



Private David Donald BYRNE
1806 — 36th Battalion, 2nd Reinforcements & Australian Medical Corps

Born: 1888 Yeoval, registered Molong, NSW.

Next of Kin: Sister, Miss Cecilia Byrne, Thirroul, NSW.

Occupation: Labourer

District Connection: Yeoval & Cumnock

Enlistment Date: .20 Jan 1916 Liverpool, NSW.

Enlistment Age: 28yrs 11mths

Embarkation: 4 Sep 1916 - Sydney. *HMAT Port Sydney A15*

Served: Western front.

Fate: RTA 9 Dec 1918

Honour Boards: Yeoval Memorial Board, Yeoval School Board & Cumnock Memorial Gates.

Biography:

David Donald Byrne was born in Yeoval in 1888. His parents were Peter J Byrne and Isabella (nee Johnston) who were married in 1885 and registered in Molong, NSW. Their children, all born in Yeoval but registered in Molong, included: Ernest b1886; David b 1888; Cecelia b 1890; Isabel b 1895 d 1896; Peter b 1897; Belle b 1899; & Nina b 1902.

Peter Joseph Byrne worked as a labourer and played the violin at local social events. Isabella is not mentioned in local newspaper reports from 1910 and no further details of her are presently known.

Ernest and David both attended the Yeoval School, played cricket for their school and town and also participated in rabbit shooting drives to cull their numbers. David also played tennis and was a member of the Yeoval Tennis Club.

The Wellington Times - 29 Jan 1914, p5, stated: "Messrs E and D Byrne left for Dilga during the week, where they intend to take up farming on a larger scale." Dilga is a small farming area between Cumnock and Baldry. However, by the 1916 Electoral Roll for Cumnock & District, they are listed as being back in Yeoval, along with their father:- Peter Joseph Byrne, Yeoval, labourer; David Donald Byrne, Yeoval, labourer; and Ernest Hector Byrne, Buckinbah, farmer.

David Byrne enlisted in the Australian Imperial Forces (AIF) at Liverpool, on 20 January 1916 along with two other Yeoval lads, Thomas West and Arthur Brown. His medical examination stated that he was 28 years 11 months old, 5 feet 10½ inches tall, a labourer and his next of kin was his sister, Cecilia Byrne of Thirroul. He had hazel eyes, light brown hair, a dark complexion and was stated to be of the Church of England religious denomination. He was initially allocated to the 2nd Battalion, but was soon transferred to the newly formed 36th Battalion based in Newcastle.

Dave, along with Tom West and Arthur (Sandy) Brown returned to Yeoval on leave on Thursday 13 April 1916, and were entertained at a farewell social in Cavanagh's Hall on Friday. It was reported by *The Wellington Times* - 20 Apr 1916, p6, that "the large crowd, including representatives from all surrounding districts, bore splendid testimony of the popularity of the departing heroes. Mr W. R. Glasson presented the three soldiers with a wristlet watch as a small token in recognition of their response to the call of King and country. Mr Glasson expressed the fervent hope they might be spared to see their old home once again. The National Anthem was then played, and dancing resumed until daybreak when everyone crossed hands in the singing of Auld Lang Syne. Dave performed a vocal item during the night, while Miss T. Whittaker and H. Wilkin gave exhibitions of step dancing."

The Molong Express & Western District Advertiser (WDA) - 22 Apr 1916, p8, reported that: "Ptes. D Byrnes, T. West, A. Brown (from Yeoval) and H. and L Cooper (from Obley) were conveyed by cars to Molong by J. Whittaker and H. Miller, and caught the train for Sydney after final leave." David Byrne and Arthur Brown were the only two of these five soldiers to survive the war and return to Australia.

Dave sailed overseas on 4 Sep 1916 on the HMAT *Port Sydney* and arrived in Plymouth, England on 29 Oct 1916. He was deployed to the “nursery sector” in northern France on 20 Dec 1916 with the rest of the 36th Battalion. His friend Pte Thomas West - 893 36th Btn, was KIA at Armentières, on 21 Jan 1917. He was 28 yrs old.

The Wellington Times - 8 Mar 1917, p3, reported that “Pte David Byrnes was wounded in France and his many friends in the Molong district wish him a speedy recovery.” His service record indicates he was wounded on 31 Jan 1917, but does not state how and did not attend a military hospital. However Pte Byrne suffered an attack of lumbago and scabies on 15 March and treated in Field and Auxillary medical facilities and did not return to his unit until 29 Mar 1917. Two weeks later he was sick in hospital again with myalgia (muscle pain) and rejoined his unit on 28 Apr 1917. .

It was relatively quiet during winter and early autumn, and the 36th Battalion bided its time manning the front line, exchanging artillery, mortar and sniper fire with the Germans and patrolling no man’s land at night. One patrol found two German bodies frozen into the ground.

On the 7 Jun 1917 19 mines were exploded at Hill 60 and other areas before the first day of the Battle of Messines, Belgium. The 36th Btn took part in this battle as part of the Australian 3rd Division. Dave received a gun shot wound to his head, left eye and a leg, while his “D” Company was being held in reserve. On the same day (7 June), his friend Cpl Henry Cooper - 723 ‘C’ Company, 36th Btn, was killed while carrying supplies to the front line. He was 23 years old. His brother L/Cpl Leslie Cooper - 725 36th Btn, was later KIA on 12 Oct 1917, at Passchendaele, Ypres. He was just 20 years old.

Dave was shipped off to the New Zealand Stationary Hospital, then to the 15th Casualty Clearing Station, next to the Canadian General Hospital in Étapes (France), and finally to Wandsworth Hospital in England on 16 Jun 1917.

Dave was attached for duty at 1st Australian Auxiliary Hospital (AAH) at Harefield in outer London on 25 Aug 1917. This hospital was located in a former stately home and accommodated 1,000 beds at its height of activity. He never rejoined his unit at the front, presumably due to his eye wound, however he did have another 6 week stint in hospital with Dhobi itch (*Tinea cruris*), which is a common type of contagious, superficial fungal infection of the groin region.

Pte James Thomas, in a letter to his mother Mrs. J. Thomas of Yeoval on 11 Nov 1917, said that “*Dave Byrnes and myself are being sent home*”. Although James arrived back in Australia in January 1918, Dave’s departure was delayed about a year as he remained on duty at the 1st AAH at Harefield, until he embarked on *SS Argyllshire* on 9 Dec 1918 on transport duty to return to Australia.

The arrival of the *SS Argyllshire* in Australia during the deadly Spanish influenza epidemic in 1919 resulted in great controversy. The ship had been quarantined at a number of ports enroute and had taken 2 months to complete the journey from England to Sydney. The government’s direction that it should be quarantined for a further 4 days in Sydney Harbour was the last straw for some soldiers, who were so close to a reunion with family and friends waiting on Woolloomooloo Wharf. About 40 soldiers commandeered landing boats on the *Argyllshire* and escaped quarantine on Sunday 9 Feb 1919. These soldiers were later recaptured and some court-martialled.

However, the troubles didn’t end there. The remainder of the 1,200 troops on the *Argyllshire* were landed at the quarantine station at North Head on Monday for an unspecified period of isolation due to the claimed discovery of an influenza case on board. On Tuesday, about 900 troops broke out of quarantine stating that the camp was unsatisfactory and they did not wish to be retained for an indefinite period. They argued that they had been in effective quarantine for the 2 months since they left England. They marched through the main gates into Manly, keeping in column and maintaining order.

The mutinous troops were brought by ferry steamer to Fort Macquarie, and from there they were allowed to march to the Sydney Cricket Ground. Police kept the soldiers from contacting civilians. A deputation from the soldiers met the State Ministers. A satisfactory period of quarantine was agreed and the men entered the Cricket Ground. An examination of the *Argyllshire*'s men on Friday morning showed no suspicious cases and their release was ordered.

The Wellington Times - 3 Mar 1919, p2, reported that "Pte. Byrnes was one of the soldiers on the *Argyllshire*, but remained on the ship." He was not one of the soldiers who escaped quarantine and was disembarked on 16 Feb 1919. He was discharged from the AIF on 17 Apr 1919. He was awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

The Molong Argus reported that Private David Byrne arrived in Molong on 27 Feb 1919 after doing "his bit" in France. The paper stated that "the brave soldier lad looks well, but unfortunately he has lost the left eye".

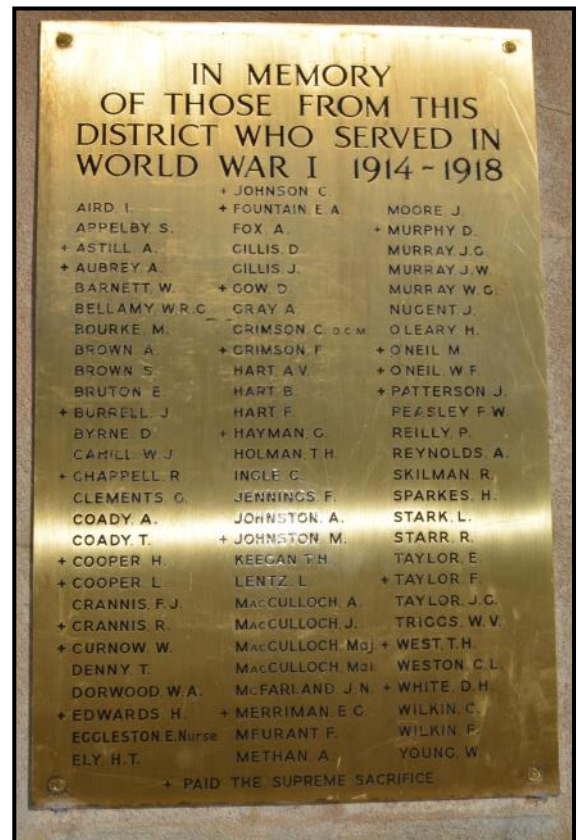
Dave reunited with his brother Ernest after the war, and both lived in Coonamble for at least the years between 1930 and 1949. The electoral rolls indicate they shared a house in Bimble Street for much of this time. Dave and Ernest's occupations were both recorded as labourers.

Dave had never married and moved back to Yeoval by 1954. Perhaps this move was prompted by Ernest's death in 1951 at Coonamble. Ernest's body was brought back to Yeoval for his funeral and was buried next to his father and son.

David Donald Byrne died in Yeoval on 7 October 1955, aged 66 or 67 years (although the Yeoval cemetery index gives his age as 61yrs, it wrongly supposed his birth year as 1894, instead of the registered birth year of 1888). He was buried in the Protestant portion of the Yeoval Cemetery.

1806 Pte David Byrne is listed in the book, "Wellington's Finest," pages 145, 146, written by Trevor Munro & Graeme Hoskin, published 2005.

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Above: Yeoval & Cumnock WW1 Honour plaques.

Right: Cumnock Memorial Gates