

Frank McDonald Memorial Presentation 2023

The soldier I have selected for my presentation is Private Cyril Ferdinand Ryan – Regimental Number 2949. I am proud to say Cyril was my great uncle.

An extract from “The Virtual War Memorial” states:

RYAN, Cyril Ferdinand

- Service numbers 2949, Private 12th Infantry Battalion, AIF WW1, Born 1897, Died 24 Jul 1916, Died of wounds



- Cyril was born in Launceston and grew up in Blessington in Northern Tasmania, which is about 50 km from Launceston.
- Cyril worked as a farm hand/labourer at the family farm and at other farms in the area.
- His parents were William and Rose Ryan. Cyril was the eldest of 9 children, and one of his brothers, Ray was my grandfather. Ray went on to become a Police Superintendent in the Tasmanian Police.



Rural Blessington

Enlistment:

- Cyril enlisted (took the oath) in Claremont (Hobart) on 28 July 1915.
- He, and several other Blessington boys, including some of his cousins were given a farewell function by the Blessington locals and Cyril made a thank you speech on behalf of the group.
- After the war, Cyril's father donated land so that St Patrick's Church in Blessington could be built.

Cyril's Life Journey:

- Born 1897: Launceston
- Grew up 1897-1915: Blessington
- Joined the Army on 28 July 1915 in Hobart. Basic training was completed at Claremont Tasmania, at what is now the Claremont Golf Club.
- Travelled overseas via Western Australia on board HMAT Honorata (27 September 1915). First to Tel-El-Kebir, Egypt (7 January 1916), and then to Alexandria, Egypt (29 March 1916). He departed Alexandria and arrived at Marseilles France on 5 April 1916 on board the Corsican as part of the 9th Reinforcements of the 12th Battalion AIF.
- Cyril fought, injured and died during the battle of Pozieres France.
- Cyril's body was subsequently transported 8km behind the lines here to Warloy Baillon Military Cemetery, France.
- Official records state that his death was reported on 24 July 1916 by the Australian Field Ambulance, "***died of wounds, received in action***".

A Reflection:

- One minute Cyril was a very young man milking cows in country Tasmania, and not long after he is 17,000 km's away fighting an enemy he probably didn't know a lot about, and dying for his country.

What Happened:

- Cyril died as a result of his involvement in The **Battle of Pozières** (23 July – 3 September 1916) which took place in northern France around the village of Pozières, during the Battle of the Somme. The Australian official historian Charles Bean wrote that Pozières ridge "is more densely sown with Australian sacrifice than any other place on earth".
- The village was completely destroyed in World War I during the Battle of Pozières which was part of the Battle of the Somme. The village was subsequently rebuilt and is now the site of several war memorials.

Some More Background to the Battle:

- Australian troops had been brought south from Flanders; the First (of which Cyril was a member) Second and Fourth Divisions were committed in that order from 23 July 1916, first against Pozières and then the vicinity of Mouquet Farm. The AIF was engaged on the right of the British front line.
- This series of actions elicited the greatest quantum of Australian sacrifice of any single campaign in our military history. In five weeks of fighting in mid 1916, the Australian First, Second and Fourth Divisions sustained 23,000 casualties, 5,000 of whom were killed.

Pozières Village:

- The Australian 1st Division attacked here in the early hours of 23 July 1916.
- The task was difficult – they had to capture three objectives. The first: the Pozières Trenches; the second: the outskirts of the village; the third: the main road which ran straight down the middle of the village.

- By this stage of the battle, the village had been completely obliterated by shellfire.
- The Germans defended the ruins of Pozières tenaciously, often to the last man. In the face of heavy resistance, the Australians moved through the shattered remnants of the village, overcoming machine-gun posts and wresting trenches and strong points from the Germans in the savage close-quarter fighting.
- The 1st Division successfully captured the “OG (or ‘Old German’) line and the “Gibraltar” blockhouse – which these days is the site of the 1st Division Memorial.
- Over the next 36 hours, progress would be measured in metres of ground gained and hundreds of men would die. Nonetheless, the village was captured.
- The Australians took the first four lines of the trenches and penetrated into the village of Pozières, with some of the advance parties gaining a foothold on the road to Bapuame. It was during this action that the Australians were subject to a large number of gas shells.



Cyril's Resting Spot:

- After going probably over 80 years without a visitor, over the past 20 years Cyril has had a steady stream of visitors, with family members travelling to this very spot, Warloy Baillon Cemetery. My wife and I visited 6 years ago, 3 of my siblings have visited, as well as other cousins and other family members.
- If you look closely at the photo, at the base of the grave, there is a cross which my wife Michelle and I placed on Cyril's grave 6 years ago. I have another cross exactly the same, made out of Tasmanian timber which I will leave here again. I would be honoured if everyone could put their name on it too.



A bit closer to home, and 30 km from where Cyril grew up is Evandale. The photos below are of the Evandale War Memorial which has Cyril's name on it, with firstly my younger brother Chris, who is in the Army Reserve, standing proudly in front of it at the 2022 Anzac Service, and secondly of me taken in December 2022 (just after we received our FMMP Akubra's!)



To conclude my presentation on Great Uncle Cyril, I have included a photo of his medals, and also a copy of a profile my daughter Hannah did on Cyril when she was in grade 7 (she is now aged 26).

Lest We Forget.

Don Ryan

Ex 10 Field Ambulance and 44 Transport Squadron, Tasmania, Australia.

Tasmanian Returned Services League (RSL) Representative, Frank MacDonald Memorial Prize Trip 2023.

Treasurer and Committee member, Lenah Valley RSL Tasmania.



The Star Medal, The War Medal, and the Victory Medal. Referred to as World War One Trio. Recipients of the Trio enlisted in either 1914 or 1915. None of the medals were issued alone, and a recipient would always be entitled to at least two of the three medals above.

Cyril Esmond Ryan

Cyril F Ryan is my Great Great uncle. He was born in 1896 but we are unsure what month or date. Before he went to war he worked on a farm with his family which he had 5 brothers and 3 sisters and he was the eldest. He was also the only one who went to war in his family.

Cyril went to war on the 27/1/15 which meant he was 19. His service number was 2491.

How he got to France

He went from Australia to Egypt by boat then joined the 2nd Battalion in Alexandria Egypt. From there he went to France and landed in Marseilles where he then went into action.

His description when he went to war was

- 5'6 feet tall
- pale complexion
- blue / grey eyes
- black hair
- a scar on the left side of his chin

He died of wounds at the age of 19 (24/7/1916) between Amiens and Beaumont in front of a place called pozieres where all the action was. He was buried at the Holywell British Cemetery near Albert in France.

Two of his cousins, William Alfred White and William Ernest Whitcomb also got killed in World War one.

In 1921 a little wooden Catholic Church was built out of Essington where Cyril and his two cousins were born in memory of them. The church is called St. Peter's church. Cyril's father, William Ryan, donated the land for the church to be built.

This is Cyril