Sergeant DONALD HUGH WHITE

392 – 17th Australian Infantry Battalion

Born: 1 Sep 1895, Peak Hill, NSW

Parents & NOK: Edgar & Sarah White

Occupation: Postal Assistant

District Connection: Cumnock

Enlistment Date & Place: 20 Feb 1915, Liverpool.

Enlistment Age: 19 yrs

Embarkation: 12 May 1915, Sydney - HMAT *Themistocles A32*

Served: Egypt, France

Fate: KIA 6 Nov 1916, France, 21 yrs.
Buried at Warlencourt British Cemetery

Honour Boards: Australian War Memorial, Canberra;
Cumnock War Memorial Gates, NSW.

Biography:
Donald Hugh White was 7th child of 12 children, with 9 brothers and 2 sisters. His father Edgar Edward White and mother Sarah Jane (nee Hoskisson) were married in 1884 at Cooks River, NSW. Edgar White was a brick maker by trade.

Donald, known as Don, transferred from Sydney to Cumnock in August 1912, just before his 17th birthday. He was assistant postmaster to Mr. James Johnson and soon settled into the community. According to local newspaper reports over the next three years, he played instrumental solos at concerts in Leary's Hall, played cricket, football and tennis for Cumnock, and was a member of Cumnock's Debating, Euchre and Brass Band Associations.

Donald White enlisted in the AIF on 18 Feb 1915 at Liverpool, Sydney, aged 19 years. His next-of-kin was his mother, Sarah Jane White, Dartbrook Road, Auburn, Sydney. His enlistment document states that he had served three years as a Senior Cadet; was 5 feet 9 inches tall, had green eyes, fair hair and complexion, and was of the Church of England religious denomination.

The Molong Express & Western District Advertiser – 6 Feb 1915, p9 reported:
*"**Cumnockites Farewelled***
Messrs. Don White, Walter Young, and Jack Murray of the Cumnock district, are going to the war.
On Wednesday, at Cumnock, they were tendered a farewell social, at which dancing and euchre playing were the principal diversions.
During the evening highly eulogistic references were made to the guests of honor by Messrs Johnson, Durr and Hopper. The interest taken by the young patriots in all local matters was favorably commented upon, particularly their association with sporting activities. Mr White had been of great service to the cricket, football and tennis clubs, in the capacity of the former for two years, and of the latter for one year. He practically re-organised the football club, and put it upon a sound 'footing' and was also well liked as a postal clerk, and will be much missed by the townspeople...
Messrs White and Young left for Sydney on Thursday, and Mr. Murray will follow on Monday."

Donald embarked as a Private with the 17th Infantry Battalion as part of the 5th Brigade, 2nd Division, on 12 May 1915 at Sydney, on HMAT *Themistocles* A32. The ship sailed via the Indian Ocean to Egypt.

The Battalion trained in Egypt from mid-June until mid-August. The Molong Express and Western District Advertiser, 12 Jun 1915, P11, had this comment in the Cumnock section:

"Latest advices from Don White and Walter Young state that they are in good health. They are with the 3rd Expeditionary Force."

Pte White joined the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force at Gallipoli on 16 Aug 1915 - the 2nd Division relieving the 1st Division who had been there since April. He was part of the signalling section of the 17th Battalion.
At Gallipoli, the Battalion participated in the last action of the August Offensive 'the attack on Hill 60', before settling into defensive routine in the trenches. For a short period, part of the 17th garrisoned Pope's Hill, but for most of its time on the peninsular the battalion was responsible for the defense of Quinn's Post, one of the most contested positions along the entire ANZAC front.

The Molong Argus - 5 Nov 1915, p4, Cumnock section:

"Writing to a Cumnock friend, Signaller Don White (who, prior to enlisting, was a postal assistant in Cumnock) states that he has so far recovered from his shrapnel wound as to be able to return to the firing line again. Don, who is a bit of a wag, stated that he had just returned from a hunt in Turkey, and had captured one "Old gobbier", but got a knock on the arm from a piece of shrapnel – but not a serious injury.
He says it's not all beer and skittles at the Dardanelles, and he had gone for 72 hours without taking off his boots or having a wash, but he was getting used to that sort of thing now, and took things as they came."

The Molong Argus – 17 Dec 1915, p4:

"Writing to a Cumnock friend, Signaller D. White, late of Cumnock Post Office, said, among other things, that he was well, and still going strong. He also mentioned that he had a very narrow escape a few days previous. During a spell from the trenches, he and nine others were bathing on the beach, when the Turkish gun familiarly known as 'Beachy Bill' started shelling them with shrapnel.
The first shell burst high overhead, of which they took no notice. However, the next one was better timed, as it burst just overhead and a hail of bullets flew around, killing a comrade standing alongside him, and wounding four more. He said they didn't wait for any more."

The Battalion was evacuated from Gallipoli in December 1915. Pte White embarked at Mudros (a small Greek port on the island of Lemnos, in the Aegean Sea) and disembarked at Alexandria on 9 Jan 1916. On 2 Feb 1916, he was promoted as a Temporary Sergeant at the Canal Zone. He joined the British Expedionary Force at Alexandria on 17 Mar 1916, disembarking at Marseilles on 23 Mar 1916.

The battalion moved up to the front line in April 1916 and took over the forward position in the eastern Armentieres section. On 14 Apr 1916 T/Sgt White was slightly wounded in France but remained on duty, and his next of kin were notified on 20 April. On 10 May 1916, he was promoted to Sergeant.

The Molong Express & Western District Advertiser – 19 Aug 1916, p5, letter from Sgt- Signaller Don White, once of the Cumnock Post Office, writing from France on June 14 to Mr. Jack Patterson, of Dilga:

"I'm still in the land of the living – due to more good luck than good management, I think. I got hit for the second time a few weeks back, but fortunately each wound was slight. A 'Jack Johnson' lobbed in my dug-out and killed my mate, but just blew me out into the sap with a cut on my head and back, plus a hell of a shaking up. I was properly scared for a few days, but managed to pull myself together without going into hospital. Am quite good now.
This France is a wet and muddy joint to be soldiering in; the trenches are full of mud and slush. And if you put your head up you're sure to be sniped, and if you bob down you get drowned. Dinkum! The Australians are properly established in France now. It's much easier than Gallipoli; that is to say, we do not have to endure as many hardships. Here we get good rations and plenty of water. Every eight days or so we get a hot bath and a change of underclothing. No such thing as having a shave, wash, and clean your teeth in half a pint of water, and then having to go minus a drink all day on account of such extravagance.

When we first came into the trenches here Fritz tried all he knew to bluff us; but it didn't work. He used to paste us with three to four hundred 5.9 shells almost daily. Now if he tries the 'dirty dog' act we return it hot and strong. I think Fritz has decided that we won't be bluffed.
I haven't run up against Joe yet. Would very much like to have a yarn with him. The other boys are still in Egypt, on the Canal. I did over two months on the Arabian Desert, look for Turks; but they were scarce.
I see the Russians are doing some fine work. I wish we were on the move like them. This trench warfare is about the most monotonous game going, especially during wet weather. Ploughing isn't in the same street with it. I'm expecting a week's leave to England very soon now. All the old hands are getting it. What a time I will have. I suppose you are still keen on dancing, Jack. I could do a waltz myself just now. It would be better than squatting in this little dugout of mine. I suppose you heard about poor old Ernie Merriman being killed. We got a terribly heavy bombardment that night. Remember me to all the boys."

The battalion took part in its first major battle at Pozières between 25 Jul and 5 Aug, 1916. The battalion returned to the Pozières trenches for a second time, although in a reserve role, between 18 and 28 August. Sgt White was reported missing in August 1916. Molong Express and Western District Advertiser, 26 Aug 1916, P10, in Personalities section: *"Pte. Don. White, erst of Cumnock, is reported missing."*

His family wrote to the War Department on 1 September, requesting information. However, the missing report was an error and the family was sent a reply to this effect on 12 September.

After a spell in a quieter sector of the front in Belgium, the 2nd Division, which included the 5th Brigade, Sgt White was transferred back to the Somme in October 1916. For the remainder of the year his battalion undertook defensive duties along the front through a very bleak winter.

Sgt Donald White was killed in action on 6 Nov 1916 during the last stages of the Battle of the Somme, Northern France.

The Molong Argus - 15 Dec 1916, p5, Cumnock section:
"The 248th casualty list contained the name of Sergt. D.E.WHITE, Willoughby, killed in action. Undoubtedly this refers to Don White, late of Cumnock post office, who was reported as missing some time ago, and which report was declared false. Don, who enlisted from Cumnock together with Private Walter Young, was, perhaps, the most popular young man in Cumnock at the time of his enlistment, and when the casualty list appeared containing his name, very many expressions of sympathy were heard for his people."

Sgt White was buried at the Warlencourt British Cemetery, Warlencourt-Euaucourt, Departement du Pas-de-Calais, Nord-Pas-de-Calais, France in plot VI. G. 39. His family received his medals: the 1914/15 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

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Photo of Sgt Donald Hugh White's grave, Warlencourt British Cemetery.
This photo was taken by Don Bruce, of Cumnock, who visited the Cemetery on the 22 Sep 1923, and paid his respect to this brave soldier.