

Robert MacLeod Laing M.C. Died 20th July 1916

Died: 20th July 1916 ~ France
Robert MacLeod Laing



Cameronian (Scottish Rifles)
Cap Badge

4th Bn. attd. 1st Bn., Cameronians (Scottish Rifles)
who died on 20 July 1916 Age 23
Son of William and Mary Anne Laing, of Argyll
Cottage, Dollar, Clackmannanshire.

Remembered with Honour on the Thiepval Memorial
The 1901 census shows Robert as an 8 year old
scholar living with his parents William Laing (aged 43
years) and Mrs Mary Anne Laing (aged 40 years), all
living at 21 Toll Road School House, Alva,
Clackmananshire. Robert's father was listed as a
Public School Teacher. Robert's siblings were Alex
Paterson Laing (aged 12 years); William Mackie Laing
(aged 11 years); Robert McLeod Laing (aged 8
years); Annie McLeod Laing (aged 4 years); Frederick

Cairus Laing (aged 5 months). A domestic servant called Annie McKenzie (aged 36
years) was also living in the home.

The following are extracts from the 1st Battalion, the Cameronians (Scottish Rifles) War
Diary.

Place: Auchy, date Sunday 2nd April 1916.

"Battalion moved into trenches in AUCHY (LEFT
SUB – SECTION) relieving the 2nd Bn. R.W.F.
Trenches were dry, except in a few places."

**Place: Trenches AUCHY LEFT Sub-Section Date
Monday 3rd April 1916.**

"Work went on hard in the left company, which in
places was beginning to reach a normal condition of
repair. The enemy shelled the support line with field
guns for a few minutes in the morning & from 4 p m
till about 6 p m. No casualties & only small damage
done to the trenches. Last night patrolling was done
specially with a view to finding a suitable place for a
raid against enemy's trenches, however wire was
found to be very strong & deep at points visited."

Date: Tuesday 4th April 1916

"Work continued as usual. Our Stokes guns were
active & called forth heavy retaliation with by field
guns at various times during the day which stopped
working parties for a time. Last night a special patrol found that the selected spot for a raid
was covered by wire of considerable depth in dead ground, they brought back a piece of



Lieutenant R. M. Laing, Menstrie.

Lieutenant Robert M. Laing, of the Cameronians
(Scottish Rifles), youngest son of Mr and Mrs
William Laing, The Schoolhouse, Menstrie, who
was awarded the Military Cross, was killed in
action a few days later. The deceased was aged
23 and was a prominent athlete at Dollar Aca-
demy, and afterwards played for Clackmannan
County Cricket Club.

the wire but were fired on while cutting it, the enemy were on the alert. **LT. LAING** led this patrol. During the day the enemy used a large proportion of phosphorus shells.”

Date: Wednesday 5th Aril 1916

“The enemy shelled us with field guns intermittently throughout the day, chiefly in retaliation for our trench mortars which appear to cause considerable annoyance.

LT LAING took out a patrol at about 3.30 a m this morning & has taken up a position in a shell hole in the disused trench about 20 yds from the German parapet. He has remained there all to-day. ---- **LIEUT LAING** returned with his party to-night having obtained valuable information regarding habits of enemy sentries, hour of standing to arms & method of carrying it out, enemy snipers & machine guns. The patrol consisted of **LIEUT LAING, --CPL TRIPP,- CPL. CAIRNS,- L/CPL ROACH.** (This patrol was afterwards complimented by the Army Commander & Divisional Commander.)”

Place High wood; date 20th July 1916:

“Bn. started to advance on HIGH WOOD at 2 a.m. moving forward 1300 yards under cover of artillery barrage. 5th Sco. Rifles were on our Right.

At 3.25 a.m. barrage lifted and Battn went into the wood. A & B Companies got held up by rifle & machine gun fire from the edge of the wood part of C and the whole of D got in easily and in a short time worked right across the wood. At about 11 a.m. the Germans shelled the wood heavily and things having come to a standstill, re-enforcements were asked for. At about 2.45 p.m. the R. Welch Fusiliers came up. Shortly after this the Germans retired from the N.W. corner of the wood and we occupied practically the whole of it. At dusk the enemy bombarded very heavily with 5.9s.

At about midnight the Queens & K.R.R.C. arrived and relieved us. The Bn withdrew to MAMETZ WOOD arriving there about 4 A.M.

Casualties Killed

| | | |
|----------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| | CAPT. BURGESS, | |
| | LIEUT R.B. RITCHIE | 2/LIEUT McKILLOP |
| | 2/LIEUT GILLESPIE | 2/LIEUT R.H. LAING |
| Wounded. | 2/LIEUT PERCY | 2/LIEUT McRAE |
| | 2/LIEUT RODGERS | 2/LIEUT de BETHUNE |
| Missing | CAPT EVANS | CAPT MacDONALD, |
| | 2/LT F. RITCHIE | 2/LT. BIBBY |

| | | |
|----------------------|---------|-----|
| <u>Rank and file</u> | killed | 52 |
| | missing | 157 |
| | wounded | 160 |

It is interesting to note that 2nd Lieutenant RM Laing’s initials are wrong in the transcript of the diary.

The London Gazette of 27th July 1916 records the reason that Robert received the military Cross as “*2nd Lt. Robert MacLeod Laing, 4th (attd. 1st Bn.) Sco. Rif. For conspicuous gallantry on patrol duty. With three men he remained for 17 hours in a hole inside the enemy’s wire and within a few yards of his trenches, gathering useful information. At dusk he was discovered and fired on, but, retiring a short distance, he bombed the enemy and finally withdrew in the darkness.*”

Unfortunately Robert's records cannot be found and we therefore do not know his date of enlistment. On checking the Army Lists for the Cameronians from 1914 to 1918, no trace of Robert could be found.