

Late Private J Wilkinson

UNVEILING OF MEMORIAL.

A memorial to the late Private Rev John Wilkinson was unveiled in the Methodist Cemetery at Murrumbidgee, on Saturday afternoon in the presence of a fairly large gathering. Private Wilkinson enlisted in the "Wallabies" who marched from Narrabri to Newcastle, and whilst in camp on the Mullalyd showground on February 2 he was struck by lightning during a thunderstorm. The unveiling was performed by Mr R. Cameron, honorary captain of the "Wallabies," and included in those present were Captain (Captains) S. Varcoe Cook (Newcastle), Bull (late of Broomfield camp), and W. H. Howard, Revs Jas Mountaine, of the Binekin Congregational Church, Alderman Wm. McLaurin (Mayor of West Maitland), Mr R. Mansell (Mayor of Newcastle), Mr J. Mansell (president of Maitland District Patriotic Fund), Mrs Mansell (president of West Maitland Women's Patriotic Committee), Miss Vera McLaurin (secretary of Maitland Girls' Patriotic League), Mrs R. Eckford, and Misses Laybutt and Fuller, of the Hursenbaw Road Patriotic League. Applauds were received from Rev. G. O. Coles, Senator and Mr. D. Watson, Miss Gray (treasurer of the West Maitland Women's Patriotic Committee), and Miss Leclaw, a friend of the deceased.

The staging of the National Anthem opened proceedings, after which prayer was offered by Captain Chaplain Bull.

Captain Chaplain Howard referred to the tragic circumstances connected with the end of their respected and beloved friend, and although he had not been long in Maitland still there were many evidences of respect for the "Minister soldier" who had been so suddenly stricken down. An area of ground was set apart by the cemetery trustees for his burial, but the last resting place of the late John Wilkinson was not to remain unmarked and unattended. While the question of erecting a memorial in their late beloved friend was being discussed, a letter was received from Narrabri, stating the North-West Route March Committee would like to do something, and a cheque for £25 was received from that body. They were deeply grateful to that committee, and particularly to Captain Cameron. They had evidence how deeply Private Wilkinson had gone into their hearts. His desire was to be a minister and a soldier at the same time, and the monument would bear testimony to his work.

Captain Chaplain Cook said it was with mingled feelings that he stood there that afternoon. He had a great admiration for the man whose memory they were honoring that afternoon, and his admiration was profound, was excited by reason of the beautiful character that had been so completely transformed by the word of God. The last entry in deceased's diary, which was an outburst, would show the thoughts of the man:—"Onwards, 'Lo, I am with you always.' Read Hebrews 11. Dread of mistake decision. Distress while clearing up. Parking boots, etc. Day of tenebris. God's grace is sufficient. 'Lead Thou me on.' Perplexity. Sometimes we'll understand. Camp. Oh, Lord, Thou knowest what is best for us, let this or that be done as Thou shalt please. Give what

is best for us, let this or that be done as Thou shalt please. Give what Thou wilt, and how much Thou wilt, and what Thou wilt. Deal with me as Thou thinkest good, and as best pleaseth Thee. Set me where Thou wilt, and deal with me in all things just as Thou wilt. Behold, I am Thy servant, prepared for all things; for I desire not to live unto myself but unto Thee. And, oh, that I could do it worthily and perfectly." Private Wilkinson had lived for a fortnight in his (the speaker's) home, and one of the greatest benefactions on his home was the removing of their late friend. It was no wonder the hearts of his comrades were a tender towards him. It was no wonder the Route March Committee sought in honor his memory. The prayer showed the spirit of the man. Undoubtedly he was ready to take his place in the firing line, though his soul trembled to go forth into the stress of turgue. But God had seen fit to call him where there was no carnage, and where his soul would not be injured. His soul was too beautiful to be injured. He was like an orchid. After referring to his influence on the route march he quoted the following lines of Dracken:—

"What constitutes a gentleman?
Not gold,
But kindness, goodness, courtesy,
and love;
A spirit fashioned in the Master's mould,
Brave as a lion, gentle as a dove."

Nothing described this gentleman of God more aptly than those lines. The monument would stand permanently as a beautiful tribute of appreciation of the man who was taken from them by a shaft of lightning. Before he left Narrabri on the march he was making an appeal for recruits. He asked the young men why they did not enlist, and if they were afraid of the battlefield or of being killed. A tile could be dislodged from a nearby roof, he stated, and strike them or they could be struck down by a shaft of lightning; but God did not permit him to see the battlefield. He called him home before.

Captain Chaplain Howard said that in showing the affection the men had for their late friend, a member of the "Wallabies," who had broken his leg and been discharged, but intended enlisting again, had hidden down from Singleton in order to be present at the grave that afternoon. In asking Mr. Cameron to unveil the monument he said that Mr. Cameron had three sons at the front.

Mr. Cameron said he could agree with all that had been said, but he knew something of their departed friend deeper down, far deeper. He had worked with him at Narrabri and on the route march. They had not seen human nature put to so severe a test as he had. They started the march from Narrabri on December 3, 1915, and when Rev. John Wilkinson

gave them a good sermon. The men mounted it. A few days after wards, however, he could see the men were being attracted to him, and as the march went on the hold he obtained over the men was simply astounding. His influence spread through the ranks, and seemed to grip every man. It was really splendid. Private Wilkinson seemed to be a man of iron will, and never to tire. He was always looking for and helping the man who wanted assistance. On one occasion he took the place of the drummer, who had become ill. Unwilling to march in military boots, and in hot weather, told on the men. Private Wilkinson refused a bit, saying, "It is only the flesh that is tired; the spirit is getting stronger." He was a man of great spirit and with great faith in his Maker. There was something in every departed friend that he found in very few men. The last word he got from the Wallabies as they were embarking was "Captain, we expect you to do something in Mr. Wilkinson's grave." On behalf of the Route March Committee he thanked Mr. Howard for the valued assistance he had given in connection with the erection of the memorial. He thanked all who attended that afternoon to do honor to their late friend, one who had served his country and his God well. He offered the monument, and said as he stood by the grave he was reminded of a coincidence. On the last day of the march he (Captain Cameron), became ill, and that removed the military head of the march. A few days afterwards the spiritual head, Private Wilkinson, was removed.

The monument is in the form of a white marble obelisk, with freestone kerbing, and the grave is occupied with white New Zealand stones. The inscription is as follows:—"JOHN WILKINSON, Methodist minister, who enlisted with the Wallabies, killed during a thunderstorm at the Murrumbidgee Military Camp on February 2, 1917, aged 22 years. He was not, for God took him. Erected by the Narrabri Route March Committee." The monument was the work of Messrs McLaurin and Mathey, of Newcastle."

Alderman McLaurin stated that he was not personally acquainted with Private Wilkinson, but from the expressions made concerning him he recognized how much he was appreciated, and he was well worthy of the monument erected over his grave. It would also remind those who had dear ones on Gallipoli and other places of their friends, who, although they may not have such elaborate monuments, would be held dear. Mr. Cameron mentioned that deceased said he had received the call. Little did he know that it was to be his last call. They were in the hands of their Father, but see, Mr. Wilkinson was prepared for the call, and it was perhaps preferable that one who was ready should be called than one who was not. It was with regret that there was need for such a gathering, but as the other hand he felt it an honor to assist in building the memory of such a man.

On the grave were three artificial wreaths placed there by members of the Wallabies, and on behalf of Miss Leclaw, Mrs Howard placed a spray of flowers to brighten them.

Prayer was offered by Rev. J. Mountaine, and a hymn sung, the doxology following.

requested he asked him if he thought he could stand it. The reply was that he felt the call, and he thought he ought to go. They had only got a few miles out of Narrabri when they were caught in a tremendous storm. Things were most uncomfortable, and the men (rough diamonds) voiced their opinions. Private Wilkinson got up and gave them a good talking to, but the men mounted it. A few days after

in 1900—the rear the great white

In 1899—the year the great white American Fleet visited Australia—a young man, Lieutenant Hill, of the Virginia, ventured the opinion that if the United States became engaged in war, her people (no matter from whence they had come) would defend the “Stars and Stripes.” Confirmation of this opinion is to be noticed in the names of soldiers in our Army. A recent recruit in the Light Horse is young Luff, the only son of Mr. Luff, who carries on business in Macquarie Street. His mother is a British woman. The military believe in the loyalty of this class of recruit, the people on the other hand, express doubts.