

David Molton Peek

For the Premiers ANZAC Spirit School Prize



By Ezra Lockwood

Part A

Using a range of sources, research the experience of a South Australian serviceman or woman who served (Navy, Army, Air Force, Nursing, or other service duties) during World War 1 and/or World War 2

David Molton Peek was one of 42,188,810 allied troops (Carrodus, et al., 2012) who fought in World War One. He specifically fought on the Western Front. The Western Front was made up of 440 miles of trench warfare stretching from Belgium to Switzerland. Trench warfare consists of two armies fighting each other from trench systems placed opposite to each other. The allies in World War 1 fought using 4 types of trenches. The one closest to the central powers was the front trench/the front line. This was where the worst conditions were experienced. It was common for these trenches to be submerged in water, infested with rats, diseases, rotting corpses from fallen soldiers, and to top it off, this was where much of the fighting was experienced. Soldiers could spend days in these trenches. The other trenches included the support trenches, reserve trenches and communication trenches.

M & M.L. Peek Refreshment Rooms

Balaklava Methodist Church

My House

Peek's story of how he ended up in the mess and horror of the Western Front starts in my hometown of Balaklava, South Australia on the 8th of March 1901. It was on this date that he was born to his father, Wesley Pinder Peek, and his mother, Matilda Saint. In Figure 1 several significant links to Peek early life can be seen. A sign labelled "M & ML Peeks" Refreshment rooms can be seen. This may refer to Peek's mother Matilda. Also, the Balaklava Uniting (or then Methodist) church can be seen. Likely, Peek worshipped there. Furthermore, in Figure 1 you can see my own house. I love knowing that Peek's life can relate to my own as we would have gone to the same churches, walked down the same streets, and gone to similar events (Shows, Pageants, etc). Interestingly, Peek's middle name "Molton" is highly likely a family name as it is shared with his maternal grandfather, William Molton Saint, who immigrated to Balaklava from England with his wife Lucy Ann Alderman C. 1860s (ancestry, n.d.). Peek was raised in his mother's hometown with his brother Alfred Massey Peek (1895-1918), and his sister Deborah Linda Peek (1893 – 1969) (ancestry, n.d.). Before the war, Peek was living on Dutton Terrace in Adelaide and working as an Engineers Improver. This career consisted of analysing issues in the industry and evaluating solutions (Zippia.com, 2020). In 1917, Peek decided to enlist in the Australian Infantry Battalion. However, having been born in 1901, he did not meet the minimum age requirement meaning he was ineligible to enlist. Later that year on the 2nd of July, Peek re-enlisted stating he was born in 1899 conforming to the minimum age requirement of 18 and allowing him to enlist (Virtual War Memorial Australia, n.d.). At the age of his enlistment, Peek was 5ft high, weighed 144 pounds, had brown hair, blue eyes, and he identified as Methodist. (Australian Imperial Force, 1917). What seemed like a small white lie to find adventure, would result in him ending up in one of the worst places on Earth.

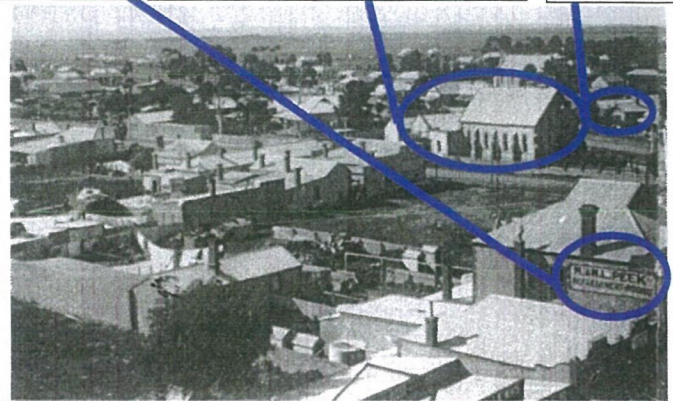


Figure 1: Balaklava c. 1921

Source: (State Library of South Australia, 2005)



Figure 2: D. M. Peek c. 1917

Source: (Virtual War Memorial Australia, n.d.)

Peek's military career started and remained at the rank of private for the duration of the war. This was the lowest rank in WW1 having no soldiers under their command and being directed by either a corporal or lance corporal (Boff, 2014). On the 6th of March 1918, Peek was assigned to the 43rd infantry battalion with whom he embarked from Melbourne on the RMS "Ormonde" to South Hampton, England. He arrived on the 15th of May during the same year and with others of the 43rd Bn was assigned to the 9th training Battalion (Peek, 1917-1918). It was expected that every soldier was given 3 months of basic training.

Peek trained with the 9th in the village of Fovant in the southwest of Wiltshire, England. 20,000 men were accommodated there both for training and medical treatment. The housing consisted of prefabricated huts made of wood and corrugated iron cladding (BirtwistleWiki, 2019). After about 1 month, Peek was sent to the 50th infantry battalion to complete his remaining 2 months of training at Codford (Peek, 1917-1919). Codford was a significantly larger camp than the camp at Fovant. It was approximately 60km from Bristol and 62km from South Hampton (BirtwistleWiki, 2019). At both Fovant and Codford, Peek learnt many things such as weapons handling, marksmanship and digging trenches. All these skills would be highly valuable knowledge to remember when fighting on the Western front (Boff, 2014).

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After these 3 months of intensive training, Peek was at last sent to the Western Front on the 8th of August 1918. He was accompanied by several young men as they departed from the port at Folkestone, England (Peek, 1917-1918). Many of the young soldiers would have been nervous about going to the place they had only known from t



Figure 3: *Balaklava c. 1898*

Source: Personal

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he stories of those who had gone before them. Renowned war poet Siegfried Sassoon, who also served between 1914 and 1919 (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2014), would describe the trenches along the Western Front in 1918 as "The hell where youth and laughter go" (Sassoon, 1918). But along with this fear, there was a sense of excitement and adventure in the air. Peek with the others in his battalion knew that the past 3 months of his life were leading up to this moment. However, as they would soon find out, war is not just glory and grandeur.



Figure 4: *The Battle of Amiens 1918*

Source: (Australian War Memorial, n.d.)

Peek arrived during the late hours of the Battle of Amiens. This battle consisted of several consolidated allied forces launching an offensive that was able to penetrate the German front lines. Despite the success of this battle, Peek was there to witness 27,000 casualties. 6,500 of these were Australian (Australian War Memorial, n.d.). At such a young age, this experience would have deeply impacted Peek revealing to him the true nature of war. He then went on to fight in the capture of the fortress at Peronne from the 1st to the 3rd of September. Later, he helped break through the Hindenburg Outpost Line, a series of German defences captured from the British after the spring offensive of 1918, on the 18th of September at Bellicourt (Australian War Memorial, n.d.). The 50th then continued to fight in the last 2 battles that Australia

fought in during World War 1 (Australian War Memorial, 2020).

These battles were the battle at Bellenglise in which Australian and American forces broke the primary Hindenburg line on the 29th of September (Australian War Memorial, n.d.) and the battle at Montbrechain. Following the success of the Hindenburg line for the allies, the battle of Montbrechain took place on the 5th of October 1918 and it represented the breach of the German defences based at the Beauraivour trench system (Australian War Memorial, 2020).

After the end of the war on the 11th of November 1918, Peek had to wait until July of the following year to return to Australia. During this time there were a series of victory parades throughout Europe. Interestingly, Peek was forced to remain absent from one of these parades on the 7th of February for "making a false statement to his superior officer" (Peek, 1917-1919). There is no record of what this statement was. 3 days after the battle of Montbrechain, Peek's brother died from blood poisoning (The Advertiser, 1918). On return to Australia, Peek married a woman called Pauline Phelps. They together had at least one child called Deborah Peek (The South Australian Chronicle and Weekly Mail, 1880). Peek did not go on to fight in the Second World War. There is little information regarding Peek's life after the First World War. It is believed that he continued his previous occupation and stayed in South Australia for many years. Eventually, at the age of 79, he died of natural causes on the 24th of March 1980 in the town of Bega, New South Wales. Peek's name is memorialised on the Balaklava District WWI Roll of Honour.

The Anzac Spirit embodies the strengths and virtues that were commonly considered to be displayed by the Australian and New Zealand soldiers in WWI and WWII. Peek demonstrated strong perseverance and courage. He demonstrated strong perseverance when it came to enlisting because he felt so strongly about defending his country. He displayed perseverance as he persisted in trying to be enlisted. Not only did he try multiple times to be accepted into the army, but he also resorted to lying about his true age to be accepted. This display of perseverance not only demonstrates his cunning and initiative but also that he would persevere through whatever it took to defend his homeland.



Figure 5: *The poppy, a timeless symbol of remembrance representing the ANZAC'S sacrifices.*

Source: (Beaulieu, 2021)

Peek's courage was demonstrated in turn with his perseverance with which he dared to persevere and demonstrate his bravery as he fought on the front line despite his young age. Winston Churchill stated that "Success is not final; failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts". Peek demonstrated this as he experienced success and failure, courageously persevering until the war's end.

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Part B

How did you gather the evidence about your individual in order to tell their story? In your response, explain the process you undertook when researching your individual.

Looking for reliable sources of evidence for my biography took up nearly more time than it did to write it. To find evidence, I was given much advice from my history teacher who taught us about WW1 and gave us tips on writing biographies. I was also taught by Dr David Rafferty who visited our class for a lesson and discussed in detail how to make the most of online sources. He also gave us

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advice on reading war documentation in "untidy" cursive. After these lessons, I was left with several reliable sources from which I could find information. These included The National Archives of Australia's AIF project, Trove, The Virtual War Memorial of Australia, The Australian War Memorial, and the Sir John Monash centre.

Using the NAA, I was able to unearth some of Peek's original war documentation including his enlistment form, medical examination, War Gratuity Schedule, and Service Record. The Service Record was especially useful as it listed Peek's family connections, occupation, address, etc. Overall, these documents told me the story of David Peek. They gave me a very detailed view of where he lived, how he looked, where he trained, and where he fought. What makes these documents especially reliable is that he authored these documents. Firsthand accounts (or primary sources) are the most reliable evidence as they show what happened without being miscommunicated throughout the years by word of mouth. When a source is written years after an event, it is likely to be either incomplete or inaccurate. This then tarnishes the person's story.

I also gathered information by reading through his battalion's war diaries on the AWM. These outlined what Peek's battalion was doing including a day's events, if the unit was at rest or in battle, and many other useful fragments of information. To find information on specific battles, I used information from the AWM and the Sir John Monash Centre's website. This information included a battle's dates, its location and context. Whilst I could not include comprehensive recounts in this biography, I still acknowledge the dates and contexts.

Finding information about Peek after and before the war was difficult. In the end, I mainly used Trove, Ancestry, and Peek's Service record. Using these resources, I could find information about his family, whom he married, and where he lived. Once I started to understand Peek's story, I started writing it down. Even once I had started writing, I kept finding inconsistencies and instances where the dates were hard to follow or in the wrong order. I found it useful simply laying out Peek's life in a timeline. In doing this, I was able to see at a glance the order of certain events. This was a significant touchstone when writing the biography and it made the process of remembering things in order far easier. Whilst writing, I also made sure to list my sources in a biography as proof of their reliability.

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