAL

Commemoration Service



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KILLED IN ACTION - 12 APRIL 1918

DEATH OF LIEUTENANT COLONEL JAMES ALEXANDER MILNE DSO MID

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**His grave bears the following inscription
"OUT OF THE STRESS OF DOING INTO THE PEACE OF DONE"**



Lieutenant Colonel John Alexander MILNE DSO MID is buried at Heath Cemetery which is situated between Amiens and St Quentin, approximately 13 kilometres from Villers-Bretonneux. Heath Cemetery, so called from the wide expanse of open country on which it stands, was made after the Armistice. The earliest date of death is September 1915, the latest October 1918, but the majority died in March or August 1918 with Milne being killed in action in April 1918. There are now 1,860 Commonwealth servicemen of the First World War buried or commemorated in this cemetery. 369 of the burials are unidentified but there are special memorials to 26 casualties known or believed to be buried among them.