

A SOLDIER'S STORY



Service No.: 3529 (3569B)
Name: Francis Arnold OLSTON
Nickname: Shorty



Medals and Decorations

1914 - 15 Star
British War Medal
Victory Medal

Rank: Private
Service: Army
Enlisted: 28 May 1915
KIA: 20 Sep 1917

Francis (Frank) was born at Oodla Wirra on 28 Dec 1896 to Francis Olston and Evangeline Olston (nee Mercer) of Oodla Wirra. He was one of 7 children, 3 boys and 4 girls. His father, who had been a Swedish sailor, turned his hand to farming.

Just getting to the Tumby area must have been a real chore for the family; they left Oodla Wirra with the father driving a wagon with “6 strong horses”, the mother driving a spring cart with a “frisky pony” and the 4 girls on foot herding the cows. The journey took 6 weeks. On arrival at Yallunda Flat it was obvious that the scrub block would not produce a return for at least 12 months, so the father went carting with the horse team, whilst the females cleared the block and established the home; the father returning home each week end. Two of the boys were born at Yallunda Flat: Frank’s brother being the first white male to be born in the area.

Frank was employed on his father’s farm and later on other local farms in the area until the outbreak of WW1. He enlisted in the Australian Army in May 1915 and was posted to 10th Battalion, before embarking for the UK. He was one of the first to enlist from this district and was one of the first to land in France. He was involved in an immense amount of front line action stretching from 1915 to 1917.

He took part in all the heavy fighting on the Somme, was at the storming of Armentierres, Pozierres, and Thiepval; and then the rush for the three trenches at Moquet Farm. During this latter action he volunteered to carry dispatches through the German barrage for reinforcements, and although wounded, managed to get the message through.

After several months in hospital he returned to the trenches on 20 Dec 1916, but due to his wounds breaking open again, he was placed on light duties for more than a month. In Mar 1917 he fought at Bullecourt. Three months later, at the battle of Lancourt he

volunteered for a raiding party; he was reported as missing in action (MIA) on 20 Sep 1917. It was later confirmed that he was killed in action (KIA) on that date; he was 20 years and 9 months old.

His parents, still living at Yallunda Flat, received a telegram from Buckingham Palace notifying them that their son had been killed in action. The telegram, a copy of which is held in the Tumbly Bay Sub Branch, concludes with the words “he was one of Australia’s best”, and is signed by the King.

It is hard to believe that a soldier who had seen this amount of action, who had been wounded and yet returned to the trenches, and who had volunteered for several dangerous missions was not given a bravery award. It really does indicate how “tough” it was during WW1.

Below: Menin Gate Memorial, Ypres, Belgium



1914-15 Star British War Medal Victory Medal



Mr. and Mrs F. Olston, of Yallunda Flat, have been notified that their son, F. A. Olston, No. 3529, 10th Battalion, was killed in action on the day he was reported missing, September 20, 1917. He had seen a lot of fighting, being one of the first to enlist from his district, and was one of the first to land in France. He took part in all the heavy fighting on the Somme, was at the storming of Armentieres, Pozierres, Thiepval, Moquet Farm, and the rush for the three trenches. He there volunteered to take the dispatches through the German barrage for reinforcements, and although wounded, managed to get the message through. After some months in hospital he again went in the trenches on December 20, but due to his wounds breaking out, he was put on light duty for about a month. In March he fought at Bullecourt and Lancourt, and volunteering for a raiding party he made the supreme sacrifice. He was 20 years and 9 months old, and was one of Australia's best.



BUCKINGHAM PALACE.

I join with my grateful people in sending you this memorial of a brave life given for others in the Great War.

George R. I.

Letter that appeared in the local paper.

Letter from Buckingham Place signed by King George V