

# Durrington War Graves

## World War 1



*Lest We Forget*



**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).

Thomas Francis O'Connell was a 36 year old, single Labourer from Ballarat, Victoria when he enlisted on 7<sup>th</sup> April, 1916 with the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, 21<sup>st</sup> Infantry Battalion, 14<sup>th</sup> 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 18<sup>th</sup> January, 1915 to 15<sup>th</sup> March, 1915. He was discharged at Broadmeadows on 15<sup>th</sup> March, 1915.

Pte Thomas Francis O'Connell embarked from Melbourne on HMAT *Themistocles* (A32) on 28<sup>th</sup> July, 1916 & disembarked at Plymouth, England on 11<sup>th</sup> 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 6<sup>th</sup> Training Battalion, was charged with “Conduct to the prejudice of good order & military discipline. Creating a disturbance in the lines” on 23<sup>rd</sup> 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 4<sup>th</sup> 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 4<sup>th</sup> 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 4<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1916 from Internal Haemorrhage result of Bayonet wound of chest.”

A Coroner's Inquest was held at Fargo Hospital on 5<sup>th</sup> December, 1916. Thomas Francis O'Connell died on 4<sup>th</sup> 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 4<sup>th</sup> December, 1916 in the course of his duty & without the will or intention to kill O'Connell.

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

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1st Witness.  
No 4507 A/Sgt Pranty 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 Rollestone 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.F. 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.

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.



COPY.

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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) N.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 Forge 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:**

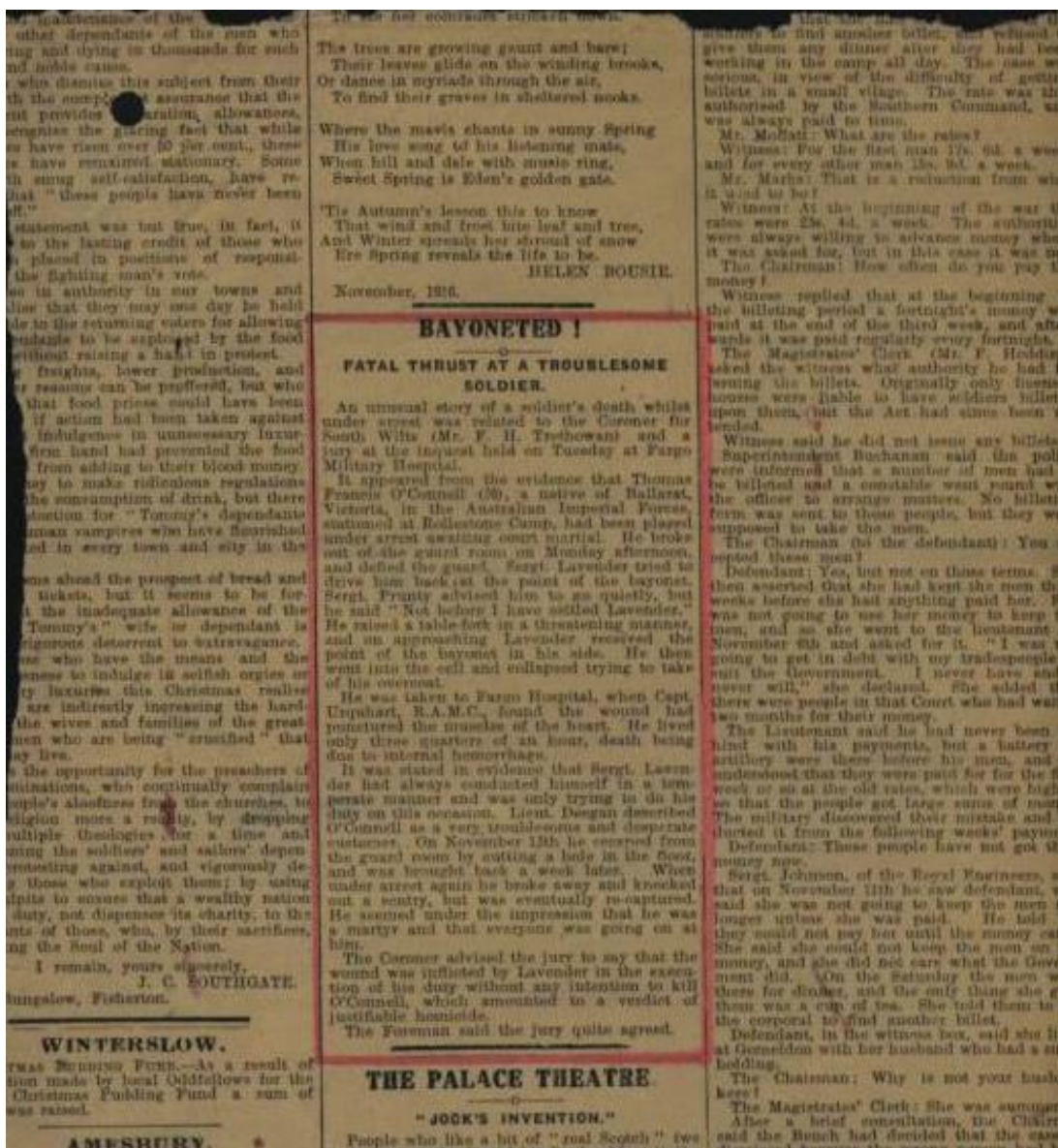
*"The Court having taken the evidence of the witnesses are of the opinion that the wound to No. 5392 Private O'Connell T.F. 21<sup>st</sup> Battn. Was inflicted by A/Sgt. Lavender, A. No. 5367 21<sup>st</sup> Battalion, the Sergeant of the Guard, with a bayonet whilst in the execution of his duty, and 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.



Private Thomas Francis O'Connell was buried on 6<sup>th</sup> 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 23<sup>rd</sup> 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*



## **Newspaper Reports**

THE ROLL OF HONOUR

AUSTRALIAN CASUALTIES 250<sup>th</sup> 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 26<sup>th</sup> 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.



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



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



*(Photo © Ian King - with permission)*