



THE MENIN GATE

The Last Post Ceremony



Matt Walsh

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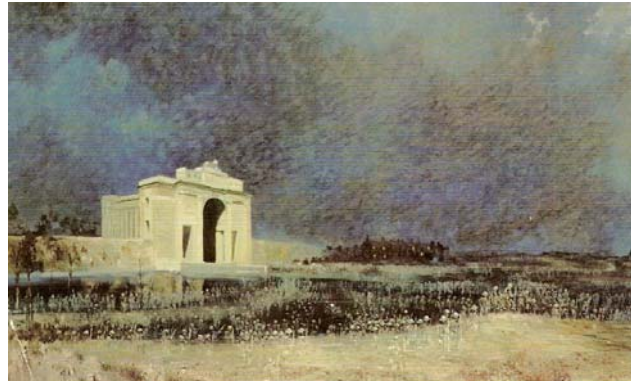
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Introduction

Ask most Australians have they heard of the “*Menin Gate*” – and they will answer ‘Yes’ – it is a Memorial to the Australians Soldiers killed during World War 1.

When asked where is it located, many would say somewhere in France- whilst others will be correct and say in Belgium, more particularly in the town of Ypres.

If they are asked for further information some will make reference to the Will Longstaff painting of the ‘Menin Gate and its ghostly images’.



Unfortunately, very few Australians have any further knowledge of this very important aspect of Australia’s Military History.

How does the ‘Menin Gate Memorial’ fit into Australia’s Military History?

The Battle of Ypres

The 6,000 Australian ‘Diggers’ who lost their lives defending Belgium during World War 1 and who have no known grave are remembered and commemorated on the Menin Gate Memorial.

The Menin Gate Buglers

The citizens of Ypres and the surrounding district wishing to remember and commemorate the Deeds of the Allied Soldiers (including the Aussie Diggers) on the advice of the Chief of Police decided that the “Last Post” should be sounded at the Menin Gate each evening. The first sounding took place on the 1st July 1917 and this continued until the winter of 1928.



*Chief of Police
Pierre Vandenbraambussche.*

In 1929 the “Last Post Committee” was formed to ensure that the “Last Post “ would be sounded each evening for all time and this has continued since the 11th November 1929. The sounding of the “Last

Post” has continued each evening since this day except for a short period commencing on the evening of the 20th may 1940 when the Bugles remained silent when the Germans entered Ypres. They remained silent until the 6th September 1944 when the Germans fled Ypres.

During this period the daily ceremony continued in England at Brookwood Military Cemetery – Surry. On the evening that Ypres was liberated by the Polish forces the ceremony was resumed at the Menin Gate, despite the fighting still taking place within part of the town.

Who were the Menin Gate Buglers?



The first Buglers were originally some of the local workman, other were members of the ‘Volunteer Fire Brigade. These Buglers would sound the “Last Post” in their working clothes after finishing work for the day.

To ensure that the tradition would continue, it was agreed by the Fire Brigade chief that the Fire Brigade would provide the Buglers – This continues to-day. The Buglers are still members of the Fire Brigade or retired members of the Fire Brigade.

The Bugles used in the Service each evening have been donated by the Australians the British and the Canadians.

The Origins of ‘The Last Post and Reveille’



The Last Post

The “Last Post” originated in medieval times, about the year 1622 and was known as the ‘Retreat. It was usually played at 2200hours (10.00pm) to call the soldiers to retire for the night at the end of the day. This sounding of the final bugle call of the day signalling the end of the soldier’s day can be traced back to when the British Army was on campaign in the Netherlands.

There was already a Dutch custom called Taptoe. This was the signal at the end of the day to shut off the beer barrel taps and comes from the Dutch “Doe den tap toe” – turn the tap off”. At the same time the British Army adopted the concept of sounding drum beats as the officer on duty made his rounds in the evening to check sentry posts and to call off duty soldiers out of the pub and back to their billets. When the bugle call of ‘Last Post’ was sounded at the final sentry post inspection this was the final warning that every one should be back in their billets

It has become the custom over the years to sound the ‘Last Post’ at military funerals and commemorative services. It symbolises the ‘end of the soldier’s day’ in so far as the dead soldier has finished his duty and can rest in peace.

When the closing sounds of the music sound out the sad farewell to ‘Light out, Lights out’ most people including servicemen and women would be unaware that there are words to the “Last Post’.

Come home! Come home! The last post is sounding for you to hear.
All good soldiers know very well there is nothing to fear
While they do what is right, and forget all the worries
They have met in their duties through the year.

A soldier cannot always be great, but he can be a gentleman
and he can be a right good pal to his comrades in his squad.

So all you soldiers listen to this-
Deal fair by all and you'll never be amiss.

Be Brave! Be Just! Be Honest and True Men.

Reveille or (Rouse)



The tradition of sounding a bugle or drum, at various stages in a soldier's day originated in the British Army. In the Military Camp around the medieval times of 1600, to wake a soldier at the start of his day at dawn a wake up bugle call 'Reveille' from the French word 'Reveiller' – to wakeup- would be played. Traditionally 'Reveille' (or Rouse) called the soldiers to arise ready to fight for another day. Originally, Reveille was performed on drum and fife, today a trumpet or bugle is used.

Traditionally, 'Reveille' is played only at the first call of the day (Dawn Service) while 'Rouse' can be at any time. Reveille is two long verses whereas Rouse is only one short verse. Both have words which can be used.

The Town of Ypres (Ieper)

The town of Ypres is in the Flanders Region of Western Belgium near the French Border. To-day when we refer to the town it is referred to by its Flemish name of ***Ieper***. However when reference is made to the town in relation to the Allied forces during World War 1 then it is referred too by its French name of ***Ypres***.

The Australian contingent at The Menin Gate April 2008

