

**In this Edition:****Legacy**

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**Australian Army
Nursing Service**

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The Seated Soldier

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Captain Charles Mills

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**News from Marg
O'Leary**

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ANZAC DAY 2022

Since our Newsletter of November, 2021, we have been receiving contact from families mostly from all over the country, but also from overseas. These stories are being worked on for them to be uploaded to our Website www.fromelles.info.

These stories remind us that war is not to be celebrated, but to be commemorated. Accordingly, it would not be appropriate to pass by without a Newsletter at this time of year, despite the building mountain of material being placed on our website.

We had hoped at this time we would be providing you with names of soldiers who have been identified who lay at rest at Fromelles, but at the time this Newsletter has been compiled, we do not have news to pass on. A separate announcement will be made when that is to hand.

We trust you will take your own time to pause and reflect the service of those who served in any capacity during World War 1, on this year's Anzac Day, 25th April, 2022.

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THE BEGINNINGS OF LEGACY

It all started with a promise. In the trenches of the Western Front during WW1, a soldier made a promise to his dying mate "to look after the missus and kids".

Since 1923, Legacy has kept that promise to help families carry on with their lives after the loss or injury of a loved one in military service by offering the same stability, guidance and assistance that a partner would normally provide to his or her family. You can help keep the promise and ensure that no child is disadvantaged by their parent's service to our country. Find out more: legacy.com.au/anzac-day/



THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY NURSING SERVICE – THE ANZAC NURSES

The continuing interest in Australian & New Zealand nurses who served in the Australian Army Nursing Service and the New Zealand Army Nursing Service of either country has attracted much interest. The nurses who served overseas were small in number when compared to the men who served in the Australian Imperial Force (in which AANS nurses who served overseas belonged). Whether for the purposes of military, cultural or family genealogical study, the study of individual nurses' war service has not been of greater than it is today.

Perhaps as many as 6,000 Australians and 1,000 New Zealanders served as nurses in the Great War and its immediate aftermath, in varied roles as qualified nurses, doctors, assistants, masseuses or as voluntary staff. The war service of Australian nurses will be studied in a broader sense.

The Australian branch of the Western Front Association in conjunction with the Families and Friends of the First AIF will deliver a one-day seminar on the subject of Australian nurses on Saturday 30th of April at the Anzac Memorial in Hyde Park, Sydney 10:00 am to 4:00 pm titled:

'Australian Military Nurses In The Great War.'

A new online database, developed by researcher David Perkins, will be launched to capture details of those possible 6,000 Australian and 1,000 New Zealand nurses who served.

A case study of **Nellie Alfreda Laffin (nee Pike)**, who served as a nurse in the Australian Army Nursing Service in the Great War will be presented by descendant Sue Tongue and other members of Nellie's family using archival material and family items. This case study will help showcase the role of nurses from Australia in the war, from the viewpoint of one brave woman who served.

Nurses also saw duty as home-service nurses in the AANS (AMF) or as VADs (Volunteer Aid Detachments) for the Australian Red Cross. Other women travelled to the United Kingdom to enlist in the



Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service (Reserve) and to serve with the British forces (especially in India and Salonika), whilst others joined the VADs in the UK. These latter women may not be included in official local archival resources, and have consequently been 'missed'.

[Picture: Young girls attend a patriotic gathering in New South Wales in 1915. They carry a precious 'casualty' for treatment. The 'cape' each wears emulates that worn by nurses in the AANS.]

Other researchers will attend to share their findings. A special afternoon tea will be hosted for those attending. Time will be allocated to a study of the Great War exhibits in the memorial's museum that relate to nurses.

Members of the Fromelles Association are particularly welcome to attend this event. Please RSVP your wish to attend, with names, to Paul Simadas, branch chairman, by email to:

wfaaustraliabranch@gmail.com

Seventy-two spaces are available in the audience, at this first-class venue.

For those lost so far from home.



[Picture: Colourised photograph of Canadian nurses at Buckingham Palace in June 1918 at an investiture of the RRC, both 1st and 2nd Class. Our Canadian cousins served in the Canadian Army Medical Corps.]

Seminar programme:

Title: 'Australian Nurses In The Great War.'

Location: Anzac Memorial Hyde Park, Sydney CBD.

Date and time: Saturday 30th April 2022

9:30 am: Arrival and registration.

10:00 am: Welcome. The Ode.

10:15 am: Nurses database launch, David Perkins. Introduced by Paul Simadas.

11:15 am: John Laffin Memorial Lecture, Sue Tongue and Laffin family members: 'Our Nurse Nellie in the war.' Introduced by Jim Munro.

(If only attending this lecture be at the venue seated in the venue before-hand, please be prompt.)

12:30 pm: Lunch (own arrangements outside the memorial). Also a time to tour the memorial.

1:30 pm: Research presentations by invited attendees: To be Confirmed but planned subjects/case studies invited/confirmed appear to be: Nurse Rebecca Williams 15 minutes, Nurse Edith Blake 30 minutes, Harefield Hospital, 1AAH update 35 minutes, and the Nurses 35 minutes.

This will be flexibly managed to ensure all are happy.

3:30 pm: Discussion with afternoon tea (self-catered by Paul Simadas, and all who can help, from the kitchenette). Tea/coffee/condiments, water, Anzac biscuits + Lamington cakes, paper plates/napkins.

4:15 pm: close of business.

(Continued Next Page)

[This photograph, taken in 1916 in England, is of Matron Ethel Gray, Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS), of No. 1 Australian Auxiliary Hospital (1AAH), looking out the window of her office towards a patient in a cane wheelchair.

[Photograph comes from the Australian War Memorial. Image file number AWM P12670.012.002.]



For those lost so far from home.

Dress: Smart casual.

Your contribution is invited: Please bring archival material or mementoes you have kept (and treasured) of a family member who served as a military, volunteer, Red Cross, or civilian nurse in the war years 1914-1919.

Rations: Lunch is your own local arrangements, with many local venues open. An ANZAC afternoon tea will be provided to thank all those in attendance. A kitchenette will operate for refreshments during the seminar.

Travel: The Museum underground railway station is in Hyde Park, parking stations with flat-pay weekend rates are within short-walking distance.

Cost: No-charge, but please be generous with your raffle donations, gold coin or \$5 note. \$3:00 tickets.

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FROMELLES AND THE LATER HUMANITARIAN WORKS OF

CAPT. CHARLES MILLS

(From a larger article compiled by Bob Griffith, to be posted on our website.)

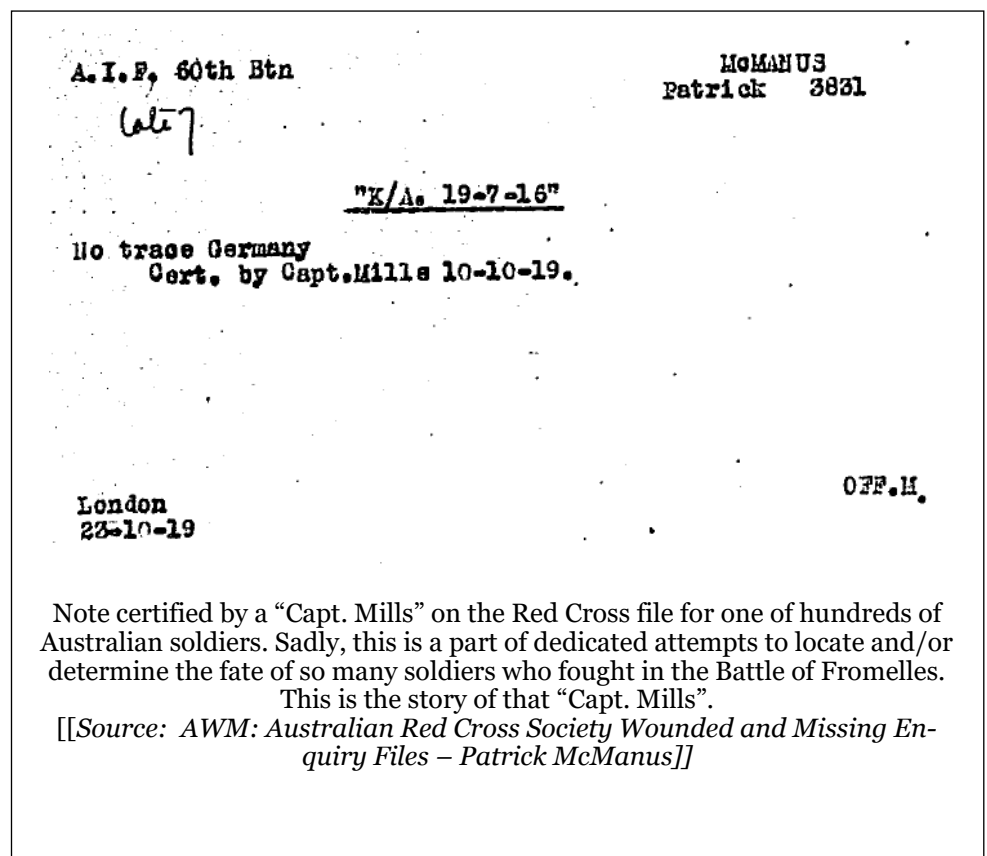
When researching a soldier's records for the Soldier Stories of Fromelles, there is one item that comes up (all too) often – a note from a Capt Mills. This is his story.

Charles Mills – His early life

Charles Mills was born in Cheltenham Victoria on 17 July 1876 to Mary Ann (nee Carter) and John Mills, the seventh of their nine sons. John and Mary Ann were farmers in Heatherton, near Cheltenham, Victoria.

Charles unfortunately lost his mother when he was 6 years old and his youngest brother was only 2. His father, John, remarried a year

later – to Eliza Noy, and they had another two sons. A family of eleven boys!



For those lost so far from home.

While Charles went on to have a very notable military career, his older brother Roderick 1869-1940 became more widely known as 'Saltbush Bill', being an excellent horseman, who spent many hours out in the saltbush on his horse. His roughriding shows and vaudeville appearances even attracted the attention of King George V during a tour of Australia.

In 1899, Charles married Jessie Cameron 1876-1929 and had four children – Alex 1900-27, Florence 1904-36, Glennie Millicent 1905-76, and Ronald 1910-10.

Early Military Career

In his teens, Charles served for four years in the senior cadets and he had "in every way, proved himself a thorough soldier". He also won first prize in the Senior Cadet Rifle matches three years running and was described by his commanding officer as "the best shot in the senior cadets". [[Source: NAA: B2455, MILLS, Charles – First AIF Personnel Dossiers 1914-1920, page 45]].

After he finished school, in which he earned a 1st Class Certificate of Education, he worked for a while as an electrical fitter, but then chose to pursue a military career. Charles enlisted in the Royal Australian Artillery in early 1896 with his first five years as a gunner and a bomber. His first promotion to Corporal was in mid-1901. In 1906, he became a Sergeant Electrician. In 1909, he moved to the Royal Australian Engineers and by early 1915 had become a Warrant Officer.

Off to War

The Australian Imperial Force was formed in late 1914 for support of the War in Europe and experienced military men were in demand. In August 1915 Charles was transferred to the AIF and assigned to the 31st Infantry Battalion, initially as a Lieutenant, but was promoted to Captain in October. They departed for Egypt on 9 November and arrived in Suez on 7 December. Their time in Egypt was spent training and guarding the Suez Canal.

On 15 June 1916, the 31st began to make their way to the Western Front, first by train from Moascar to Alexandria and then aboard the troopship *Hororata*, sailing to Marseilles. After disembarking on 22 June, they took trains to Steenbeque, 35 kilometres from Fleurbaix, arriving on 26 June.

After settling in and continuing their training and planning for an upcoming attack, they were into the trenches for the first time on 11 July. The battalion strength was 979 soldiers. The original plan for an attack was on July 17th, but bad weather caused it to be postponed.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P03236.097

Captain Charles MILLS 1876-1937
[Source: AWM Collections, P03236.097]

For those lost so far from home.

Charles was in the front line on the 19th and at 4.00pm the 31st were in position for their attack. Their assault began at 5.58pm, with four waves of men going over the parapet. According to the battalion's war diaries (AWM),

"Just prior to launching the attack, the enemy bombardment was hellish, and it seemed as if they knew accurately the time set."

The pre-battle bombardment had a significant impact on German first line trenches and the 31st quickly advanced to the second line, which was mostly ditches filled with water. Even with the initial support, they remained under heavy artillery from both sides.

Unfortunately, with the speed of their advances, 'friendly' artillery fire caused a large number of Australian casualties. They were able to take out a German machine gun, but they were being seriously enfiladed from their left flank. Fighting continued throughout the night, with heavy firing from concealed machine guns from Delangre Farm and houses.

Private Albert Porter (1088) said he was bombing with Mills for the best part of the night and he confirmed that they had advanced into the German trenches.

At first light on the morning of 20 July 1916, German soldiers had showered Charles' position with grenades before rushing in from the flanks, firing their rifles from the hip and overwhelming the soldiers. Charles' right hand had been lacerated during the attack.

A German NCO stopped his men on the parapet, jumped into the waterlogged ditch and seized Mills by his wounded hand. 'Why did you not put up your hands, officer?' he asked.

The rest of the 31st were out of the trenches by the end of the day on the 20th. The head-count was just 512 soldiers of the 979 who began the battle.

After the battle, Charles was pronounced "missing", as many had reported him as wounded and/or dead. As Private Patrick Cloutt (1998) and Private John Bradford (3762) had stated,

"No bodies were brought in; he was never seen again."



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

A01549

A German photograph of Captain Charles Mills, 31st Battalion (left) in conversation with Hauptmann Fritz Lübke (taking notes) at the Neuohof farmhouse on 20 July 1916. The diary containing British XI Corps' order for the Fromelles attack can be seen in Mills' tunic pocket.

[[Source: AWM Collections A01549]]

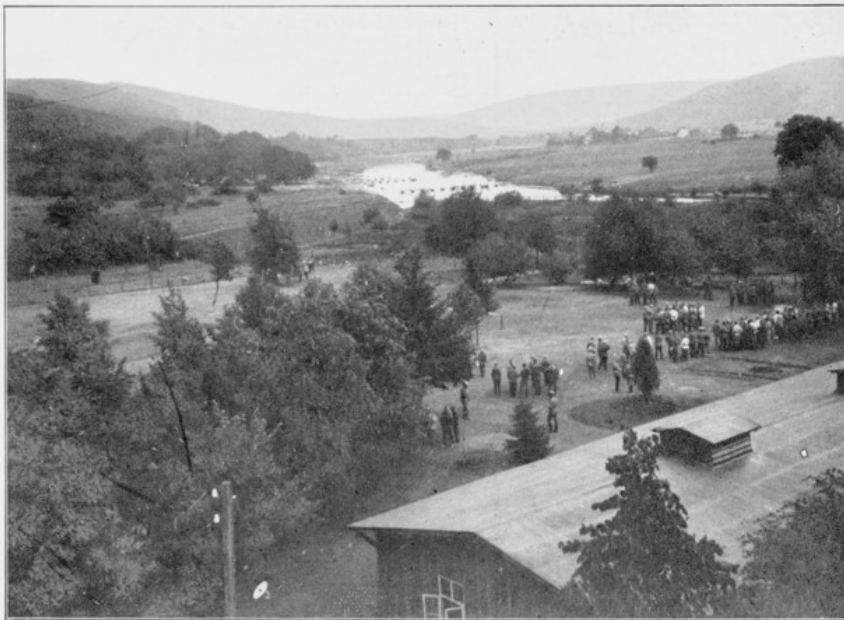
For those lost so far from home.

[[Source: AWM: Australian Red Cross Wounded and Missing Files, Captain Charles MILLS, page 11]]

Capture

As the fighting came to an end, Mills and other prisoners were escorted along a communication trench to a farmhouse that was a collecting station for prisoners of war. A German medical officer took care of the walking wounded and Charles had his hand cleaned and bandaged.

As part of his interrogation by a German intelligence officer, Mills had to turn out the contents of his pockets, a photograph and a diary. The diary was of particular interest because it gave an account of the 31st Battalion's activities since it arrived in France from Egypt just a few weeks earlier. The diary also contained a copy of the orders issued by British XI Corps headquarters that revealed to the Germans that the Fromelles attack was nothing more than a feint.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

Blick über den Lagerhof.

A01701

Prisoners in the grounds of the Hannoversch Münden Officers' lager (camp); this is an authorised postcard for sending to friends. In the background is the Weser River, showing construction and material for bridging the river and training purposes, used by the Germans.

[[Source: AWM Collections, A01701]]

Despite knowing the British intent behind the attack, German commanders decided to keep its troops in the Lille area.

While the discovery of the orders had no bearing on German activities in the area, it shows that divulging operational information to the enemy, either willingly or unintentionally, was a reality of captivity in the First World War. Charles later confessed that it was 'a serious error of judgement' to allow such an important document to fall into their hands.

The material above was largely

sourced from Aaron Pegram's extensive research for his ANU thesis, "Surviving the War - Australian Prisoners on the Western Front 1916-18."

A Prisoner, but Already Supporting Finding the Missing Six months after his capture, Charles was at a camp for Allied officers at Hannoversch Münden in Lower Saxony.

While here, he wrote to his commanding officer describing life as a prisoner of war. 'Our daily life is much as we make it. Daily routine is in our own hands, and except for a roll call at 9.30 morning and night, we are left alone, which suits us very well'.

For those lost so far from home.

He spent his days in captivity reading, exercising, learning French and German, and enjoying walks beyond the prison walls. His captors were 'uniformly courteous' and the food was decent and better than expected. His greatest concern was the uncertainty of the war's duration.

'Time hangs! Day after day with absolutely nothing to do! I have led a busy and active life and find this enforced lack of occupation very trying'.

[Source: AWM, Mary Chomley papers, 1DRL/0615 - Letter from Capt Charles Mills, 31 Bn, to Maj James Coglein]

As result of his wounds, Charles was among the first Australians exchanged for internment, in Germany and Switzerland. To be transferred, the wounded had to have a disability that would negate their further military service or interned over 18 months.

He was able to have surgery on his hand and he wrote on 8 February 1918,

"I am writing with left hand. Right hand operated on last Thursday. All O.K. Stones and Wells getting on alright too."

[Source: AWM: Australian Red Cross Wounded and Missing Files – MILLS, Charles, page 3]

Charles spent the remaining twelve months of the War in internment camps as the senior representative of approximately 100 interned Australians. During this time, he was dedicated to finding missing members of the AIF whose names appeared on prisoner of war lists from Berlin and relaying their whereabouts to London via the International Red Cross Office in Berne. This was the beginning of his Red Cross Wounded and Missing information exchanges.

After Armistice, he arrived in England on 11 January, 1919.

Charles' Quest for the Missing Prisoners of War

There were huge post-war efforts to locate the graves of missing Australian soldiers and prisoners. All told, there were 3,848 members of the AIF who surrendered to German forces in the fighting on the Western Front and all but 327 survived. [Source: Aaron Pegram "Surviving the War - Australian Prisoners on the Western Front 1916-18"] Instead of returning home, Charles stayed in Europe and was seconded to work with the Australian and International Red Cross to locate the missing Australian prisoners of



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P03236.150

Charles Mills recovering during his Switzerland internment.

[[Source: AWM collections, P0326.150]]

For those lost so far from home.

war. The Germans often had given a 'soldier's grave' to Australian soldiers who had died in their custody. The graves were as well tended as those of the German soldiers, 'engraved with the names and regiments of those who lay there, exactly in the same manner as the graves of each German soldier.' [Source: *"The last Shilling"* A history of repatriation in Australia – Clem Lloyd, Jacqui Rees]

However, the prison camps were spread all over Germany making Captain Mills' task a daunting one.

Accordingly, Charles then went back to Germany and spent months travelling across the country locating and photographing graves of Australians who had died as prisoners or were missing. His progress was often reported in the newspapers back home.

Incredibly, amidst all the turmoil caused by the war he found all but two of the Australian soldiers.

His quest complete, Charles finally came home to Australia in December 1919. His efforts were well recognized and, just after he returned to Australia, he was appointed to the Order of the British Empire.

Post War

Charles' appointment with the AIF ended on 15 March 1920, but he rejoined the Royal Australian Engineers at Army Headquarters as the Area Officer of Tasman Area and Quartermaster of Citizen Force Units, Quartermaster/Hon Captain.

Charles also became a well-known lecturer on his experiences in Germany, once noting that "he believed their hopes of world dominion were far from shattered by their defeat." [Source: HAWTHORN BRANCH A.N.A, (1920, July 23). *The Reporter* (Box Hill, Vic. : 1889 - 1925), p. 3. Retrieved March 25, 2022, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article257154467>]

In his personal life, Charles suffered numerous tragedies. He lost his oldest son Alex in 1927, his wife Jessie in 1929 and his oldest daughter Florence in 1936, but he still had his youngest daughter, Glennie. Charles and Glennie shared a "dramatic voyage" between Australia and England in 1935 as two of the eight passengers on the barque *C B Pedersen*, one of the last few windjammers sailing that route.

Funeral of Lieut.-Col. Mills

The funeral of Lieut.-Colonel Charles Mills, yesterday, was attended by members of the 31st Battalion, A.I.F., of which Lieut.-Colonel Mills was a company commander during the war, and representatives of the Australian permanent military forces. The pall-bearers were Colonel J. McArthur, Lieut.-Colonel W. W. Tracy, Lieut.-Colonel A. E. Morgan, Major B. Wilson, Captain J. G. Moylan, Lieutenant H. A. Wainwright, and Messrs. A. Lamborn and H. R. Newall, representing the 31st Battalion, A.I.F. The Base Commandant was represented by Major J. S. Tait and Captain Cook. Services were conducted at the funeral chapel and at the Melbourne Crematorium, Fawkner, by the Rev. Hugh Kelly.

The arrangements were made by H. King and Sons, Lennox street, Richmond.

News report on the funeral of Lieutenant-Colonel Mills

For those lost so far from home.

The *C B Pedersen* had held the record sailing speed from Australia to Britain for ten years.

Charles passed away suddenly at the Epworth Hospital, Richmond VIC on 21 April 1937. He was 60 years old. His remains were cremated at the Fawkner Crematorium.

The 31st Battalion was out in force to honour him at his burial.

Captain Charles Mills – a career soldier truly dedicated to his mates.

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SOME NEWS FROM OUR VICE PRESIDENT (RESEARCH), MARG O'LEARY

Hello everyone.

Wishing you some sunshine ... hopefully soon. Must acknowledge that between virus, floods and other more individual happenings, we have had ups and downs for quite a long time now.

We are very scattered across many states and regions. As a volunteer organisation, FAA can live and breathe through the wonderful voluntary work done by all.

Time for an update for the Fromelles story team, welcome to volunteer writer Michelle Coventry.

Genealogy: Firstly – the time for announcements on **Identifications from the past two years'** research is getting closer. Also, thanks to Royce for passing on genealogy to current families to story team, while all the information and family trail is focused.

Identifications 2022: Now we may find those identified are not among our 121* uploaded stories. So we might need a quick story or two created. We have no idea yet. So there might be a quick call for help when it happens.

We have about 500 stories in the wings.

Facebook: Bron Stanley is also continuing to add any news re stories to Facebook, so again, if someone has something for Facebook, please contact Bron or Geoffrey.

Compliments: We continue to receive complements for the stories and the website overall.

Positive feedback and practical support: Another outcome from the website stories is that if we write to family history groups or sources of information, libraries, universities, we are getting very positive offers of help and willingness for us to reprint, or use their docs with appropriate acknowledgement. Compliments came this week from ANU for Vicki Scanlan's organisation of sourcing and acknowledging. **Story writing and the website:** the website has led to an influx of stories from families.

In some cases, families have a part story and photos for us to put together. In others it is a major writing

For those lost so far from home.

and research task.

Thanks to Bob Griffith who has been helping with family-based stories by researching their military side and writing that up. Writers are making excellent use of family contacts.

Many families also include brothers and cousins. (Some as a surprise to the families) We can write siblings as one story, but more difficult for cousins - so generally cousins at Fromelles will have their own (overlapping) story.

The Army. The National Archives (NAA) records in Canberra, have a long waiting time for people to book to visit their viewing room to research documents not yet digitised. We were given an 8 week wait for our volunteer Dale to view POW docs that are still paper files.

Royce suggested asking Army and behold, they are now being digitised! All the states and some overseas places have our people who can do a lookup in a local area.

Geoffrey is helping to sort out a name error on a local war memorial for a family.

Looking forward to any ideas or feedback please.

Cheers

Marg O'Leary

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WE ALWAYS WELCOME MORE VOLUNTEER FAMILY RESEARCHERS AND GENEALOGISTS

If you are able to help in any way to identify the remaining 84 soldiers whose remains were reburied at Fromelles (Pheasant Wood) Military Cemetery, please do so. We particularly need assistance for people with relatives who served in the 32nd, 54th and 30th Battalions. You can use the 'Contact Us' box, or send an email to either royce@fromelles.info (genealogical research) or to geoffrey@fromelles.info.

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AS ALWAYS, WE STILL NEED FUNDS TO KEEP IT ALL AVAILABLE FOR ONGOING ACCESS

You probably already know our Association runs on the smell of an oily rag. Nobody draws funds from our Association. We always need funds to pay for Birth and Death Certificates for example. And our website hosting will continue to cost into the future. So if you can assist financially, our work will continue. Donations are always appreciated, and funds can be deposited to our bank account as follows:-

For those lost so far from home.

- Westpac Bank, Goulburn
- Fromelles Association of Australia
- BSB: 032 721 A/c No. 310953

Please drop us an email to make sure we know who it was that deposited into our account.

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CAN YOU HELP US TO IDENTIFY THE SEATED SOLDIER??

We are trying to identify the soldier who is seated?

Charles Henry Nash, is standing. At Gallipoli, Charles was with the 7th Battalion, and then in France, he was with the 59th. Not sure when or where the photo was taken, but most likely in France as he is wearing Corporal stripes. He was promoted to Corporal when he arrived there in 1916 after Gallipoli and later promoted to Sergeant about August 1916. Charles Nash was KIA 1 November, 1916. Any help in identifying the mystery man sitting is much appreciated.

If you can identify the seated soldier, please contact Royce Atkinson via email to royce@fromelles.info or royceatkinson@hotmail.com.

Thank you.



AND ON ANZAC DAY, MAY WE PAUSE TO REMEMBER THOSE WHO SERVED IN ALL WARS



While Rosemary is traditionally worn on Anzac Day, the Poppy is also a sign of our remembrance.

[Picture: Daily Telegraph, from Google Images]

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ust to recap, contact details for our committee are as follows:-

President: Geoffrey Benn—email: geoffrey@fromelles.info

Address: 13 Bromfield Avenue, Toongabbie 2146

Vice-President: Marg O'Leary (Research) - email:

marg@fromelles.info

Vice-President: Ann Watson (Research & Asst. Treasurer) -

email: ann@fromelles.info

Treasurer: Bill Irvine—email: bill@fromelles.info

Secretary: Jim Smith—jim@fromelles.info

Membership to Bill Irvine, at 41 Chantilly Court,

Goulburn 2580



[Picture: Altona Laverton Historical Society, from Google Images.]

For those lost so far from home.