

## CYRIL FOREMAN'S STORY



Thebarton, South Australia: twentieth of July, 1898. A baby boy is born, welcomed by the Foreman family – *his* family. There is a mother, Elizabeth, and a father, George. There is nine-year-old Frank, three-year-old George (known to everyone as Raymond) and two sisters, Mabel and the eldest, Beatrice. This is the day that Cyril William Ernest Foreman is born. Their family unit is complete, seven sunny South Australians.

Nineteen years, eleven months and eighteen days later, the only the two sisters remain. On the eighth of July, 1918, Cyril is killed in action on a humid day on the battlefields of northern France.

Approximately one month after this, Mabel, the younger of the two remaining Foremans (although she is now a Tyrrell), receives a parcel from France containing an identity disc, a wallet, letters, photos, a belt, a safety razor, a mirror, a metal chain, 'housewife' – a small sewing kit - a purse, some coins, buttons and a key. These items are the belongings of her late brother Cyril. These belongings, perhaps they make her cry, but these belongings are the symbol of the Anzac spirit, not only of her baby brother, but of the two older brothers, and of *every* man and woman who served on the Western Front in the First World War.

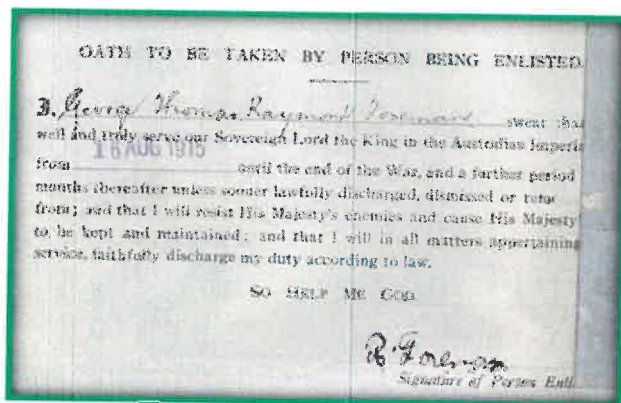
A family of seven, reduced to two. What is their story?

The parents had passed away some time earlier, and the five children were on their own. As of August 1915, Frank (aged 26) was working as a blacksmith, Raymond (aged 20) a coach-

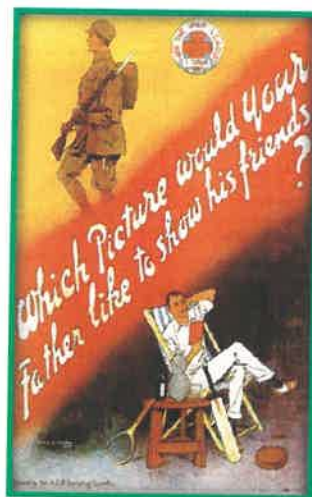
builder, and Cyril (aged 17) a brass-finisher. Beatrice was married to a lovely Mr Lang and was living in Hindmarsh, and Mabel had recently married Mr Tyrrell, with whom she resided in Parkside.

War had broken out exactly one year earlier, and at this time, there was much enthusiasm about supporting Britain. The Anzacs were not experiencing military success at Gallipoli, but *were* establishing an infectious keenness and pride of 'our men in the war' and the 'Anzac spirit.'

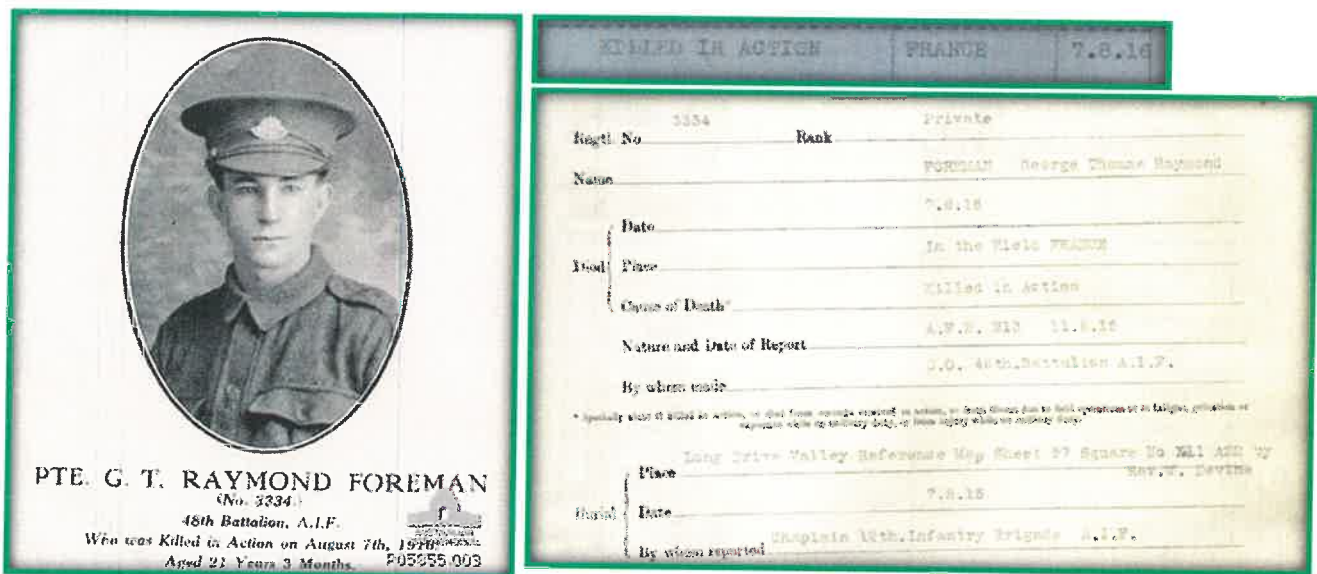
On the sixteenth of August, 1915, 'the middle brother', Raymond, was the first of the Foremans to enlist. He departed Australia in October of that year as part of the 11<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements, bound for Tel-El-Kebir in Egypt.



A few months later, just after his twenty-seventh birthday, Frank, the eldest brother, signed up. Perhaps he felt the influence of growing social pressures to enlist – or maybe he was affected by a propaganda poster, calling all men to 'do their duty'.



Frank left for England on August 28<sup>th</sup>, 1916. Just three weeks earlier (on August 7<sup>th</sup>), Raymond had been killed in the battle of Pozieres, one of 598 Australian casualties in that one day. On Frank's embarkation date, the family in Adelaide may not yet have heard of his death, and if they had, it would have been news very fresh in their minds. So, just like that, the Foreman family was now very different – Bea, Mabel and Cyril in Adelaide; Raymond dead and buried on the other side of the world – and Frank, on a ship to Plymouth to begin his war journey, just like his younger brother.



Cyril, still in his job as brass-finisher, had only just turned eighteen at this time. His sisters may or may not have been keen for him to enlist: On the one hand, he was their baby brother. With Raymond dead and Frank far away, he was a comforting presence. However, maybe the sisters did want their brother to join the others in the war effort which involved so many young men.

Cyril eventually enlisted on April 30<sup>th</sup>, 1917. He was allotted to the 5<sup>th</sup> Pioneers Unit and trained in Melbourne until October 30<sup>th</sup>, when he departed Australia aboard the HMAT Aeneas. He was now 3839 Private C.W.E Foreman. He was five feet nine inches tall, with grey eyes, light brown hair and a 'fresh' complexion, eighteen years and ten months old.



Two days after Christmas, 1917, 3839 Private Foreman disembarked his ship at Devonport in the United Kingdom. He marched into the Sutton Veny Camp. Three days later, he was transferred to the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Battalion. He resided with other Anzacs at the nearby Codford training camp until April 1<sup>st</sup>, when he travelled to the battlefields in France.

1.4.18. Proc. Oisans to France via Dover ex 15th Tug. Bn. Codford  
to reinforce 48th Bn. A.D. LON. 31/5-18.

Cyril was 'taken on strength' of the 48<sup>th</sup> Battalion Infantry on the 13<sup>th</sup> of April - he became a member of this battalion, and began serving with them



On the tenth of June, 1918, Cyril's eldest brother Frank was killed in action, aged 29. He was killed in the third battle of Morlancourt, while serving with the 27<sup>th</sup> Battalion. This was a successful attack, but it came at a cost of over 400 Australian lives, including Frank Foreman's. When his sisters back home heard the news, what were they thinking? Sadness, no doubt, at the second of three brothers, killed on the other side of the world. But they would have known his role in fighting for their country.

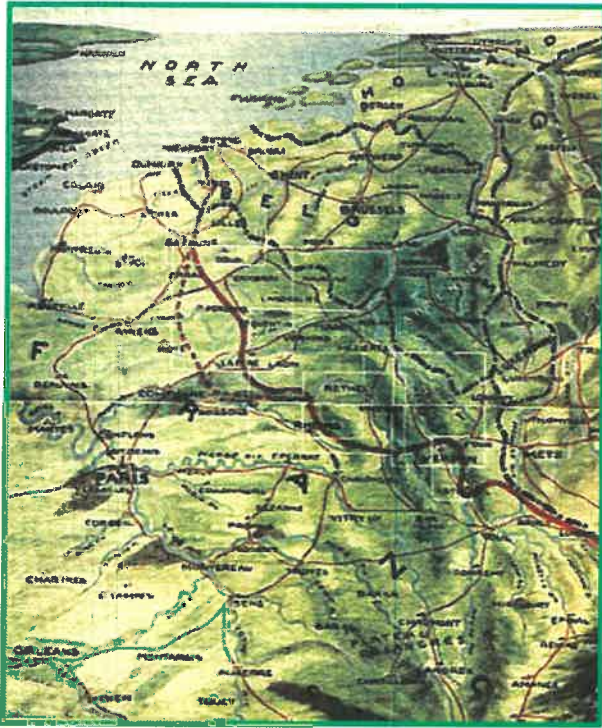


And then only Cyril remained. A part of the 48<sup>th</sup> Battalion in France, he was stationed predominantly north of the Somme River. For the spring of 1918, Cyril's battalion played a



crucial role in the blocking of the road into the town of Amiens in the German's Spring Offensive. Cyril Foreman was a part of this defence, one of the men who held off the opposition and helped to turn the war around.

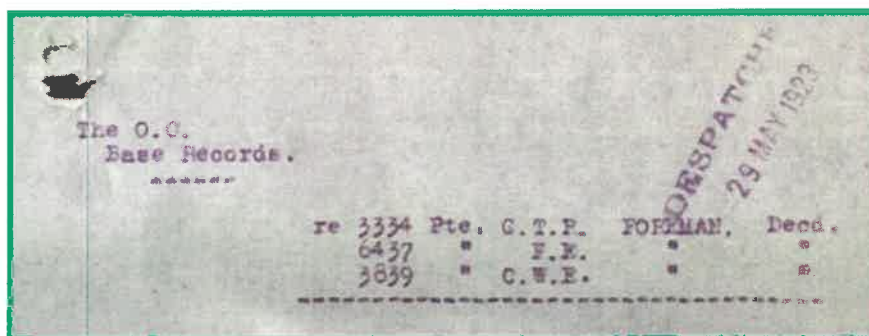
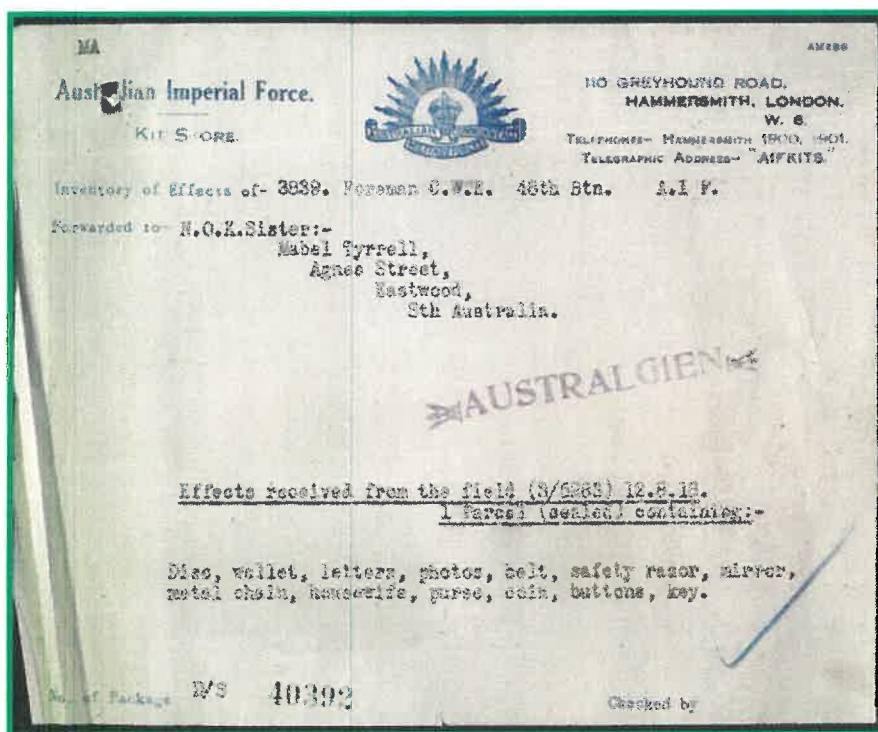
The battle of Hamel took place on the fourth of July, 1918. The 48<sup>th</sup> Battalion was, at this point, holding their line north of the Somme at Bouzincourt, about fifty kilometres from the site of the battle. They were involved in auxiliary action to the main battle.



On the eighth of July, still advancing his line against the Germans, Cyril Foreman was killed in action. He was probably killed very early in the morning, before sunrise, with the launching of an attack on the Germans. The exact circumstances of his death were not recorded, although the weather was 'close and muggy', with thunderstorms and rain marking the loss of life.



Cyril Foreman did not live to the end of the war. He missed out on the offensive victories of August 1918, his own battalion's decisive triumph at the battle of Amiens. However, it is accepted that Hamel was a turning-point in the war, and the soldiers knew that this victory was significant – Cyril Foreman would have died with some sense of satisfaction of the war he gave his life for having turned a corner in the right direction.



Mabel Tyrrell received the package of her youngest brother's belongings just over a month later, signifying the end of the Foreman line. Cyril was the last to be born and the last to die. He was killed in action. He did not die in a heroic feat worthy of a Victoria Cross, and he did not die in the middle of a large, crucial battle. But surely he did not die in vain. Cyril Foreman fought not only for the Mother Country, but also for Australia. He fought for his mates and family. The details of his character and personality as man and soldier are unknown, so it cannot be said that this man possessed 'the Anzac Spirit' by somehow

measuring his qualities of endurance, courage and mateship. However, there is plenty that *can* be said of this young man and, through him, of *every* man and woman who served on the Western Front in the First World War.

There are plenty of Western Front images that could display 'the Anzac Spirit'. Any deed that exemplifies bravery, courage, good humour, initiative or making the best of a bad situation is a personification of the Anzac Spirit. There is no historical evidence to prove that Cyril Foreman performed any of these *particular* feats. However, we know that Cyril fought on the Western Front as an Anzac, and for the same reasons that we honour the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, I see Cyril Foreman as a symbol for all the men who embodied the 'Anzac Spirit' and earned the Anzacs their reputation.

Upon enlistment, Cyril was the youngest of five siblings, who followed his two brothers into war. He was, at eighteen, little more than a Thebarton boy who had attended 'Currie Street School'. His parents were dead, and when he enlisted into the Australian Infantry Forces, one of his brothers had already been killed in action in France. To enlist under these circumstances was a courageous move – although there was social pressure to join the war effort, Cyril would have had a myriad of reasons to stay at home. He enlisted, trained and proceeded overseas to fight in France. We don't know much about young Cyril – but we know that he went, like so many other men, and fought bravely as an Anzac until his death.

**Private Cyril Walter Ernest Foreman, No. 3839: Anzac Soldier - *truly* deserving of that title.**