



## Missing Soldiers of Fromelles Discussion Group



**PHOTOGRAPH: 2639 PTE. CECIL WOODS GIBLETT**



**PHOTOGRAPH: 2619 Edward Walter Giblett, 8<sup>th</sup> Field Company Engineers, 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Division.**

Registering with the Fromelles Discussion Group in early September 2008 Terry Erbs also expressed interest in the Battle of Fromelles as his great uncle, Cecil Woods Giblett, was reported MIA on the evening of the 19/20<sup>th</sup> July 1916. Lost during the ill-conceived attack at Fromelles, Cecil's family wasn't to know his fate until well after the event, when another member of the 59<sup>th</sup> Battalion, known to his parents, sent word describing the circumstances of his tragic death. Like many of the missing and unidentified commemorated at VC Corner Australian Cemetery and Villiers-Bretonneux, Cecil Giblett was killed during the Battle of Fromelles which decimated the 8<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Brigades and had a crippling effect on the 5<sup>th</sup> Division until it was reformed months later. Although Private Cecil Giblett does not seem to appear on the list compiled by the German burial party after the battle and upon which the Australian and British governments place so much trust, there is a possibility however slight, that he may be in the recently discovered mass grave at Pheasant Wood, together with other soldiers who fell in No-Man's-Land and who were not able to be identified when being interred.

### **2639 PTE. CECIL WOODS GIBLETT**

*(Background provided by Terry Erbs to supplement his Guest Book entries.)*

On the 29<sup>th</sup> August 1917 the Commanding Officer of the 59<sup>th</sup> Battalion AIF held a COURT OF ENQUIRY into the reported death of 2639 Private Cecil Woods Giblett, 59<sup>th</sup> Battalion. Convened "In The Field" in France. The COURT concluded Private Giblett had been KILLED IN ACTION on 19<sup>th</sup> July, 1916 and a report of death was duly submitted to and received by the ANZAC SECTION, 3<sup>rd</sup> Echelon, GHQ—British Expeditionary Force on 12<sup>th</sup> September, 1917.

2639 Private Cecil Giblett, son of Albert and Elizabeth Giblett (née Allen), of Trafalgar East, Victoria and grandson of Samuel Eason and Jane Giblett (née Walters) was 22 years old when he signed his Attestation Papers on 19<sup>th</sup> July 1915. He was a farmer, of the Methodist faith and his medical records described him as,

height five feet six inches, blue-eyed and fair complexion. Exactly one year later he would perish at the Battle of Fromelles.

He joined the 6<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements, 23<sup>rd</sup> Battalion on the 13<sup>th</sup> October, 1915 at Broadmeadows and sailed from Melbourne aboard Ship A38, HMAT "Ulysses" on the 27<sup>th</sup> October 1915 to Egypt, eventually to join the newly formed 59<sup>th</sup> Battalion.

The 59<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been raised in Egypt on the 21<sup>st</sup> February 1916, as part of the 15<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 5<sup>th</sup> Australian Division AIF. Approximately half the soldiers of the new 59<sup>th</sup> Battalion were the veterans from the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion, who had fought at Gallipoli. The rest of the Battalion, including Cecil, were reinforcements from Australia and reflecting the composition of the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion, were predominately men from rural Victoria.

Cecil joined 'D' Company, 59<sup>th</sup> Battalion at Duntroon Plateau, Egypt on the 21<sup>st</sup> of April 1916, according to great nephew Terry Erbs. He fell sick on the 20<sup>th</sup> May 1916 and spent a week recovering at the 15<sup>th</sup> Field Hospital at Ferry Post before the 59<sup>th</sup> boarded the "Kinfauns Castle" at Alexandria, Egypt on the 18<sup>th</sup> June 1916 and sailed for France, disembarking at Marseilles on the 29<sup>th</sup> June 1916. Less than a month after arriving in France Cecil was listed as "missing in action" and presumed buried in No-Man's-Land.

He had been part of the attack at Fromelles on the evening of the 19<sup>th</sup> July when he met his end according to an informant, Private Leslie Edward Tatterson. Giblett and Tatterson belonged to the same company and when later asked about Cecil, Leslie reported that he'd been killed when "the whole of our line was badly cut up."

Cecil was closely related to several other soldiers who served and suffered or died with the AIF in France, The relatives listed by his father Albert, when completing a request for Particulars Required for the Roll of Honour of Australia in the Memorial War Museum were Norman Allen, Ralph Allen and Frank Giblett, all of whom were cousins of the deceased and part of his extended family. This highlights the devastating impact the Great War had across Australia and particularly upon the social and economic fabric of the nation, as there were few families not touched by grief.

Nearly a year after Cecil's death, his grieving father Albert Giblett, wrote a letter to The Officer-in-Charge, Base Records Office, Melbourne on April 9, 1917 seeking further news and asking:

*"Sir, Would you kindly inform me if any of the personal effects of, Private C. W. Giblett, No 2639, D Company, 59<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry, A.I.F., reported missing 19 July 1916, have come to hand. I was notified that payment of allotment would cease from the 8<sup>th</sup> Nov 1916 of C. W. Giblett (Now Deceased) & I was informed that I would have to communicate with your Office re personal effects, we have received no notification from the Department as to how they know this soldier is among the dead. I think his parents are entitled to know wether (sic) it is just official notice through lapse of time, or if they have information they have omitted to send us, I should very much like to know if any information regarding him has come along, & I don't know who I should write to, to get it."*

The Army promptly replied to Albert Giblett's letter on the 13<sup>th</sup> April 1917, stating that they had no further information, nor any personal effects. After the cessation of hostilities, the Graves Services Unit wrote to Albert on the 20<sup>th</sup> July 1921 stating that they were unable to locate Cecil's last resting place and enquired if Albert had received any information that might assist them. Albert wrote back to the Army on 17<sup>th</sup> August 1921 that he had received word from a young man, Percy Freckleton, who said he was only two yards from Cecil when he fell. According to Freckleton, and noted by Cecil's father Albert on the form returned to Victoria Barracks Melbourne, Cecil was mortally wounded "near some stream or ditch & it was very steep & anybody helpless would just roll into the water & of course in running water would be carried away." Percy was a state school teacher and a reliable witness who hailed from Rokeby near Warragul in Gippsland. He and Cecil had occupied the same tent the night before the battle and were well known to each other before leaving for the front.

A postscript to the Cecil Woods Giblett story according to Terry, is that his grandmother, Cecil's sister, Holly Estalla Hucker (née Giblett), named her only son, Cecil Albert George Hucker, in memory of her brother lost at Fromelles. Born in Portarlington, VX 118199 Cecil Albert George Hucker joined the Citizen Military Forces on the 13<sup>th</sup> October 1941 in Trafalgar, Victoria and subsequently the 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF on the 13<sup>th</sup> November, 1942 in Port Moresby, Papua, serving with the 2/2 Australian Infantry Battalion before being discharged on the 1<sup>st</sup> November 1945.



Terry Erbs standing outside the James Menz Club at Nui Dat, Phuoc Tuy Province, South Vietnam.

3045 Freckleton was 21 years 9 months, of the Church of England faith, when he enlisted in 1915, joined the 10<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements, 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion, on the 29<sup>th</sup> September 1915, before transferring to the 59<sup>th</sup> Battalion at Tel-el-Kebir Egypt on 26<sup>th</sup> February 1916, after which he served with the Australian Army Pay Corps. Percy was wounded during the Battle of Fromelles, after which he suffered shell shock and when discharged from Wimereux and No. 1 Convalescent Depot, he was returned to his unit where he was once again wounded in action. He was discharged as medically unfit from the AIF on the 17<sup>th</sup> July 1919, after gaining promotion to the rank of Acting Sergeant with the Australian Army Pay Corps. The appointment was made on the 25<sup>th</sup> March 1919 whilst Percy was on Transport Duty aboard the 'Karoa' returning to Australia.

3458 Private Ralph Sinclair Allen was born in Portarlington, the son of John and Isabella Allen née Sinclair of "Stanmore", Portarlington, Victoria, Cecil Giblett's cousin. Ralph enlisted aged 19 years at Geelong, 20<sup>th</sup> July 1915. He left Melbourne aboard HMHT "Afric", 5<sup>th</sup> January 1916 as part of the 8<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements, 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, transferred to the 57<sup>th</sup> Battalion in Egypt on 23/2/1916 and the 58<sup>th</sup> Battalion on 15/3/1916. He sailed from Alexandria, Egypt aboard HMT "Transylvania", landing in Marseilles France, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1916. The Court of Enquiry on the 1<sup>st</sup> September 1917 found he had been KIA at 6 p.m. 19 July 1916, the same night as Cecil, during the charge on the German trenches at Fleurbaix. The 58<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been billeted in

the village of "Sailly" prior to going in the line. He, like Cecil, is commemorated at VC Corner Australian Cemetery Memorial at Fromelles.



**PHOTOGRAPH:** A cousin of Cecil Woods Giblett, Frank Thomson Giblett was initially rejected as being unfit for military service, but eventually joined the 8th Battalion. Frank was killed in the vicinity of the village of Vieux Berguin, France, possibly in the Defence of Nieppe Forest during the Battle of Hazebrouck, which was the third phase of the Battle of the Lys.

5683 Frank Thomson Giblett, was born in Fitzroy, of the Presbyterian faith. He attempted to enlist in the AIF on the 18<sup>th</sup> September 1914 but was not accepted on the grounds of his lack of height. Like his cousin, Cecil, he gave his occupation as farmer and after a second attempt to enlist at Ararat on the 30<sup>th</sup> August 1915 was accepted by the Army. He sailed from Melbourne aboard Ship A33, HMAT "Ayrshire" on the 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1916 to Egypt and eventually France. He served with the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion and was KIA on 14 April 1918, according to the AWM 145, Roll of Honour cards and his cemetery details indicate a last resting place of 26 Villers Bretonneux, France. His War Grave Register Notes reveal he was aged 23, the son of Elijah Edward (Civil Servant) and Isabella Annie Giblett, of Ford Street, Beechworth, Victoria. Like Cecil's father Albert, Elijah was a son of Samuel Eason Giblett and Jane Giblett [née Walters].

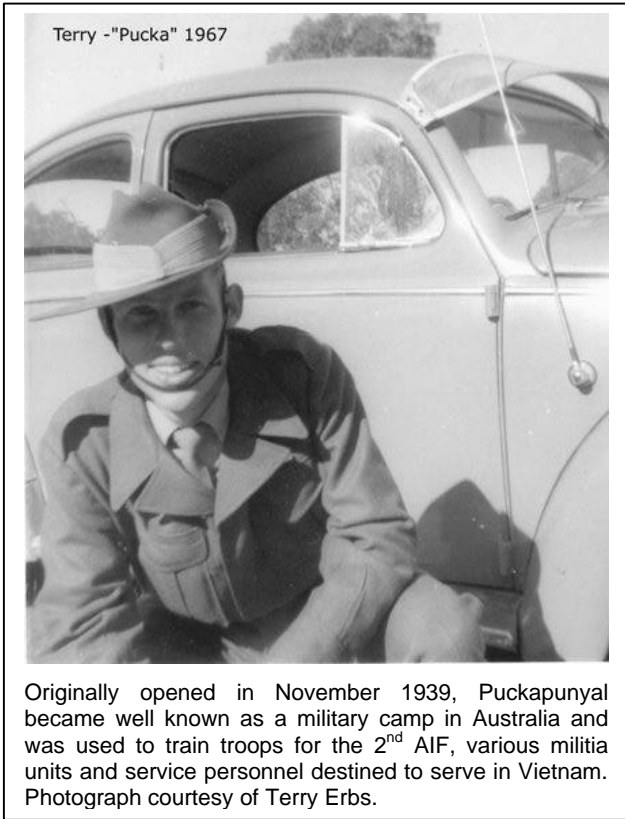
324 John Norman Allen, the other cousin mentioned by Albert Giblett, was of son of William Henry and Margaret Allen [née Higgins] Drysdale, Victoria and baptized a Presbyterian and listed

his occupation as fisherman. He had served three years with No. 1 Company, Australian Garrison Artillery before enlisting for the "Great War" on the 9<sup>th</sup> January 1915. Aged 28 years, he joined B Company, of the newly formed, 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion on the 1<sup>st</sup> May, 1915 and sailed from Melbourne aboard H.M.A.T. "Ulysses" on the 8<sup>th</sup> May 1915. He was to be part of the MEF on the Gallipoli Peninsula from September till the withdrawal in December 1915. The 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion then sailed from Alexandria Egypt on the 19<sup>th</sup> March 1916 and landed at Marseilles on the 26<sup>th</sup> March 1916, to join the BEF in France. In the units' first major action in France, John was reported MIA at Pozieres on the 5<sup>th</sup> August, 1916, On the 26<sup>th</sup> August 1916 it was recorded that he was mentioned for "Good & Gallant Conduct in the recent hard fighting round Pozieres."

John Norman Allen's remains were found by farmers, together with seven other bodies of Australian soldiers of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, in an isolated grave near Poziers. His Red Cross Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau file shows that John and the others had been buried by a shell burst in the trench they were occupying. Allen had been acting as a stretcher bearer and on the previous night he'd refused to go to the dressing station even though he had been wounded in the head. In the letter from Base Records dated 19<sup>th</sup> March 1931, which accompanied Johns' identity disc, it said

that the disc had been recovered by the Imperial War graves Commission at the time of his re-interment in Serre Road Cemetery No. 2.

Another cousin not mentioned by Albert Giblett was 2619 Sapper Edward Walter Giblett, Section 4, 8<sup>th</sup> Field Company Engineers, 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Division. He was a railway employee and nearly twenty three when he enlisted in 1915, having spent four years as a volunteer cadet before his initial posting to 8<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements, 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion. He served in Gallipoli and France and before returning to Australia in 1919. Edward was the son of Elijah and Isabella Giblett and brother to 5683 Frank Thomson Giblett.



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Like his father Harry Erbs, who served during WW 2 in the Middle East and Pacific WW2 and his WW 1 relatives mentioned in this contribution, Terry has also served in Australia's military forces, as an artillery surveyor in South Vietnam 1968/1969. After completing his national service, Terry resumed his career with the Bureau of Meteorology. He attended the Gallipoli Anzac Day Dawn Service in 2002 and plans to journey to the Western Front, to visit Villers-Bretonneux, Fromelles , VC Corner and to place a poppy on their graves.

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