

Centenary Snippets

Update No. 13

A War Time Tragedy 1943

CHILD KILLED, 7 HURT WHEN SHELL EXPLODES

ONE child was killed and seven others are in the Ipswich hospital seriously injured as the result of the explosion of a high explosive shell, with which the children were playing at St. Patrick's Convent school, Goodna, late yesterday afternoon.

The victims are:—

KILLED

John William Watson, 12, Bertha Street, Goodna.

INJURED

Vincent Mangin, 12, Station Road, Goodna, compound fracture to leg and foot and penetrating wounds to lower limbs.

Claire McErlean, 12, Church Street, Goodna, penetrating wounds to left buttock and other injuries.

James Benedict Guley, 12, Church Street, Goodna, penetrating wound in abdomen and lower limbs.

Roy Thompson, 13, Goodna, penetrating wounds to chest, pelvis, and compound fracture of lower limbs, also penetrating wounds to lower limbs.

Andrew Patrick McCarthy, 12, Stewart Street, Goodna, penetrating wounds to lower limbs.

Andrew Joseph Coogan, 12, William Street, Goodna, penetrating wounds to lower limbs, compound fracture leg and foot.

Kathleen Mary McGrath, 12, Brisbane Road, Goodna, injuries to hand.

Watson suffered severe wounds to the legs and died late last night.

The terrific explosion hurled the children in all directions. A hole 1ft. in diameter and 6in. deep was blown in an asphalt floor, and part of the shell gashed a tank 30ft. away, from which a stream of water spouted.

Found In Bush

The shell was one of two found in the bush in the vicinity of the school last Sunday.

The children were members of the scholarship class. The boy who had found the shells, and is believed to have taken one of them to the school the previous day, was again showing it to the others when, presumably, it was accidentally dropped.

Help was sought hurriedly, and Drs. P. F. V. Crowe and A. G. Barrett, from the Goodna Mental Hospital, and nurses from the institution gave temporary treatment to the wounded children. The Ipswich Ambulance dispatched three cars, in which the children were taken to the Ipswich Hospital.

An appeal was made for suitable persons to give blood transfusions to the children after they had been admitted to hospital.

Doctors were still operating at 3 o'clock this morning.

Thompson, Coogan, and McErlean are on the dangerously ill list, and the others are on the seriously ill list.

'A Tragic Event' is a chapter in our history book detailing the explosion in the school that killed one student and seriously wounded the other 7 students in the Scholarship class. Clair McErlean, Kath McGrath, John Watson, Andy McCarthy, Joe Coogan and Jim Guley had been together at St Patrick's since year one. Vince Mangin and Roy Thompson joined the class at a later time. A number of boys began throwing the bomb (brought to school for show and tell) to see who could throw it the hardest and furthest. "The rocket exploded with a deafening noise and a flash of blinding light. Hot jagged metal fragments of shrapnel flew in every direction, becoming embedded in the timberwork of the building and puncturing the water tank in several places. A crater about 150mm deep and 300mm wide was blown in the asphalt." (Welcome Learning by John Browning).

Doctors and nurses were called from the Mental Hospital and all children were taken to the Ipswich General Hospital. Sadly, John Watson passed away from his injuries that night. Other students spent from a few days to three months in hospital recuperating. The coroner's finding was accidental death. No one was sued for negligence and no compensation was ever paid.

During our Centenary celebrations in 2010, a plaque will be unveiled to commemorate the scholarship class of 1943. We hope that some of the surviving members of the class will attend this ceremony. If you have contact details for surviving students or their families, please pass these details to us.