

Durrington War Graves



Lest we Forget

World War I



5392 PRIVATE

T. F. O'CONNELL

21ST BN. AUSTRALIAN INF.

4TH DECEMBER, 1916 Age 36

*Commonwealth War Graves Headstone for Pte T. F. O'Connell is located in Grave Plot # 125
of Durrington War Graves Cemetery*

Thomas Francis O'CONNELL

Thomas Francis O'Connell was born at Clunes, Victoria. His birth was registered in 1881 to parents Patrick & Ellen O'Connell (nee Mangini). He was a 36 year old, single Labourer from Ballarat, Victoria when he enlisted on 7th April, 1916 with the 6th Infantry Brigade, 21st Infantry Battalion, 14th Reinforcements of the Australian Army (A.I.F.). His service number was 5392 & his religion was Roman Catholic. His next of kin was listed as his mother – Mrs Ellen O'Connell of 108 Skipton Street, Ballarat, Victoria. On his Attestation Papers, Thomas O'Connell had answered “yes” to the question “Have you ever been convicted by the Civil Power?” He stated he had served 3 months for Assault at Melbourne Jail & had previously served 56 days with Australian Imperial Forces on account of his conviction - from 18th January, 1915 to 15th March, 1915. He was discharged at Broadmeadows on 15th March, 1915.

Pte Thomas Francis O'Connell embarked from Melbourne on HMAT *Themistocles* (A32) on 28th July, 1916 & disembarked at Plymouth, England on 11th September, 1916.

Reinforcements were only given basic training in Australia. Training was completed in training units in England. Some of these were located in the Salisbury Plain & surrounding areas in the county of Wiltshire.

Pte Thomas Francis O'Connell, of the 6th Training Battalion, was charged with “Conduct to the prejudice of good order & military discipline. Creating a disturbance in the lines” on 23rd October, 1916 at Rollestone, Wiltshire. He was awarded 168 hours detention.

Pte Thomas Francis O'Connell was admitted to Fargo Military Hospital at 4.30 p.m. on 4th December, 1916. The Admissions form for the Hospital states he was admitted with a bayonet wound of chest.

Private Thomas Francis O'Connell died at 5.10 p.m. on 4th December, 1916 at Fargo Military Hospital, Wiltshire from “wounds received accidentally”. This had been amended from “died of wounds received in action.” The Hospital Admissions form states “Died in Military Hospital Fargo on 4th Dec. 1916 from Internal Haemorrhage result of Bayonet wound of chest.”

A Coroner's Inquest was held at Fargo Hospital on 5th December, 1916. Thomas Francis O'Connell died on 4th December, 1916 at Fargo Hospital from the result of a bayonet wound inflicted by Alfred Lavender a Sergt. in the 15/21st Bn. A.I.F., & that the wound was inflicted by Lavender on 4th December, 1916 in the course of his duty & without the will or intention to kill O'Connell.

A Court of Enquiry was held on 5th December, 1916 at Rollestone by order of Major H. J. Smith, C. O. 6th Training Battalion, A.I.F., inquiring into the wounding of No. 5392 Private O'Connell, T.F. 21st Battalion.

1st Witness.

No 4507 A/Sgt Prunty L.P. 21st Battn.

at present serving with 6th Training Battn duly sworn states:-

I am Provost Sergt to the 6th T.B. stationed at No 5 Camp Rolleston at about 4.p.m. on 4th December 1916. I was standing on the verandah in front of Orderly Room of 6th T.B. when Sergt Lavender who was Sergt of the Quarter Guard reported to me that Private O'Connell. T.P. who was under detention awaiting trial by District Court Martial, was in the yard behind the Guard Room and that he had taken a fire poker and defied the Guard to put him back to his cell Sergeant Lavender then asked me what steps he was to take to have him put back in his cell I told Sergt Lavender that Private O'Connell had to go back to his cell even if he had to put him back at the point of the bayonet Sergt Lavender then left me and went into the Guard Room. About two minutes afterwards I heard a great commotion I went into the Guard Room and saw Private O'Connell with a dinner fork in his hand. I then spoke to him and told him not to be foolish but to go to his cell quietly. Pte O'Connell then answered "I'll do for this black bastard first" meaning Sergt Lavender he also used vile language and defied the whole guard to put him under restraint at this time, Sergt Lavender was enforcing his order to get O'Connell back to his cell and he held his rifle with bayonet fixed at the ready position. O'Connell raising the fork in a threatening attitude attempted to get past the bayonet at Sergt Lavender. Sergt Lavender standing his ground the bayonet entered Private O'Connell's side just below the left nipple. Private O'Connell then went into his cell and the cell door was locked on him by Sgt Lavender. At this time I did not know that the bayonet had even entered his clothes but immediately the door was locked Private O'Connell called out "Sergeant I am stabbed". I immediately opened the door of the cell and saw that he was bleeding and sent at once for Captain. J.S. Reid. Medical Officer 6th. T.B. At the same time taking his clothes off pending the arrival of the doctor.

4507 (SGD) A/Sgt L.P. Prunty.
11/21st Battalion.

2nd Witness.

2nd Witness.

No 5367 A/Sgt Lavender . A. 21st Battn. at present serving with the 6th Training Battn stationed at Rolleston being duly sworn states:-

On the 3rd and 4th December 1916 I was Sergeant of the Quarter Guard Private O'Connell was a prisoner under close arrest in a separate cell in the Guard Room. At about 2.p.m. on the 4th December 1916, I sent Private O'Connell under escort of Corporal Binnie and 4 men to the Medical Officer to have his wounds dressed, on his return about 3.30 p.m. he refused to go back to his cell, and went into the yard behind the Guard Room and took a poker from the ground, and put it into the fire until the iron was red hot. I then went out and reported the matter to Sergt Prunty Provost Sergt who instructed me to place him in his cell even if force were necessary. Corporal Sinclair under orders from me, watching his opportunity took the poker out of the fire while O'Connell's attention was diverted elsewhere, and threw it over the fence. O'Connell then went into the Guard Room seeking some other weapon. I then called two Corporals, and I, with them each of us being armed with rifle and fixed bayonet, proceeded to place O'Connell in his cell. O'Connell seeing a broom handle made an attempt to get same. Bringing my rifle to the "ready" position I blocked him from doing so. Keeping our bayonet points close to him we gradually got him into the passage leading to his cell. At this time he became possessed of an eating fork, whether drawn from his pocket or from the window sill in the passage I cannot say.

He then made use of the words "You black Bastard" and attempted to get at me, past my bayonet point with the fork raised in a threatening attitude. Remaining at the "Ready" position, I followed him with my bayonet point. The conjoint movement of O'Connell and myself caused the bayonet to come into contact with his side about the left breast. At the time, he appeared to me to be almost a raving lunatic, and as he turned and went into his cell, I closed the door and locked it, and was not aware that he had met with any injury until he called out "Send for a Doctor, I'll bleed to death". With that the Provost Sergeant, who had up to this time witnessed the proceedings, asked me for the key and told me to stand by. Sergeant Frunty then entered the cell, while I remained outside on guard, in case O'Connell made a sudden rush to get out, as he had done so previously during the day by using another prisoner as a screen, while he was at large in the General Guard Room. The first intimation to me that O'Connell was wounded was when Sergeant Frunty rushed out of the cell to get assistance. On the arrival of the Medical Officer, I carried on with my usual routine duties and the last I saw of O'Connell was when he was being carried out on a stretcher from the Guard Room to the Ambulance.

(Sgd) A/Sgt. A. Lavender.
15/21st Btn.

3rd Witness.

No. 5558 A/Cpl Binnie, W.A. 21st Btn. at present serving with 6th T.B. stationed at Rolleston, being duly sworn states -

On the 3rd - 4th December 1916, I was one of the Corporals of the Quarter Guard and at about 2.45 p.m. on 4th December, I paraded Private O'Connell to the Doctor. I returned back to the Guard Room with O'Connell and escort about 3.15 p.m. On arrival Sgt. Lavender, Sergeant of the Guard, told Pte. O'Connell that he had received orders that he (O'Connell) was to go to his cell. Pte O'Connell refused point blank, using vile language, and went into the yard behind the Guard Room where there was a fire. He took the poker that was lying on the ground and put the end of it into the fire. Sgt. Lavender then warned him again that he would have to go to his cell, and Private O'Connell said that the first man that laid hands on him he would brand with the red hot poker. About this time, the Guard was called out by the Orderly Officer. On being dismissed the Guard Room. Private O'Connell had in the meantime come from the yard into the Guard Room. He then walked into the passage leading to his cell, when the sentry closed the door and locked same. Private O'Connell then became violent and knocked some panels out of the door, at the same time demanding to be let out. The door was opened to allow another prisoner who had asked to go to the latrines, to get out. O'Connell then rushed out behind the other prisoner. Sgt. Lavender then ordered him to go back to his cell when O'Connell jumped to get a broom-handle which was behind the stove. Sgt Lavender coming down to the "On Guard" position prevented him from doing this, and gradually forced him into the passage leading to his cell. About ~~at~~ the middle of the passage leading to his cell, he became possessed of an eating fork (from where I do not know). Holding the fork in his hand in a threatening

manner he made a rush at Sgt. Lavender. Seeing Cpl Sinclair beside Sgt. Lavender with his bayonet fixed, Pte. O'Connell avoiding Cpl. Sinclair's bayonet, seemed to me to rush on to the bayonet of Sgt. Lavender. He then of his own accord went into his cell, and the door was shut and locked. The next I saw of Pte. O'Connell was about five minutes later, when the Provost Sergeant was undressing him. I assisted when the doctor arrived and noticed that he had a wound on his left side, below the nipple. I then left him to the Doctor and his assistants, and the last I saw of Pte O'Connell was when he was being carried on a stretcher to the ambulance.

(Sgd) H.A. Binnie Cpl, No. 5558.

15/21st Battn

4th Witness.

Captain Reid, J.S. Army Medical Corps attached to 6th Training Battalion, Rollestone.

About 4 p.m. on the 4th December, 1916, I was called to see Pte. O'Connell and was told he had received a bayonet wound. I found him in a collapsed condition, with a punctured wound below and to the inner side of the left nipple. This wound could have been caused by a bayonet, I ordered his removal to Forgo Military Hospital. I have previously attended this man for slight bayonet wounds.

(Sgd) J.S. Reid Capt.
A.A.M.C.

Rollestone,
December 5th, 1916.

Court of Enquiry Finding:

"The Court having taken the evidence of the witnesses are of the opinion that the wound to No. 5392 Private O'Connell T.F. 21st Battn. Was inflicted by A/Sgt. Lavender, A. No. 5367 21st Battalion, the Sergeant of the Guard, with a bayonet whilst in the execution of his duty, and they wish to add that in their opinion Segeant Lavender A., is exonerated from all blame.

(Sgd) F. Parkes, Major"

A death for Thomas F. O'Connell, aged 36, was registered in the December quarter, 1916 in the district of Amesbury, Wiltshire.

A copy of the section of the *Salisbury Times* was included in the Service Record file of late Pte Thomas Francis O'Connell.

other dependents of the men who are dying in thousands for such noble cause.

who discuss this subject from their to the mercy of an assurance that the not provides a gratification, allocations, organize the glaring fact that while or have risen over 50 per cent, these a have remained stationary. Some in smug self-satisfaction, have re- that "these people have never been it."

statement was not true, in fact, it to the lasting credit of those who a placed in positions of respect- the fighting man's vote.

to its authority in our towns and dies that they may one day be held to in the returning voters for allowing dependents to be employed by the food without raising a hand in protest.

of frights, lower production, and re seasons can be proffered, but who that food prices could have been if action had been taken against indulgence in unnecessary luxur- from hand had prevented the food from adding to their blood money, way to make ridiculous regulations the consumption of drink, but there station for "Tommy's" dependents man vapours who have flourished in every town and city in the

ems ahead the prospect of bread and tickets, but it seems to be for- the inadequate allowance of the "Tommy's" wife or dependant is rigorous deterrent to extravagance, one who have the means and the sense to indulge in selfish orgies or luxuries this Christmas realize are indirectly increasing the hard the wives and families of the great men who are being "crucified" that they live.

is the opportunity for the preachers of utilitarianism, who continually complain people's idleness from the churches, to signal more a really, by dropping multiple theologies for a time and urge the soldiers' and sailors' depen- protesting against, and vigorously de- those who exploit them; by urging spite to soothe that a wealthy nation duty, not dispense its charity to the ate of those, who, by their sacrifices, are the Real of the Nation.

I remain, yours sincerely,
J. C. SOUTHGATE.
Wingaloo, Fisherton.

WINTERSLOW.
THAT BURNING FURN.—As a result of sum made by local Oddfellows for the Christmas Fooking Fund a sum of was raised.

AMESBURY. *

The trees are growing gaunt and bare;
Their leaves glide on the wailing brooks,
Or dance in myriads through the air,
To find their graves in sheltered nooks.

Where the meads chant in sunny Spring
His love song of his listening mate,
When hill and dale with music ring,
Sweet Spring is Eden's golden gate.

The Autumn's lesson this to know
That wind and frost his leaf and tree,
And Winter spreads her shroud of snow
Ere Spring reveals the life to be.

HELEN HOUSIE.

November, 1916.

BAYONETED!

FATAL THRUST AT A TROUBLESOME SOLDIER.

An unusual story of a soldier's death whilst under arrest was related to the Coroner for South Wilt (Mr. F. H. Trishowani) and a jury at the inquest held on Tuesday at Fargo Military Hospital.

It appeared from the evidence that Thomas Francis O'Connell (20), a native of Ballarat, Victoria, in the Australian Imperial Force, stationed at Bellemeane Camp, had been placed under arrest awaiting court martial. He broke out of the guard room on Monday afternoon, and defied the guard. Sergt. Lavender tried to drive him back at the point of the bayonet. Sergt. Franks advised him to go quietly, but he said "Not unless I have killed Lavender." He raised a table fork in a threatening manner, and on approaching Lavender received the point of the bayonet in his side. He then went into the cell and collapsed trying to take off his own coat.

He was taken to Fargo Hospital, when Capt. Unphart, R.A.M.C., found the wound had punctured the muscles of the heart. He lived only three quarters of an hour, death being due to internal hemorrhage.

It was stated in evidence that Sergt. Lavender had always conducted himself in a temperate manner and was only trying to do his duty on this occasion. Lieut. Duggan described O'Connell as a very troublesome and desperate customer. On November 13th he escaped from the guard room by cutting a hole in the floor, and was brought back a week later. When under arrest again he broke away and knocked out a sentry, but was eventually re-captured. He seemed under the impression that he was a martyr and that everyone was going on at him.

The Coroner advised the jury to say that the wound was inflicted by Lavender in the execution of his duty without any intention to kill O'Connell, which amounted to a verdict of justifiable homicide.

The Foreman said the jury quite agreed.

THE PALACE THEATRE

"JOCK'S INVENTION."

People who like a bit of "real Scotch" two

that she had not seen him since he had returned to find another billet, and refused to give them any dinner after they had been working in the camp all day. The case was serious, in view of the difficulty of getting billets in a small village. The rate was the authorized by the Southern Command, and was always paid in time.

Mr. Magistrate: What are the rates?

Witness: For the first man 17s. 6d. a week and for every other man 15s. 6d. a week.

Mr. Magistrate: That is a reduction from what it used to be?

Witness: At the beginning of the war the rates were 25s. 4d. a week. The authorities were always willing to advance money when it was asked for, but in this case it was not.

The Chairman: How often do you pay the money?

Witness: replied that at the beginning of the billeting period a fortnight's money was paid at the end of the third week, and after wards it was paid regularly every fortnight.

The Magistrate's Clerk (Mr. F. Holding) asked the witness what authority he had in issuing the billets. Originally only lieutenants were liable to have soldiers billeted upon them, but the Act had since been amended.

Witness said he did not issue any billets. Superintendent Buchanan said the jobs were informed that a number of men had to be billeted and a constable went round with the officer to arrange matters. No billets form was sent to these people, but they were supposed to take the men.

The Chairman (to the defendant): You accepted these men?

Defendant: Yes, but not on these terms. She then asserted that she had kept the men the weeks before she had anything paid her. He was not going to use her money to keep it men, and as she went to the lieutenant a November 8th and asked for it. "I was going to get in debt with my tradespeople and the Government. I never have and never will," she declared. She added that there were people in that Court who had wait two months for their money.

The Lieutenant said he had never been behind with his payments, but a battery artillery were there before his men, and understood that they were paid for the first week at all the old rates, which were high so that the people got large sums of money. The military discovered their mistake and directed it from the following weeks' payment.

Defendant: These people have not got the money now.

Sergt. Johnson, of the Royal Engineers, said that on November 13th he saw defendant, and said she was not going to keep the men in longer unless she was paid. He said if they could not pay her until the money came she said she could not keep the men on a money, and she did not care what the Government did. On the Saturday the men were there for dinner, and the only thing she got them was a cup of tea. She told them to go to the corporal to find another billet.

Defendant, in her witness box, said she lived at Gosden with her husband who had a tin holding.

The Chairman: Why is not your husband here?

The Magistrate's Clerk: She was summoned. After a brief consultation, the Chairman said the Bench had decided that the case dismissed because the wrong person had been

Private Thomas Francis O'Connell was buried on 6th December, 1916 at Durrington Cemetery, Wiltshire – Plot number 125 and has a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone.

Private T. F. O'Connell is commemorated in the Hall of Memory Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Australia on Panel 94.



(Photos by Cathy Sedgwick)



Roll Of Honour WW1 Australian War Memorial Canberra, Australia

Pte Thomas Francis O'Connell was entitled to British War Medal only as he had not entered a Theatre of War. A Memorial Scroll & Memorial Plaque were also sent to Pte O'Connell's eldest brother – Charles O'Connell (Parents deceased) (sent October, 1922 & September, 1922). Mrs Ellen O'Connell, mother of late Pte Thomas O'Connell, had died on 23rd September, 1917

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission lists Private Thomas Francis O'Connell – service number 5392 as being 36 years old & served with 21st Battalion Australian Infantry. No family details are listed.

(72 pages of Pte Thomas Francis O'Connell's Service records are available for On Line viewing at National Archives of Australia website).

Information obtained from the CWGC, Australian War Memorial (Roll of Honour, First World War Embarkation Roll) & National Archives

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Newspaper Reports

THE ROLL OF HONOUR

AUSTRALIAN CASUALTIES 250th LIST

VICTORIA – DIED OF WOUNDS

T. F. O'Connell, Ballarat, 4/12/16

(The Queenslander, Brisbane – Saturday 23 December, 1916)

Commonwealth War Graves Commission Headstones

The Defence Department, in 1920/21, contacted the next of kin of the deceased World War 1 soldiers to see if they wanted to include a personal inscription on the permanent headstone at Durrington War Graves Cemetery. Space was reserved for 66 letters only (with the space between any two words to be counted as an additional letter) & the rate per letter was around 3 ½ d (subject to fluctuation).

The expense in connection for the erection of permanent headstones over the graves of fallen soldiers was borne by the Australian Government.

(Information obtained from letters sent to next of kin in 1921)

A letter from Base Records, dated 26th July, 1921, to Mrs M. Jermyn of 1009 Dana Street, Ballarat West, Victoria advises that a letter from the Defence Dept. concerning an inscription on the headstone of the late Pte T. F. O'Connell, brother, had not been answered & non-receipt of a reply within 21 days would have to be accepted as indicating that no further action was to be taken.

Pte T. F. O'Connell does not have a personal inscription on his headstone.

Photo of Pte T. F. O'Connell's Headstone at Durrington War Graves Cemetery, Wiltshire.



(Photo © Ian King - with permission)