



## Private Herbert Kevin O'LEARY 282 — 1st Btn, B Company

**Born:** 8 Apr 1891, Cowra, NSW.

**Next of Kin:** Parents - Patrick and Mary O'Leary, Annadale.

**Occupation:** Telegraph Linesman

**District Connection:** Cumnock

**Enlistment Date:** 24 Aug 1914, Sydney.

**Enlistment Age:** 23 yrs.

**Embarkation:** 18 Oct 1914 - Sydney

**Served:** Gallipoli

**Fate:** RTA 24 Jun 1916

**Honour Boards:** Cumnock Memorial Gates

Unit colour patch



### Biography:

Herbert Kevin O'Leary was born on 8 Apr 1891 at Cowra. His parents were Mary and Patrick O'Leary. Patrick married Mary Markham on 7 Jan 1873, at Grenfell. They lived on land around Boorowa and had eight children: Bridget, Catherine, Honora (Nora), Frederick, Elizabeth, Patrick (born & died 1887), Herbert Kevin and Leslie.

Mary and Patrick were living at Annadale, a suburb in the inner west of Sydney in 1914. He was educated at the Brigidine Convent School, Cowra. On leaving school he was employed in the electrical branch of the General Post Office, Sydney. Herbert gave his occupation as a Telegraph Linesman when he enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force on 24 Aug 1914.

The WW1 Honour plaque lists O'Leary, H. The only connection we found he may have had with Cumnock was that he was working in our district before he enlisted. Telegraph lines were being constructed at Cumnock during 1913/14.

Herbert was 23 yrs, single, 6 feet 2 inches tall, had brown eyes, dark hair and complexion and was of the Roman Catholic religious denomination. After training at Kensington Racecourse, Pte O'Leary embarked on *HMAT Afric A19* with the 1st infantry Battalion. The *Afric* left Albany with the first convoy on 1st November. On board was also a kangaroo as a mascot (see photo). A newsletter was also published on board the *Afric* during the journey, called "The Kangaroo." The *Afric* arrived at Colombo on 15th November and left two days later, stopping at Aden on 25 November and Suez on 1 Dec 1915.

The *Afric* arrived at Port Said, Egypt on 3 Dec 1914 and Alexandria on 5 December. The 1st Btn were moved to Cairo by train and proceeded to Mena Camp where they spent the next four months training and undergoing route marches.

On 3rd April the 1st Btn left Mena for Cairo, and the following day took the train to Alexandria. They boarded a ship and on 6th and left Alexandria on 10th, arriving at Mudros on 12th, where over the next week, they practised embarking and disembarking from boats.

The 1st Btn took part in the ANZAC landing at Gaba Tepe on 25 Apr 1915 as part of the second and third waves. The Unit Commander Diaries record that 1st Btn disembarked at 6.15 am and landed without loss. Around 10 am the whole Btn was "thrown into the firing line and worked independently of Btn headquarters." Early May was spent digging trenches and dodging the Turkish shelling.

Pte O'Leary was wounded sometime between 1st - 5th May, with an unspecified injury and did not rejoin his unit until 15th June. On 28th June, Pte O'Leary was wounded again. After being treated on board a hospital ship, Pte Leary was transferred to No. 2 Australian General Hospital, Cairo, on 5th July. He was treated for a gunshot wound to the right kidney area and eventually pronounced unfit for service and embarked on 15th August per *HMAT Themistocles* at Suez for Australia, arriving on 18 Oct 1915.



Herbert O'Leary gave two interviews to reporters on convalescing at home in NSW. The first was reported in the *Western Champion* (Parkes) - 11 Nov 1915, p3 and the 2nd in *The Globe & Sunday Times War Pictorial* (Sydney) - 11 Dec 1915. Both interviews have inaccuracies, the first stating that Bert was a Corporal and that he was 6 feet 3 inches (sic 2 inches). It gives his account of his injuries as:

*"... Corporal O'Leary landed with the Australians at Gaba Tepe on April 25th, and was several times wounded, the last occasion being early in July [actually on 28 June], when he found himself a 'host' for 14 machine gun bullets at one shot. Eleven of these have been extracted, and when, after leaving the hospital in Egypt he was invalided to Australia it was expected that the remaining three would be removed by operation here. But the doctors have decided otherwise, and so the Corporal will carry them back to Gallipoli again."*

The 2nd report on 11 Dec stated about his injuries:

*"...Private O'Leary was hit 14 times. His chief injury was from a shot in the stomach [actually in his right kidney]. He had three shots in the hip and the rest were distributed. Yet so marvellous is the work of the surgeons that he is now as fit as he ever has been, and goes into camp tomorrow with the intention of returning as soon as he can get away..."*

Pte O'Leary embarked at Sydney on *RMS Mooltan* with the 1st Btn - 12th Reinforcements on 20 Dec 1915 and returned to Egypt. He reported for duty at Ghezireh on 15 Jan 1916 and for duty at Zeitoun on 28 January. On 21 Mar 1916, Pte O'Leary was attached to the Headquarters of 1st Infantry Brigade for duty in Field Post Office. On 22 Mar 1916, the 1st Btn and Pte O'Leary embarked at Alexander on *HT Grampian* and sailed for France and the Western Front, disembarking at Marseille on 28 March.

He was admitted with Influenza to 1st Field Ambulance and transferred to 7th Casualty Clearing Station on 20th April. He was then transferred from Calais to England on 6th May and admitted to 3rd London General Hospital, with Pleurisy. Here the diagnosis changed to Tuberculosis and he was then transferred to 1st Auxiliary Hospital, Harefield on 29 May. He then returned to Australia per *Euripides* on 24 Jun 1916 arriving in Melbourne on 8 Aug 1916.

Pte Herbert O'Leary was discharged from the A.I.F. 2 M.D. on 22 Oct 1916. He was awarded the 1914/15 Star, the British War and the Victory Medals.

Herbert's brother, Pte Leslie George O'Leary 4588 - 30th Btn, enlisted aged 22 years, on 19 Jun 1916 and served on the Western Front. He was wounded in action on 16 Feb 1918 (gun shot wound to foot) and returned to Australia on 24 Dec 1918.

Herbert O'Leary died, aged 26 years, at Wentworth Falls, Blue Mountains, on 11 Mar 1918, from Pulmonary Tuberculosis. He was buried in the Catholic portion of the Katoomba Cemetery.



Herbert's father, Patrick O'Leary, died May 1923, aged 81 years. Herbert's mother Mary, died 2 Jan 1932, aged 80 years. Both are buried in the Catholic portion of the Rookwood Cemetery.

**Dianne Strahan & Val McKenzie, June 2022,**  
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