

# Durrington Cemetery, Wiltshire

## War Graves

### World War 1



*Lest We Forget*



**3108 PRIVATE**

**R. F. LYONS**

**38TH BN. AUSTRALIAN INF.**

**22ND SEPTEMBER, 1917**

*Though Sundered Far*

*By Faith We'll Meet*

*Around One Common Mercy Seat*

*Commonwealth War Graves Headstone for Pte R. F. Lyons is located in Grave Plot # 256  
of Durrington War Graves Cemetery*

## Robert Francis LYONS

Robert Francis Lyons was born at Carlton, Melbourne, Victoria around 1899 to parents Robert & Isabella Lyons.

Robert Francis Lyons was an 18 year old, single, Cabinet maker from North Carlton, Victoria when he enlisted on 8th January, 1917 with the Australian Imperial Force (A.I.F.). His service number was 3108 & his religion was Presbyterian. His next of kin was listed as his father – Mr Robert Lyons, 899 Rathdown Street, North Carlton, Victoria. Robert had served 4 years with Cadets. As he was under the age of 21 years, both parents had signed their consent for their son to enlist in the A.I.F. for Active Service abroad.

Private Robert Francis Lyons embarked from Melbourne on HMAT *Ballarat* (A70) on 19th February, 1917 with the 38th Infantry Battalion, 7th Reinforcements & disembarked at Devonport, England on 25th April, 1917. The *Ballarat* had been torpedoed on 25th April, 1917 and sank at the entrance to the English Channel. All the troops and all the members of the crew were saved.

Extract from *World War One Channel Wrecks – Vessels Lost in The English Channel 1914 – 1918*:

*The steamer Ballarat was a large ship and an extremely tempting target for an enemy submarine commander. She was also important because of her human cargo of 1602 troops from Australia. With all the escorts around her it would be hard to believe that any enemy vessel would come within miles of the convoy, but one did.*

*The Ballarat was zig-zagging about 23 miles to the south-west of St Mary's, Scilly Isles, at about 10 knots. A lookout suddenly shouted that he could see the wake of a torpedo heading for the ship but before the officer on the bridge could react it was too late. The torpedo slammed into the starboard side by number five hatch. A huge explosion followed which opened up a large hole in her side, smashed the rear deck gun and starboard propeller.*

*As the water poured into her the master realised that he had to stop the ship to try and slow down the rate at which she was settling and hopefully get all the troops and crew off safely. Destroyers and armed trawlers descended on her from every direction. Whilst some were busy taking off all men from the sinking steamer others were searching for the culprit (UB-32) and trying to shield Ballarat from further attack. Fortunately they were successful with the latter and all the men were taken off without injury.*

*The master with six of his crew remained on board to see what could be done for the ship. They were joined by seven men from the naval vessel *Acasta*. They found that the two after holds were completely flooded and that water was up to the cylinders in the engine room. Word had already gone out asking for tugs to be sent to the scene but the reply was that it would be some time before any were available.*

*At 6.30 pm Midge got the Ballarat under tow and slowly eased her towards the Cornish coast. They were lucky through the night as the weather remained calm allowing them to make some good headway but the ship was badly crippled, taking on more and more water as time went by. Eventually, as they approached the Lizard the steamer was showing all the signs of going down and the tow was dropped. At 4 am she rolled over and sank.*

(With thanks to Empire Attendant (Twitter) for sharing this with me.)

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.

Private Robert Francis Lyons was marched in to 10th Training Battalion, No. 12 Camp, Durrington, Wiltshire on 26th April, 1917.

Private Robert Francis Lyons was temporarily attached for duty at Field Post Office, Durrington from 26th August, 1917.

Private Robert Francis Lyons was admitted to Fargo Military Hospital, Wiltshire on 20th September, 1917 after falling from a wagon onto the rifle of a sentry, while unloading mail & causing an injury to his buttock at 26 Camp, Larkhill. He was operated on twice.

Private Robert Francis Lyons died at 6.25 a.m. on 22nd September, 1917 at Fargo Military Hospital from wounds of Perineum.

A death for Robert F. Lyons, aged 18, was registered in the September quarter, 1917 in the district of Amesbury, Wiltshire.

An Inquest was held on 24th September, 1917 with Coroner F. H. Trethowan into the death of Private R.F. Lyons on 22nd September, 1917. The jury returned a verdict of "Accidental Death".

A Court of Enquiry was held at No. 12 Camp, Durrington on 24th September, 1917 by order of Lieut. Col. M. St. J. Lamb, Commandant, No. 3 Group, Durrington for the purpose of inquiring into fatal injuries received by 3108 Pte R. F. Lyons, 38th Battalion. It was found by Lt. Col. F. E. Woods, C. O. 10th Training Battalion A.I.F. "*I am of opinion that the injuries received by No. 3108 Pte R. F. Lyons, 38th Battalion, were received whilst in the performance of Military Duty, and he was not to blame for same.*"

#### EVIDENCE.

Capt. O.G. de Lacy A.M.C. attached R.B.A.A. No. 21. Camp, Lark Hill, being duly sworn states:- On the afternoon of 20th. Sept. 17 at 2.30 p.m. No. 3108. Pte. R.F. Lyons 38th.Btn. A.I.F. was brought into me at my Medical Hut, Camp 21. The men who brought Pte. Lyons to me stated that he had fallen off a cart on to the muzzle of a sentry's rifle. On examination the patient was rather collapsed and had a jagged wound on the right side of the buttock leading into the anus and rectum. I dressed the wound and by that time an ambulance had arrived and I sent Pte. Lyons straight away to hospital. (Fargo)

(Sgd) O.G. de Lacy.  
Capt.,

Capt. L.L. Phillips, R.A.M.C. attached Fargo Hospital, Rolleston being duly sworn states:- On the afternoon of 20th. Sept. 1917, I was called to see No. 3108. Pte. Lyons R.F. 38th. Battalion, A.I.F. who had just been admitted to the hospital. I found him considerably collapsed and with a jagged wound on the right buttock penetrating the anus. I took him straight to the operating theatre and cleaned and stitched up the wound which was bleeding fairly freely. I also repaired the wound in the rectum, but could not reach high enough to discover any further injury higher up in the rectum. Pte. Lyons was then put back to bed and seemed to improve considerably. About 6 a.m. the next morning he had a sudden collapse and afterwards complained more of abdominal pain. This gradually got worse during the day, and his urine was drawn off and found to be loaded with fresh bacilli similar to those found in the bowell. owing to his condition getting worse I further operated. His abdomen was opened and found to be full of faeculent blood stained fluid. As the patients condition would not allow a further repair being undertaken a drainage tube was inserted, the wound quickly stitched and the patient returned to bed. Under saline treatment he rallied considerably, but during the night gradually sank and died at about 6.20 a.m. on the morning of 22nd. Sept. 1917, from Peritonitis caused by a wound of the bowell and probably of the base of the bladder also.

(Sgd) L.L. Phillips. Capt.,  
R.A.M.C.



No. 13844. Driver Herber Leslie Martin, A.A.S.C. detachment attached 10th Training Battalion, 3rd. Camp Durrington being duly sworn states:- It is my duty to report daily at Durrington Field Post Office at 7.45 a.m. and again at 1.30 p.m. to convey the Mails from the Lark Hill Railway siding to the respective Camps to which they were addressed. It was my custom to meet No. 3108. Pte. Lyons, 38th. Battalion, A.I.F. at Durrington Field Post Office. It being his duty to accompany me and supervise the loading and distribution of the mails. At 1.30 p.m. on the afternoon of 20th. Sept. 1917, I met Pte. Lyons as usual and he accompanied me on the G.S. Wagon conveying the Mails to the Lark Hill Field Post Office. I had stopped the wagon and Pte. Lyons was unloading the mail bags when I heard a groan and on looking round I saw Pte. Lyons, with his hands clasped across his stomach and appeared to be in great pain.

(Sgd) 13844. Dvr. H.L. Martin.

No. 51. Pte. George John Bayley, 37th. Battn. A.I.F. attached Aust. Postal Corps at Lark Hill Field Post Office being duly sworn states: It is my duty to receive the mail bags arriving at the Lark Hill Field Post Office. It was the custom for the mails to be brought to the Post Office in a G.S. Wagon. No. 3108. Pte. R.F. Lyons had

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been in charge of the mails arriving in this way for about one month prior to 20th. Sept. 1917. On 20th. Sept. 1917 the mail arrived about 2 p.m. No. 3108. Pte. Lyons was in charge. He started to unload the wagon. I was handling a mail bag and on hearing a noise I looked up and saw that Pte. Lyons R.F. had met with an accident, and was evidently in pain. Sergt. Thomson who was present at the time took Pte. Lyons first into the post Office, but immediately removed him to the Medical Hut at No. 26. Camp.

(Sgd) G. Bayley. Pte.

No. 34234. Sergeant. L.A. Thompson, No. 2. Battery R.B.A.A. attached Camp 21, Lark Hill being duly sworn states:- I saw the G.S. Wagon conveying mails to Lark Hill Field Post Office arrive at about 2.30 p.m. on the afternoon of Sept. 20th. 1917. I saw No. 3108. Pte. R.F. Lyons, 38th. Battalion commence unloading the mail. He unloaded two parcels and in attempting to unload another, which was evidently caught, he first gave one unsuccessful try to get it out, and in making a second pull pull at it he over balanced through the parcel coming away without any apparent resistance. To save himself from falling he jumped backwards and in doing so landed on the rifle of a sentry who was standing in rear of him. Seeing that he was injured I took him into the Field Post Office, and examined him. Seeing he was badly hurt got assistance and took him immediately to the Medical Hut where he received immediate attention.

(Sgd) L.A. Thompson.

Sgt.



No. 32997. Driver James Herbert Noble No.2. Battery R.B.A.A. attached No 21 Camp Lark Hill, being duly sworn states:-

On the afternoon of 20th. Sept. 1917, at about 2.30 p.m. I was on duty at the Lark Hill Post Office as sentry. I saw Pte. Lyons commence unloading mails from the front of a G.S. Wagon. He then walked about the ledge of the wagon towards the rear and started unloading there. I was standing at ease on my beat and was not taking any notice of the unloading of the mail, when Pte. Lyons fell on me and was impaled on my rifle. I did not see how Pte. Lyons came to fall. I eased Pte. Lyons off my rifle and he was taken charge of by Sgt. Thompson. At the time of the accident my bayonet was not fixed.

(Sgd) J.H. Noble.

No. 2150. Cpl. H.H.Heppell, Australian Postal Corps, in charge Durrington Field Post Office, being duly sworn states:-  
No 3108. Pte. R.F.Lyons, 38th.Battalion, A.I.F. was attached to Durrington Field Post Office for duty and since first commencing duty he had been in charge of the transport. At 1.30 p.m. on the afternoon of 20th.Sept. 1917 he left Field Post Office, Durrington Camp, to proceed to No.15 siding Lark Hill to pick up the afternoon inward mails. It would be his duty having got these mails to deliver them to Field Post Office Lark Hill, and other Field Post Offices. Soon after 3 p.m. on 20th. Sept. 1917, Pte. G.J. Bayley returned with transport and informed me that Pte. Lyons had met with an accident outside Field Post Office Larkhill.

(Sgd) H.Heppell. Cpl. 2150.

HEADQUARTERS.  
No.3. Group.

(Sgd) C.R.Lowe. Major. PRESIDENT.

(Sgd) F.Miller. Lt. MEMBERS. (Sgd-J.Anderson 2/Lt.

I am of opinion that the injuries received by No. 3108 Pte. R.F.Lyons, 38th.Battalion, were received whilst in the performance of Military Duty, and he was not to blame for same.

24.9.17.

(Sgd) F.E. Woods. Lt.Col. C.O. 10th. T.B. A.I.F

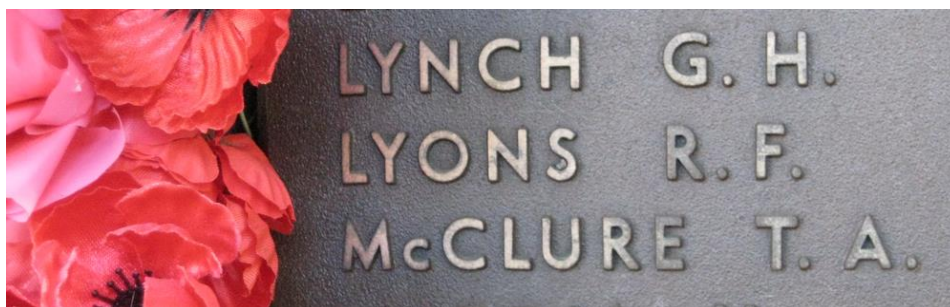
Private Robert Francis Lyons was buried on 25th September, 1917 at Durrington Cemetery, Wiltshire – Plot number 256 and has a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone. From the burial report of Private Robert Francis Lyons- *Coffin was solid Elm wood, well finished with Brass Mountings* – Mrs Brown of 5 Bond Road, Bitterne Park, Southampton (aunt) attended the funeral. *Funeral left Fargo Hospital at 2.15 p.m. arrived at Cemetery at 3.30. A large number of friends were present and many floral tributes were laid on the grave. The weather was bright and sunny and the burial ceremony beautifully expressive.*

A War Pension was applied for & granted to Isabella Farr Lyons, mother of late Private R. F. Lyons, in the sum of 40/- per fortnight from 28th November, 1917. A War Pension was also applied to by Catherine Graham Lyons, sister & Douglas Lyons, brother but both were rejected on the grounds of "Dependence not proved".

Private Robert Francis Lyons 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 Private Lyons' father – Mr R. Lyons (sent March, 1922 & February, 1922).

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission lists Private Robert Francis Lyons – service number 3108 as having served with 38th Battalion Australian Infantry. He was the son of Robert & Isabella Farr McFarlane Lyons, of 899 Rathdown Street, North Carlton, Victoria. Born at Melbourne.

Private R. F. Lyons is commemorated in the Hall of Memory Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Australia on Panel 130.



*(Photos by Cathy Sedgwick)*



*Roll Of Honour WW1 Australian War Memorial Canberra, Australia*

(59 pages of Private Robert Francis Lyons' 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*





## Newspaper Reports

### ROLL OF HONOUR

#### VICTORIAN LIST – DIED OF WOUNDS

Pte R. F. Lyons, Nth Carlton, 22/9/17

(*Weekly Times*, Victoria – Saturday 20 October, 1917)

R. F. Lyons is remembered on the family headstone in Melbourne General Cemetery, Victoria, Australia.



*In Loving Memory*  
*Of*  
*HUGH C. LYONS*  
*Son of Robert Isabella*  
*Farr Lyons*  
*Died 22ND May 1899*  
*Aged 6 Years & 9 Months*

*Also Brother Of Above*  
*Private R, F, LYONS, A.I.F.*  
*Died Of Wounds 22ND Sep 1917*  
*IN Fargo Military Hospital England*  
*Aged 18 Years 8 Months*  
*On Ballarat When Torpedoed*

*ROBERT LYONS*  
*Father Of Above*  
*Died 17Th Oct 1923 Aged 78 Years*

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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*)

Private R. F. Lyons does have a personal inscription on his headstone.

*Though Sundered Far By Faith We'll Meet Around One Common Mercy Seat*



## Durrington Cemetery, Wiltshire

Durrington Cemetery contains 232 Commonwealth War Graves – 208 from World War 1 & 24 from World War 2. There are 141 Australian WW1 War Graves in Durrington Cemetery.



**Durrington Cemetery, Wiltshire** (Photo by Dave Healing 2013)



**Durrington Cemetery** (Photos from CWGC)



Photo of Private R. F. Lyons' Commonwealth War Graves Commission Headstone at Durrington Cemetery, Wiltshire, England.



*(Photo © Ian King - with permission)*