Patrick Francis (AKA John Francis) Fitzpatrick
Australian Imperial Force – 17th Battalion
Service Number 5674

Compiled by Catherine Nagy, 2018

Pte Patrick (AKA John) Francis Fitzpatrick
17th Battalion AIF Regimental # 5674

Patrick Fitzpatrick was one of the nearly 417,000 men who enlisted to serve in the AIF during WW1.[1] He is representative of the more than 60,000 Australians killed [2] fighting for the British Empire far from home; he spent relatively little time in the frontline, did not distinguish himself in battle and died during one of the most costly campaigns to the AIF – 3rd Battle of Ypres.[3] Yet, he was somebody's son, brother, lover, uncle, friend, and the ramifications of his death still echo today.



Figure 1: Patrick Fitzpatrick, circa 1916, Photographer unknown, Fitzpatrick private collection

Patrick Francis Fitzpatrick was born in Leichhardt, NSW on 5 Dec 1893.[4] His parents, Michael and Catherine, were Irish Catholic immigrants who had been in Australia for 16 years.[5]

In Apr 1910, Patrick's father Michael died from pulmonary tuberculosis.[6] In Nov 1913, his sister Margaret died from consumption – she was only 22.[7] At the time of Patrick's enlistment in 1915, his eldest siblings were both married, and there were two unmarried brothers – Michael, 26 years old and Gregory aged 17.

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[1] Joan Beaumont, 'Australians and the Great War: Battles, the Home Front, and Memory', *Teaching History*, Vol. 49, Issue 1, 2015, p 1.
[2] Australian War Memorial, 'First World War 1914-1918', https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/atwar/first-world-war, Accessed 21 Mar 2018.
[3] Beaumont, 'Australians and the Great War', p 3.
[4] Birth Certificate of Patrick Francis Fitzpatrick, born 5 Dec 1893, Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages New South Wales, 17896/1894.
[5] Ancestry, Immigration Record for Michael Fitzpatrick, 'New South Wales, Australia, Assisted Immigrant Passenger Lists, 1828-1896', Accessed 22 Mar 2018
Ancestry, Immigration Record for Catherine Garvey, 'New South Wales, Australia, Assisted Immigrant Passenger Lists, 1828-1896', Accessed 22 Mar 2018
[6] Death Certificate of Michael Fitzpatrick, died 2 Apr 1910, Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages New South Wales, 4414/1910.
[7] Death Certificate of Margaret Fitzpatrick, died 8 Nov 1913, Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages New South Wales, 18180/1913.

Patrick (using the name John Francis Fitzpatrick), signed an application to enlist with the AIF on 8 Nov 1915 in Katoomba.[8]

He then reported to Lithgow to enlist on 24 Nov 1915.[9] It is unknown why he used John instead of his given name Patrick. Perhaps the family did not approve of him enlisting? He is the only sibling to enlist, although he did have cousins who signed up. Furthermore, it is puzzling as to why he travelled to Katoomba to enlist. Perhaps he was inspired by the "Coo-ee" recruitment march which left Gilgandra 10 Oct 1915 arriving Sydney 12 Nov 1915.[10] Maybe his work as a milk carter [11] took him to the Blue Mountains area. Did he go with a friend?

He was initially allocated to A Co. 45th Infantry Battalion at Lithgow depot camp.[12] Due to low recruiting numbers in Lithgow, this camp was closed [13] and a new one opened in Bathurst.[14] Patrick was assigned to the 15th reinforcements of the 17th Battalion [15] and spent the next six months here in training before transferring to Liverpool military camp in Jun 1916.[16]

On 9 Sep 1916, Patrick embarked on HMAT A14 "Euripides" from Sydney, bound for Plymouth, England.[17] On 14 Dec 1916, he was marched into Etaples,[18] the huge allied camp which, apart from containing "*the largest field hospital complex of its time"*,[19] was also used for final training of fresh recruits for the frontline.[20]

The 17th Battalion was raised in NSW in Mar 1915 [21] as a part of the 5th Brigade [22] AIF, assigned to 2nd Division in July 1915. [23] Following training at Liverpool, 17th Battalion embarked on SS "Themistocles" on 12 May 1915 [24] and arrived at Suez on 12 Jun.[25]

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[8] Service Record of John Francis Fitzpatrick, p 55, B2455, National Archives of Australia.
[9] Service Record of John Francis Fitzpatrick, p 5.
[10] 1915 Coo-ee March, https://cooeemarch1915.com/day-by-day-account/, Accessed 21 Mar 2018.
[11] Service Record of John Francis Fitzpatrick, p 55.
[12] Service Record of John Francis Fitzpatrick, p 3.
[13] Anon., 'Brevities', *Lithgow Mercury*, 21 Jan 1916, p 4.
[14] Anon., 'Lithgow to remain depot camp', *Lithgow Mercury*, 12 Jan 1916, p 2.
[15] Service Record of John Francis Fitzpatrick, p 6.
[16] Service Record of John Francis Fitzpatrick, p 7.
[17] Service Record of John Francis Fitzpatrick, p 10.
[18] Service Record of John Francis Fitzpatrick, p 10.
[19] Remembrance Trails-Northern France, 'Etaples Military Cemetery', http://www.remembrancetrails-northernfrance.com/trails/the-allies-logisitics-base-on-the-channel-coast/etaples-military-cemetery.html Accessed 21 Mar 2018.
[20] Remembrance Trails-Northern France, 'Etaples Military Cemetery'.
[21] Lt Col. KW Mackenzie, 'The Story of the Seventeenth Battalion AIF in the Great War 1914-1918', East Sussex, The Naval and Military Press Ltd & Imperial War Museum London, 1946, p 17.
[22] Mackenzie, 'The Story of the Seventeenth Battalion AIF in the Great War 1914-1918', pp 20-21.
[23] Mackenzie, 'The Story of the Seventeenth Battalion AIF in the Great War 1914-1918', p 41.
[24] Mackenzie, 'The Story of the Seventeenth Battalion AIF in the Great War 1914-1918', p 29.
[25] Mackenzie, 'The Story of the Seventeenth Battalion AIF in the Great War 1914-1918', p 13.

This Battalion saw action in Gallipoli, The Somme, & Pozieres [26] before Patrick joined their ranks on 24 Jan 1917.[27]

17th Battalion had been billeted in Dernancourt since 16 Jan, reorganising and training troops.[28] On 1 Feb the Battalion moved up to the front line at Le Sars and remained here for 5 days.[29] This was Patrick's first taste of frontline activity. There is family history passed down, of a letter sent home imploring his younger brother Gregory not to enlist, as the war was not what they thought it would be.[30]

On 14 Mar Patrick was sent to hospital "sick".[31] He re-joined the Battalion on 8 Apr [32] and 7 days later was wounded in the battle of Lagnicourt.[33] He was admitted to the 3rd Canadian General Hospital in Boulogne, then transferred to England via "St Denis" hospital ship on 1 May 1917.[34] His hospital admission to 1st Australian Auxiliary Hospital (Harefield Park House) on 9 May states that he was suffering from gunshot wound to the chest and trench feet.[35]

While he was recovering in England, the 17th Battalion was involved in the initial phase of the second battle for Bullecourt on 3 May 1917, where they suffered casualties of 11 officers and 331 other ranks. [36] The 17th then made their way to Rubempre where they spent nearly a month training, resting and relaxing with sports such as cricket, boxing and football. [37]

14 June saw the 17th Battalion moving onto Bapaume where they continued with their training and recreation.[38] However, *"July 28th marked the end of the Battalion's stay in the Somme area. The tide of war was setting northward and with it went I Anzac with orders to move into General Headquarters Reserve and to concentrate in the St Omer area".*[39]

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[26] Digger History, '17th Battalion AIF', http://www.diggerhistory.info/pages-conflicts-periods/ww1/1aif/2div/05bde/17th_battalion_aif.htm, Accessed 21 Mar 2018.
[27] Service Record of John Francis Fitzpatrick, p 10.
[28] Mackenzie, 'The Story of the Seventeenth Battalion AIF in the Great War 1914-1918', p 145.
[29] Mackenzie, 'The Story of the Seventeenth Battalion AIF in the Great War 1914-1918', pp 145-154
[30] Carmel Walker to Catherine Nagy, face to face discussion, 10 May 2011
[31] Service Record of John Francis Fitzpatrick, p 16.
[32] Service Record of John Francis Fitzpatrick, p 16.
[33] Service Record of John Francis Fitzpatrick, p 16.
[34] Service Record of John Francis Fitzpatrick, p 16.
[35] Service Record of John Francis Fitzpatrick, pp 58-59.
[36] Mackenzie, 'The Story of the Seventeenth Battalion AIF in the Great War 1914-1918', pp 176-178.
[37] Mackenzie, 'The Story of the Seventeenth Battalion AIF in the Great War 1914-1918', p 179.
[38] Mackenzie, 'The Story of the Seventeenth Battalion AIF in the Great War 1914-1918', p 180.
[39] Mackenzie, 'The Story of the Seventeenth Battalion AIF in the Great War 1914-1918', p 181.

Patrick re-joined the 17th Battalion on 9 Aug 1917.[40] By now the Battalion was in Arques camped in tents.[41] Rain and flooding forced the Battalion to be billeted to Clairmarais.[42] Here troops spent another month training in forest manoeuvres, resting with recreational pursuits such as swimming, sport and visiting the local villages.[43]

12 Sep saw the Battalion marching east to participate in the third battle of Ypres.[44] By 13 Sep, troops were quartered in tents at Dickebusch, south west of Ypres.[45] Preparations for the capture of Passchendaele Ridge were nearing completion. The weather was fine and warm with no rain for the previous two weeks.[46] Conditions were favourable for an imminent attack. All ranks were given detailed instruction on creeping barrage, objectives to be reached and formation of troops.[47]

Unfortunately, the Battle of Menin Road proved to be the end for Patrick – along with more than 5,000 [48] other AIF men. His service record states "KILLED IN ACTION Belgium 20 Sep 1917".[49] Eyewitness statements report that he along with other soldiers from his company, were killed by a phosphorus shell on the evening of 19/early morning of 20 Sep as they were making their way along the duckboards up to the front line.[50] It was noted that the men were buried beside the duckboards [51] and Patrick's service record notes:

> *"Buried E of Gordon House. S. of road running from Zillibeke road. to Leinster Farm. West of small cemetery on South side of Hedge 1½ miles E. of Ypres."* [52]

In Dec 1919, Patrick's remains were exhumed and reburied in Birr Cross Road Cemetery[53] in Plot 3, Row C, Grave 22.[54] Graves 21, 23, 24 and 25 hold the remains of fellow C Company soldiers killed with Patrick on the 20th.[55]

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[40] Service Record of John Francis Fitzpatrick, p 13.
[41] Mackenzie, 'The Story of the Seventeenth Battalion AIF in the Great War 1914-1918', p 181.
[42] Mackenzie, 'The Story of the Seventeenth Battalion AIF in the Great War 1914-1918', p 181.
[43] Mackenzie, 'The Story of the Seventeenth Battalion AIF in the Great War 1914-1918', pp 181-186.
[44] Mackenzie, 'The Story of the Seventeenth Battalion AIF in the Great War 1914-1918', p 188.
[45] Mackenzie, 'The Story of the Seventeenth Battalion AIF in the Great War 1914-1918', p 188.
[46] Mackenzie, 'The Story of the Seventeenth Battalion AIF in the Great War 1914-1918', p 188.
[47] Mackenzie, 'The Story of the Seventeenth Battalion AIF in the Great War 1914-1918', pp 188-190.
[48] Australian War Memorial, 'Battle of Menin Road', https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/E97, Accessed 21 Mar 2018.
[49] Service Record of John Francis Fitzpatrick, p 13.
[50] Australian War Memorial, 'Australian Red Cross Society Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau Files, 1914-18 War 1DRL/0428' pp 2-6, https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/R1488697, Accessed 21 Mar 2018.
[51] Australian War Memorial, 'Australian Red Cross Society Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau Files, 1914-18 War 1DRL/0428'
[52] Service Record of John Francis Fitzpatrick, p 13.
[53] Service Record of John Francis Fitzpatrick, p 40.
[54] Service Record of John Francis Fitzpatrick, p 23.
[55] Commonwealth War Graves Commission, 'Graves Registration Report Form', https://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/459949/fitzpatrick,-patrick-francis/#&gid=null&pid=1, Accessed 21 Mar 2018.

The only items shipped back to Patrick's next of kin – his mother Catherine – were 2 discs and a belt.[56]

The outpouring of public grief for the loss of Australian youth in WW1 began before the war had even finished, with one of the first memorials in NSW unveiled in Balmain in April 1916.[57] To date, there are over 3,000 war memorials in NSW.[58]



Figure 2: Montage of photos of memorials to Patrick Fitzpatrick. Mason & Nagy private collections

[56] Service Record of John Francis Fitzpatrick, p 47.
[57] The Dictionary of Sydney, 'Balmain War Memorial', https://dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/balmain_war_memorial, Accessed 22 Mar 2018.
[58] Register of War Memorials in NSW, 'About the Register', https://www.warmemorialsregister.nsw.gov.au/content/about-register, Accessed 22 May 2018.

Patrick's name appears on panel 82 in the Commemorative area at the Australian War Memorial.[59] On 9 Apr 1922, a memorial to the more than 350 Leichhardt soldiers killed in the war, was unveiled by the Governor of NSW. [60] Patrick Fitzpatrick's name was included. It was originally placed outside the Leichhardt Town Hall, but was moved to the Pioneers Memorial Park in 1944.[61]

Patrick's sacrifice was commemorated privately by his family; a death notice was inserted into the Sydney Morning Herald on 20 Oct 1917 [62] and Michael & Margaret's gravestone was engraved with his name. Furthermore, Patrick's widowed mother Catherine acknowledged the ex-nuptial child born to Patrick's girlfriend Ada, by substantiating her claim for a share of Patrick's war medals.[63]

Patrick Fitzpatrick's involvement in WW1 was typical of most privates serving in the AIF. Due to when he joined the Battalion, combined with hospital stays, he spent minimal time engaged in battle. His death didn't even occur on the frontline, but while on the move up to the front. None of this mattered to his family. He didn't come home. He never met his son or married his sweetheart. Their lives were forever changed.

[59] Australian War Memorial, 'Roll of Honour', https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/R1732020, Accessed 21 Mar 2018.
[60] Anon., 'Unveiling Leichhardt's War Memorial', *The Sydney Mail*, 12 Apr 1922, p 17.
[61] Anthony Staunton & Harry Willey, 'James Gorman VC Remembered at Leichhardt', *Leichhardt Historical Journal*, No. 16, Jun 1989, p 5.
[62] Anon., 'Roll of Honour', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 Oct 1917, p 12.
[63] Service Record of John Francis Fitzpatrick, p 34.

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