

# Mackay North State High School Lest We Forget Commemorative Project

Mackay North High's Lest We Forget Project is an ongoing project of commemoration undertaken by Senior History students at the school.

The aim of the project is to commemorate and further publicise the sacrifices made by Australians in war and to make practical and respectful tributes to those Australians who have died for our country.

The project revolves around overseas pilgrimages to the battlefields, cemeteries and memorials where Australians have fought and died. These tours involve the search for individual graves and names and the honouring of these fallen soldiers on behalf of relatives in Australia. Photographs of the graves and names are taken and presented to relatives on each group's return.

The school has so far undertaken 6 commemorative tours - in 1999, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008 & 2010. In that time 148 students have travelled to Gallipoli, the Somme and Flanders, Thailand and Singapore and have honoured 576 men and 33 nurses buried or commemorated in these areas.

*"My final thoughts as I watched the silent headstones was that we have to live the life these soldiers gave us .... we have to live our lives to the fullest, love our friends and family to the utmost. It's the least we can do - live the life that these men never got."*



## For more information on the Lest We Forget Project

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(or Google - 'Mackay North Lest We Forget')

The Lest We Forget Project



Securing our future by respecting our past

# Mackay North State High School



# Anzac 2010

## Commemorative Tour

# Street Memorial Project



Dear Gillan St Resident

My name is Lauren Germanotta and I am a member of the Mackay North SHS Anzac 2010 Commemorative Tour Group.

Our group has recently returned from a 3 week overseas pilgrimage to the past Australian battlefields, cemeteries and memorials of Gallipoli, France, Belgium and Singapore.

One aspect of our research and commemoration centred around undertaking a local history study of Mackay streets which were named in honour of fallen Mackay soldiers.

Each student 'adopted' a street and the relevant soldier and, in the lead up to the tour, we researched the war service of "our" soldiers and learnt about the circumstances surrounding each man's death.

On the tour, we visited the graves or the memorials where each of these soldiers is buried or commemorated. At each site, we undertook a service which included the delivery of a eulogy, a recital of The Ode and the observance of a minute silence. We then photographed the grave or memorial name to bring this record back to Mackay.

I was honoured to have researched and commemorated the soldier after whom Gillan St is named. So as to provide you with a little history of your street, please find over information related to the soldier. I hope you find it interesting.

## Gillan Street, South Mackay

Named in honour of:

Private Robert Gillan

Service No. 3179

49th Battalion AIF

Killed in Action in France on 15 August, 1918

Aged 21

Robert was born in Townsville and was the son of James and Euphemia Gillan, who lived in Wellington St, Mackay. He left Australia to live in Scotland when he was five and returned at the age of 15.

Robert was working as an apprentice engineer for Camerons Ltd in Mackay when he enlisted on 22 April, 1916 at the age of 19. He left Australia on 22 December of that year and was initially taken on strength into the 52nd Battalion. He served for a month in France before being admitted to hospital with trench fever on 19 August. After attending signalling training schools in England, Robert was transferred as a signaller to the 49th Battalion and joined this unit on 20 May, 1918.

His time with the 49th was short, however, as he was killed in action on 15 August. It seems that his death was particularly unfortunate as the 49th had been relieved the day before after heavy fighting around the Etiniham Peninsula during the Battle of Amiens.

Even though they had been relieved, there were still dangers for the men, as the battalion history states, *“The troops were not out of danger simply because they were not in the front line. Near Bray, the 49th was heavily shelled by enemy artillery for about 40 minutes on the afternoon of the 15th.”*

Robert was killed by this shellfire and he was buried near where he died. His body was later located and exhumed and he is now buried in Cote 80 French National Cemetery, which is situated on a hill above the Somme River.

Cote 80 Cemetery (meaning in French Hill 80) is a French Military Cemetery situated on the old Somme Battlefields.

The original cemetery was made by Australians, with 49 Aussies buried there during the war.

After the Armistice, the French Army relocated a large number of their war dead to this cemetery. It is one of the few cemeteries of the First World War that contains both French and Commonwealth soldiers.



### Robert's Commemoration

On 30 September this year, I was honoured to commemorate Robert at his gravesite in Cote 80 Cemetery. Even though I am not related to George, I found it an a very emotional experience.

*“Robert, you were a brave and noble soldier, who like all men here died far to young. Your life was cut short by war. But you answered the ANZAC call and for that I could not be more thankful. You are more then just a name on a piece of metal, on a street in Mackay. You are a real person, who in life showed a great deal of bravery, honour and courage. Thank you Robert for all you did. Rest in peace.”*

