



RESTING PLACE: Private Frank Brennan is buried in the Bailleul Communal Cemetery Extension (Nord), France.



Private Brennan's headstone.

PHOTOS: CONTRIBUTED

# Battle claimed young life

Young Stanthorpe soldier remembered for his service and sacrifice in 33rd Battalion

■ Peter McLady

FRANCIS 'Frank' Brennan was like many young men of his generation, eager to enlist for war service as soon as he could.

He was working hard as a labourer when, at 18 years of age, he joined the 33rd Battalion in Armidale, northern New South Wales.

He undertook more than a year's training with the 3rd Division A.I.F., before joining the fighting on the Western Front in November 1916.

Frank's time at the front lasted less than three months.

Whilst in the frontline near Armentieres in northern France on February 12, 1917, he was seriously wounded by enemy artillery fire and died later the same day.

Francis George Brennan was the son of Patrick and Amelia Brennan of Two Mile Gate, near Stanthorpe.

In November 1915, two months after his 18th birthday, Frank was working at Enmore, near Uralla, when he enlisted at Armidale, the closest big town.

Frank joined the 33rd Battalion, which became known as New England's Own because many of the recruits were drawn from that region.

Frank's service began at the battalion's training camp that had been established at the Armidale showground.

While Frank was in training in Armidale, another Stanthorpe man joined the 33rd Battalion.

Private Alfred Potts, who was working for the Railway Department at Werris Creek, enlisted in January, 1916.

Alfred was killed in the Battle of Passchendaele in 1917.

In February, 1916, the battalion moved from Armidale to the Rutherford Camp, near Maitland, for brigade training.

Together with the other 1027 officers and men of the 33rd Battalion, Frank departed Sydney on May 4, aboard HMAT Marathon.

They expected to be sailing to Egypt but instead found they were heading for England via stopovers in Durban, Cape Town, and Dakar.

Frank disembarked at Plymouth, England, on July 9, and travelled by train to the Lark Hill Camp on the Salisbury Plain.

Months of hard training lay ahead as the 33rd Battalion prepared for life in the trenches on the Western Front.

Frank sailed from Southampton to join the fighting in France on November 21, just over a year after he had enlisted.

The 33rd Battalion spent the first few months on the front line in the "Nursery" sector near Armentieres in northern France.

Although this was supposed to be a quieter part of the front line, conditions were extremely tough and made much worse by the extremely harsh winter.

The War Diary of the 33rd Battalion for February 11, 1917 contains a scout report that described the bleak conditions.

"The snow is still very thick and last night commenced to thaw.

"The body of a man (Australian) was found. He had his rifle slung and was in a crawling position facing



Private Francis 'Frank' Brennan. PHOTO: AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL COLLECTION

our lines. "He was evidently one of the 10th Brigade raiders. He could not be moved as he was frozen to the ground, nor could any of his pockets be opened."

The following day, the 33rd Battalion War Diary outlined how the enemy had responded to an Allied artillery bombardment.

"He used a great deal of heavy high explosive. One shell landed in a bay with a Lewis Gun team wounding three men seriously and damaging the gun."

Frank was one of the three men from the Lewis Gun Section who were seriously wounded.

His service record states that on February 12, 1917 he was admitted to the first Canadian Casualty Clearing Station, suffering a compound fracture of the femur and wounds to his face, arm, and leg.

He died later the same day.

Private Daniel Sims from Gurley Siding told the Red Cross: "I was in the same Battalion with Brennan. I

knew him well. I was one of his cobbles and was in hospital with him at Rutherford Camp when we both had measles.

"I was in the same trench with him at Armentieres on the February 12, doing garrison duty. I was right alongside of him when a pineapple shell came into the bay he was in and hit him.

**“He was a very happy-go-lucky chap and real good mate, very popular.”**

— Private Daniel Sims

"He was carried out but did not seem to be very bad and was laughing at the thought of getting a blighty. I did not think he was badly wounded and was surprised when I heard the next day that he (had) died. "He was fairly tall, thin, fair complexion about 22-years-old. He was a very happy-go-lucky chap and real good mate, very popular."

The Stanthorpe Border Post reported Frank's death on March 2.

"Saturday last brought to Stanthorpe, by cable, the sad news of the death of another local lad at the front, in the person of Private Francis George Brennan, who died of a gunshot wound to the face and arm. Private Brennan was the eldest son of Mrs. Brennan, of the two-mile gate. He was 19 years and five months old, and a sad coincidence is that

on the day his mother received the sad news of his death she also received two letters from him saying he was alive and well, and 'strafing Fritz' for all he was worth. The news of his death was conveyed to Father Murphy, who went out and broke the sad news to the family."

A further article in the Stanthorpe Border Post followed in May 1917.

"Mrs P. Brennan has received three letters from France regarding the death of her son, Private Francis George Brennan. One letter is from Private D.V. Mass, of Mt Janet, one from the Captain of the Company in which Frank was serving, and one from Lieutenant Colonel Morehead, who says "I very much regret that I should have to write to you of your gallant son, No 9, Private Francis George Brennan.

"He was wounded by shrapnel on 11th instant and died the following day. I want to tell you that your son proved himself an excellent soldier. Always ready and willing to cheerfully perform any duty, ever reliable and trustworthy, he was one I could ill afford to lose. All his officers speak in the highest terms of him, and he was greatly beloved by his comrades. Officers, non-commissioned officers and men all join with me in offering you most sincere and heartfelt sympathy in your great loss."

Private Francis Brennan was buried at Bailleul Communal Cemetery Extension (Nord) in northern France.

The inscription on Frank's headstone reads "He Gave His Life For His Country".