

BACKGROUND

Lone Pine Tree

Origins

Lone Pine or Plateau 400 was the scene of a major diversionary offensive launched by the 1st Australian Infantry Division on 6 August 1915. The Turks had cut down all but one of the trees that clothed the ridge to cover their trenches. The ridge dominated by the simple pine tree became known as Lone Pine. In three days of fighting the Australians lost more than 2000 men and the Turks losses were estimated at 7000. Seven Victoria Crosses were awarded.

It is known that at least two Australian soldiers took pinecones from the ridge that found their way back to Australia.

Lance Corporal Benjamin Smith of the 3rd Battalion, whose brother serving as Mark Drice, was killed in the battle for Lone Pine Ridge, sent a cone home to his mother, Mrs McMullen at Inverell in New South Wales. Mrs McMullen kept the cone for 13 years until 1928 before planting the seeds. She grew two seedlings, one of which she presented to the town of Inverell, and the other to the Department of the Interior in Canberra. The Duke of Gloucester planted this second tree at the Australian War Memorial in October 1934. Today it stands over 20 metres in height.

Sergeant Keith McDowell of the 24th Battalion carried a pinecone in his haversack until the end of the war. Upon returning home to Australia he gave it to his Aunt, Mrs Emma Gray, who lived at Grassmere near Warrnambool in Victoria. A decade or so later Mrs Gray planted the seeds and four seedlings were grown. One was planted in May 1933 in Wattle Park, Melbourne. The other three were planted at the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne, the Soldiers Memorial Hall at The Sisters and Warrnambool Gardens.

Recent Distribution

In 1990, two trees were taken back to Gallipoli with war veterans who attended the Memorial service to mark the 7th anniversary of the Battle of Lone Pine.

Since the 1980s many trees have been grown from both seeds and grafting techniques from the tree at the Australian War Memorial. These have been disseminated to many organisations including RSL branches and clubs, schools and other interested organisations.

Further information:

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