

# Stories from the Honour Boards

Stories of those who served and are remembered on the Honour Boards in the Merrington Anzac Memorial Peace Chapel at Saint Andrew's Uniting Church

Booklet Number 181

# **LESLIE BENJAMIN WATT 1895–1976**



*Private LB Watt. Back row, centre*

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**Cover Illustration:** *A group of prisoners of war at the Doberitz Prison Camp, Germany. The man in the centre of the back row is Private LB Watt, 9th Battalion, Brisbane. Some of the others may be identified as also being Queenslanders.*

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## Private Leslie Benjamin Watt

Leslie Benjamin Watt was born at Coomera in southern Queensland on 7 August 1895, the fourth of ten children of George Gordon Watt and Martha Marie née Fischer. Leslie's father was managing a timber mill at Palen Creek<sup>1</sup> at the time. Mr G G Watt was experienced in the timber industry and later managed mills at Fernvale and Dundas<sup>2</sup>, before starting a large mill employing 150 men at Nanango. It was controlled by his company called Timber Corporation with headquarters in Brisbane. He sold out in 1912, managed mills at Targinnie and Bunya Mountains and joined Hancock and Gore in 1917. The Nanango mill was burnt down in 1925 and rebuilt, with GG Watt supervising the installation of new equipment. Timber Corporation sold the mill to Hancock and Gore in 1928 and GG Watt returned as manager to Nanango where he later retired. George Gordon Watt died in 1956.

Leslie Watt spent much of his boyhood in Nanango. With his family background in the timber industry, it is understandable he became a sawyer. His family had moved to Wynnum when he enlisted at the age of twenty years, on 9 August 1915 to serve overseas in the Australian Infantry Force (AIF). He stood 5 feet 5 inches (165 cm) in height and weighed 112 lbs (50.8 kg). He gave his father's name, George Watt, as next-of-kin and his religious denomination as Presbyterian. Private L B Watt was allotted to reinforcements for the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion with regimental number 3960. After a short period of training at Enoggera, Private Leslie Watt's unit embarked on board HMAT<sup>3</sup> *Itonus* A50 on 30 October 1915 from Pinkenba Wharf on the Brisbane River.

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1. Palen Creek is a locality along the southern Queensland border in the Scenic Rim Region of Queensland.

2. Dundas is a rural locality in the Somerset Region of Queensland.

3. His Majesty's Australian Transport

Private Watt joined the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion in Egypt where it was being reorganised in readiness for its participation in the European War. In March 1916 the battalion sailed for France and the Western Front. In July, the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion took part in attacks at Pozières when Leslie Watt was wounded in action, suffering gunshot wounds to his right buttock. He was admitted at once to the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian General Hospital at Étaples but he was transferred to England for treatment shortly afterwards. There followed a lengthy period when he was deployed in Commonwealth Command Depots at Bovington, Perham Downs, Wareham and Hurdcott. He was punished in Wareham for neglect of duty for which he was awarded Field Punishment 2<sup>1</sup> for 2 days. He was transferred to the 69<sup>th</sup> Drafting Battalion while at Hurdcott and did not return to join his unit in the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion in France until 20 October 1917. A few days later Leslie Watt was again wounded in action. He was admitted to the Edmonton Military Hospital suffering gunshot wounds to his right hand. Again he was sent to England for recovery. He forfeited two days' pay in December for an AWL crime at Sutton Veny Military Camp.

Private Leslie Watt rejoined his battalion in France on 26 February 1918. The 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion at this stage was moving back to Belgium for the advance to the Hindenburg Line. On 26 March 1918, LB Watt was reported missing. Days later, notification was received that he was a Prisoner of War in German hands. He was repatriated to England on 14 January 1919. A German record showed he had been captured at Messines on 26 March 1918 and that he was imprisoned at Dülmen<sup>2</sup> Mannschaftslager - a soldiers' camp.

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1. Field punishment could be awarded by a court martial or a commanding officer for any offence committed on active service. There were two categories field punishment. Field punishment No. 1 consisted of heavy labouring duties, possibly being restrained in handcuffs or fetters, and being tied to a post or wheel. Field punishment No. 2 differed, in that the offender was not liable to be attached to a fixed object.

2. Dülmen is a town in the district of Coesfeld, North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany.



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*Dülmen Prisoner of War camp for ordinary soldiers*

Soldiers' camps were made up of wooden barrack huts covered with tar on the outside. Each hut held about 250 prisoners. A central corridor provided access on each side to bunk beds with pallasses filled with straw or sawdust. Furniture was kept to a minimum, generally limited to a table, chairs or benches and a stove.

The camps also included barracks for guards, a Kantine (cafeteria) where prisoners could sometimes buy small luxuries and supplementary food, a parcels office, a guardhouse and kitchens. Some camps had additional amenities including sanitary facilities or cultural facilities such as a library, a theatre concert hall or a space for worship. Prisoners on work details often spent longer or shorter periods of time away from their parent camp: those involved in agriculture, for example, might have been housed in village assembly halls.

Leslie's parents received the news by letter each time their son was wounded in action and on the occasion he was taken to Germany as a Prisoner of War. It would have been with a great feeling of joy and relief that they received news of his release in January 1919:

*"I now beg to advise you that Private L. B. Watt has been reported repatriated from Germany to England – arrived 14/1/19. His postal address will be to*

*REPATRIATED PRISONER OF WAR*

*L. B. Watt,*

*9<sup>th</sup> Battalion,*

*Australian Imperial Force,*

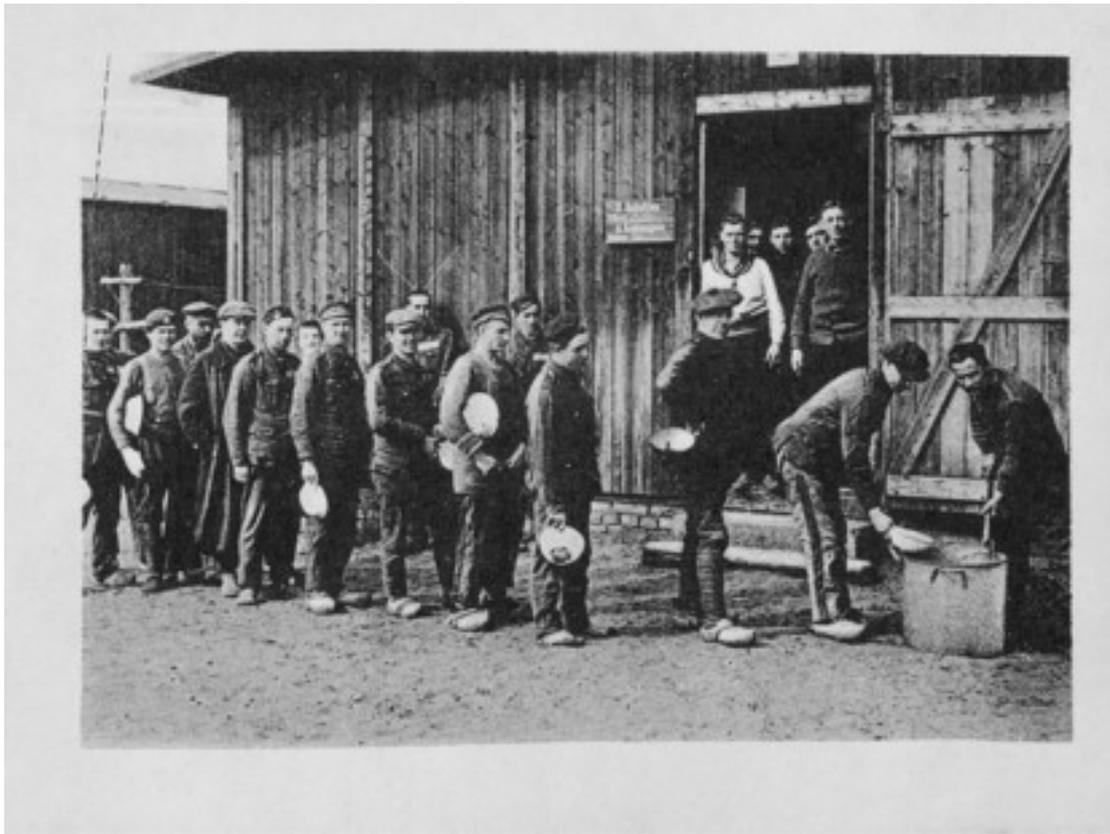
*Abroad."*<sup>1</sup>

It is difficult to know the effects his confinement had upon his health and wellbeing. Psychological illnesses were common. His invalided condition was noted on his war service document recording his return to Australia per the ship *Shropshire* in May 1919. Leslie Watt's wartime experiences were behind him when he was discharged from the AIF in Brisbane in October that year but, no doubt, memories remained.

Leslie Watt took up the carpentry trade on his return to Brisbane. He lived at Franklin Street, Annerley before marrying Ivy Edith Pretoria Veivers on 9 June 1923. 53 Mansfield Street in Coorparoo was their home for the next 21 years. Their children were Donald and Gloria Estelle. After the death of his wife Ivy in 1967, Leslie Watt moved to the home of his daughter and son-in-law at Kelsey Street, Camp Hill. He died in 1976, aged 81 years.

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1. Letter, Major J M Lean, Officer-in-charge, Base Records, Victoria Barracks, Melbourne to Mrs M M Watt, Cambridge St., off Vulture Street, West End, South Brisbane, Qld.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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*Soldiers at the Dümen POW camp receiving their meal*

## References

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Australian War Memorial, embarkation rolls and unit histories  
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*Ancestry on line*

Kerr, John, *Geographical Overview of Sawmilling*, January 1998, page 106

*The Telegraph*, Brisbane, 5 June 1944, page 6

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*Lest we forget*