



Club member who made the supreme sacrifice 1914-1919

# The Story Behind the Name

## The 'O'NEILL' Brothers



**JAMES GORDON**



**WILLIAM**



**Sergeant Major William O'NEILL**

**Abt 1885 - 21 August 1916**

Club members who made the supreme sacrifice 1914-1919

# **The Story Behind the Name**





## **Sergeant Major William O'NEILL**

**Abt 1885 - 21 August 1916**

### **PRE-ENLISTMENT:**

- William (Willie) was born 22 January 1886 in Cooktown to James Henry O'Neill and Elizabeth (Lizzie) Angelina Hackett.
- William had 2 sisters Anne Jane 28 October 1887, Lizzie Florence 22 June 1889. His mother, Elizabeth (Lizzie) Angelina, died on the 29 September 1890 and his father James married again to Edith Williams, 23 February 1892 and had one son, James Gordon born 21 August 1893.
- His step-brother was James Gordon O'Neill but his mother called him Gordon as he & his father both had James as their first Christian name
- James enlisted and was killed in action in France
- His occupation at time of enlistment was that of a seaman/clerk. He had previously been one of sixteen seamen from the wrecked ship Dundonald who spent nine months in 1907 stranded and experiencing great hardship on Disappointment Island off New Zealand.
- It is recorded that he lived in Rockhampton and Dalby in different sources
- He was a single man
- His next of kin was listed as his father, J E O'Neill, Gordonvale via Cairns

### **RIFLE SHOOTING:**

- William O'Neill was a regular member of the Mulgrave Rifle Club
- After the war, his mother, Mrs O'Neill donated a beautiful gold medal to the Mulgrave Rifle Club in memory of her two boys, William and James Gordon. They were active members of the Club when war broke out, when they enlisted and made the supreme sacrifice. The medal was shot for in due course, and the member fortunate enough to win the medal had something to be proud of, seeing that it comes from the mother of such sterling boys as Willie and Gordon.



## Sergeant Major William O'NEILL

Abt 1885 - 21 August 1916

### SERVICE:

- Service Number: 4258
- William O'Neill enlisted in Rockhampton on 30 August 1915 as a Private with 9th Battalion, 13th Reinforcement aged 29 years
- He embarked with his Unit from Brisbane, on board HMAT A55 Kyarra on 3 January 1916 aged 29 years
- He disembarked at Alexandria on 19 February 1916
- On 29 3 1916 he proceeded to join the B.E.F and disembarked Marseilles on 4 April 1916
- He marched out to 9th Battalion at Etaples o 26 July 1916 and taken on strength in France on 29 July 1916
- He reverted to ranks on joining the Battalion on 29 July then promoted Temporary Sergeant on 1 August 1916
- His War service was on the Western Front
- Sergeant Major William O'Neill was killed in action on 21 August 1916 near Mouquet Farm, France only a month after arriving there. He was aged 30

### CEMETERY &/OR MEMORIAL:

- Place of burial : No known grave
- Commemoration details: Australian National Memorial, Villers-Bretonneux, France
- Australian War Memorial Roll of Honour, Panel number 57
- Cairns Cenotaph
- Gordonvale Presbyterian Roll of Honour
- Gordonvale Cenotaph

### MILITARY HONOURS & AWARDS:

- British War Medal
- Victory Medal







## Sergeant Major William O'NEILL

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### ESTABLISHING A LEGACY

As Australia grieved for the fallen soldiers of World War I, a determined group of women in the far north Queensland town of Gordonvale set about making sure their boys would never be forgotten.

### Gordonvale Memorial Hospital

Gordonvale Memorial Hospital was originally erected as an 8 bed hospital in memory of those who died in service or were killed in action during World War I.



Official Opening of the Gordonvale Memorial Hospital

Gordonvale Memorial Hospital was originally erected as an 8 bed hospital in memory of those who died in service or were killed in action during World War One.

Mrs O'Neill was the person most involved in organising the construction of a War Memorial Hospital in Gordonvale. Her two sons Act Sgt William O'Neill, and Second Lieutenant James Gordon O'Neill were killed in action.

Fund raising for the original hospital started in September 1920 using both donations and government resources. The building was constructed by the Public Works Department and included a maternity ward.

When it was officially opened by Lord Stonehaven, the Governor-General, in July 1926, it was fully equipped with the latest appliances purchased with funds raised by the Committee.

The original building was subsequently demolished to make way for more extensive structures.



The modern Gordonvale Memorial Hospital has a marble plaque, removed from the original hospital, on the left wall of its entrance with a comprehensive history in a separate plaque below. Within the hospital foyer are several photographs of William and James O'Neill.

The original plaque was found in a filing cabinet and unveiled at the entrance to the hospital on the 24th April 2015.



# Sergeant Major William O'NEILL

Abt 1885 - 21 August 1916

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## KILLED IN ACTION - 21 AUGUST 1916

### HIS DUTY DONE

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Wed 21 Aug 1918


**Gordonvale Soldiers' Memorial Hospital**

### Establishment of the Hospital

World War I claimed many young Australians. On the cenotaph at Gordonvale, the local soldiers who did not return are honoured.

James and Edith O'Neill lost two boys and along with Mrs W Griffin who had also lost a son, had a meeting in 1920 to establish a cottage hospital as a memorial to the young soldiers.

It was quite a journey from Gordonvale to the Cairns Hospital and some of the injured or sick did not make it or were worse for the delay to treatment.



Lord Stonehaven, Governor-General of Australia 1926-1930

A committee of Gordonvale's like-minded ladies was formed and fundraising began. Over a five year period, the committee raised over £4,000, a remarkable effort.

The committee built an 8-bed hospital including a one bed maternity ward, first-aid section, nurse's quarters and kitchen. Beds were donated by residents of Gordonvale.

On 16 July 1926, then Governor General of Australia, His Excellency Lord Stonehaven unveiled two newly erected concrete gate posts that contained memorial tablets inscribed with 'Gordonvale Soldiers' Memorial Hospital.' One has been restored in recognition of the contribution of the young men and women of Gordonvale and the community spirit that led to the establishment of the Gordonvale Soldiers' Memorial Hospital. This memorial was unveiled on Friday 24 April, 2015 by the Hon. Curtis Pitt, Member for Mulgrave.

Let Us Forget.

The Hon. Curtis Pitt MP  
Treasurer and Member for Mulgrave  
Queensland Government

Bob Norman  
Chair  
Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Board

Julia Hartley-Jones CBE  
Chief Executive  
Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Service



The Gordonvale Soldiers' Memorial Hospital was a project that required a great deal of fund raising which was led by Mrs Edith O'Neill. She was the mother of James and William O'Neill who both lost their lives fighting at the front. This was an amazing achievement to honour those who so readily gave so much.