

ROBERT HENRY BRAUND

Statement

HON COLIN HOLT (South West) [9.51 pm]: It will not have escaped members, of course, that today is the eleventh day of the eleventh month. I want to make a quick speech, if possible, in the time I have to talk about a particular serviceman. My statement comes from notes that were handed to me in Albany last week. They are quite curious and I thought well worth relating to the house. They are about a serviceman called Robert Henry Braund. His history and military service are a little bit patchy, but I have the notes that were handed to me, and I have filled in a few blanks with some research. I will try to paint a picture of his history.

Robert Braund was a native Glaswegian. At 18 years old, he enlisted at Gateshead in the United Kingdom and joined the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders on 24 January 1906. For members' interest, the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders was awarded 16 Victoria Cross medals over the time that it existed. Robert Braund was sent to Stirling Castle in Scotland for his first three months' training. The castle is steeped in history and was the home of many Scottish monarchs, including Mary Queen of Scots. On 5 April 1906, after his initial training, he joined the 1st Battalion of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. He was sent to Chatham in Kent. Eight months later, in January 1907, he was on a boat, this time with the 2nd Battalion of the Highlanders, bound for South Africa, where he was stationed at Bloemfontein, and he arrived there in February 1907. He went from the depths of a British winter to a southern summer in Bloemfontein. It would have been quite a shock for a Scotsman.

Robert Braund was in Bloemfontein for just short of three years, and the records show that, at some point, he was convicted of some offence, and his penalty was the loss of seven days' pay. There is a bit of a thread throughout this story. I think Robert Braund was a bit of a ratbag.

After three years, he sailed from Durban and landed in Southampton in January 1910. He was barracked at Maryhill near Glasgow. While he was in his hometown, he met Isabella Fraser Kock and they married in February 1912. Two months later, Robert was relocated to Fort George near Inverness. I am not sure whether members have been to Fort George, but that is where the Highlanders' Museum is located. He stayed there until the 2nd Battalion of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders was sent to France, landing at Boulogne on 10 August 1914, only two weeks after Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia and the British joined the First World War. In France, they joined the independent 19th Infantry Brigade. Their first engagement with the German army was on 24 August 1914, just two weeks after they landed. Robert Braund's battalion fought in the Battle of Mons, which has been recorded as the first major action of the British Expeditionary Force in the First World War. The British Expeditionary Force was outflanked and outnumbered by the German army and was forced back to Saint-Quentin by the end of August. Around mid-September, Robert Braund's 2nd Battalion joined the Sixth Division of the British army and fought in the Battle of Armentières, which was a part of the Race to the Sea. As the history books tell us, it was a bit of a cat and mouse game whereby the German army tried to outflank the British army as they raced through Belgium towards the sea. On 7 November 1914, they reached Ypres in Belgium, which, as members would know, is the home of the Menin Gate Memorial, and a centre for many Australian war memorials. After becoming involved in battles in August, they continued fighting until 7 November.

In January 1915, in the depth of the European winter, Robert Braund was repatriated to the United Kingdom for medical reasons where he recuperated. Two months later in March 1915, he was released from hospital. He joined the 3rd Battalion, which is a reserve battalion of the Argyll and Southern Highlanders, and was stationed in Edinburgh. Two months later, he was promoted to lance corporal for reasons that are unknown and undocumented. He was sent back to France where he again joined the 1st Battalion in Armentières and Ypres. Five months later in September, he was again posted to the 2nd Battalion, this time as reserve troop, because of the heavy losses that the battalion suffered, possibly at Cambrai. Some of the dates are a bit mixed up and, as I said, the history is a bit patchy.

In late December 1915, Robert was demoted from lance corporal for reasons unknown but around that time, he was sentenced to 10 days' field punishment—I am not exactly sure what that means—for reasons unknown. There is a gap in the records but in April 1916, a good five months later, he was still in France and once again he was promoted to lance corporal. Again, there are gaps in the records. By July 1917, 15 months later, Robert was recorded as being on the battlefields of the River Somme. In August 1917, Robert received a gunshot wound to his left arm and chest. He survived and returned to the United Kingdom. The records show and we can only assume that Robert arrived on the battlefields of Europe his second time around in May 1915 after being repatriated. He left in August 1917 due to being wounded, which, to my mind, is about two years and three months on the European battlefields. I suppose that we can assume he was there the whole time.

In January 1918, Robert was found to be unfit for infantry service because of his wounds. However, he joined the Royal Army Medical Corps. The records do not show where he was posted. Finally, in May 1919, six months after Armistice Day, Robert Henry Braund was discharged and he returned to his home in Glasgow.

I know that was a lot of figures and dates to think about, but I want to get to my point. Robert Henry Braund turned up in Katanning, Western Australia, in 1920. I am not sure how he got there. I have not gone into that sort of research. I am not sure what he did in Katanning. The records also show that he was in Nanarup in 1935. In 1938, at the age of 50 years, Robert Henry Braund died at his own hand. I am sure members would know of the graves of the unknown soldiers. Thousands of war graves all over the world indicate where a soldier is buried, whose identity is not known—known as the Unknown Soldier. Robert Henry Braund is buried, according to the notes I have been supplied, at the old Dog Rock cemetery in Albany, in an apparently unmarked grave. I find that a little ironic and a little sad. I think that the fact Robert Henry Braund lays in an unmarked grave should be rectified. I think his story should be fully researched and told.

Lest we forget.