

A SOLDIER'S STORY



Service No.: 3022

Name: Olaf Neilsen THORSHEIM

Nick Name: Olly



Medals and Decorations

British War Medal

Victory Medal

Rank: Private

Service: Army

Enlisted: 11 Mar 1916

KIA: 30 Sep 1917

Olly was born in Mar 1890 at Bergen (Norway), his father being Nils Jorgenson Thorsheim. There is little known of his family, other than his father was a fisherman.

It is thought that he went to school in Bergen, commencing in 1896. On completion of schooling he joined the fishing fleet in Norway before moving to Australia and becoming a naturalised Australian citizen. He recorded his occupation as “sailor” at time of enlistment. It is thought he first came to Tumby Bay on one of the grain ships operating in the area, but then took up farm work in the Butler Tanks area on the property of Thomas Edmond (Ted) Hudson, Section 17 Hundred of Butler.

On enlistment he was posted to A company, 2nd Depot Battalion (Bn) at Mitcham to complete a very short period of training, before being transferred to 6th Reinforcements /32nd Bn. On 11 Apr 1916 he embarked at Adelaide aboard HMAT “*Aeneas* ” bound for Alexandria. After a further short period of training with his unit, he (and his unit) was on the move again, this time embarking aboard HMAT “*Huntsend* ” bound for Marseilles ; arriving on 30 Jun 1916. On arrival he was immediately placed into isolation at 24th General Hospital with German measles where he remained for almost 2 months until rejoining his unit.

The 32nd Bn had been raised in Adelaide on 8 Aug 1915 with men from SA and WA. The unit was sent originally to Egypt and then on to France , destined for the Western Front. The Bn was involved in its first major battle only 3 days after entering the front line trenches in Jul 1916: this was the battle of Fromelles and it was a disaster for the unit, which suffered 718 casualties during the attack – about 90% of its fighting strength. The 5th Division, of which the Bn formed part, suffered 5533 casualties. The Australian War Memorial describes the battle as "the worst 24 hours in Australia's entire history... (in the war)".

It was after this battle that Olly re-joined his unit on 7 Aug 1916. The unit had been withdrawn from the front line and although it did rotate through the line, it saw no further major action for the remainder of 1916. However, Olly was again admitted to hospital in Nov 1916 – this time he was evacuated to the War Hospital in UK with “Trench Feet”. It must have been a severe case, firstly because of the evacuation and secondly because he did not rejoin his unit for 6 months; his unit, during his absence was involved in a series of follow up actions as the Germans withdrew to the Hindenburg Line.

The next major action in which the Bn was involved was during the third battle of Ypres at Polygon Wood (Belgium) from 26 Sep to 3 Oct 1917. It was in the concluding stages of this battle that Olly was killed in action (KIA) on 30 Sep 1917.

He is buried at Tyne Cot Military Cemetery, 5 miles (8 km) east- north east of Ypres. This is the largest Military Cemetery in the world, containing over 12000 graves - more than 75% of which have the inscription "known only to God".

His name is also recorded on the Memorial at Tumbly Bay.

Even though Olly was a naturalised Australian Citizen, his parents still lived in Norway, so once again the difficulty and delay in passage of information at this time is brought starkly to the fore. It was almost a year later before his parents were made aware of the death of their son!



British War Medal Victory Medal

Private
THORSHEIM, O N

Service Number 3022

Died 30/09/1917

32nd Bn.
Australian Infantry, A.I.F.



Tyne Cot
Military Cemetery,
Belgium