A Cross Over Him

Lance Corporal Waldo Emerson Jones · Service number 4830 · 55th Battalion, Australian Imperial Force

Cremorne, Sydney · Killed in action at Fromelles, France, 20 July 1916, aged 21 [2][4: p. 5]

> *A Digger's Story sample. Every fact below carries a numbered citation to the record it comes from. The full list is on the Sources page at the end. Where the records disagree, we say so.*

An accountant from Iredale Avenue

In September 1915 a young accountant from Cremorne, on Sydney's lower North Shore, presented himself to the army [4: pp. 1, 10]. His name was Waldo Emerson Jones.

He was born at Fairfield, Melbourne [4: p. 1][1], and his birth was registered there in 1895 [10]. His attestation paper gives his age as 20 years and 8 months [4: p. 1]. The file gives no birth date, but that age points to a birth around January 1895 (our interpretation). He had been a pupil at the Mosman C.E. Preparatory School [1]. He was single and Church of England [4: p. 1]. He stood 5 feet 6¼ inches and weighed 112 pounds [1].

Home was a house called "Felixhaven" in Iredale Avenue, Cremorne. Even the clerks couldn't agree on its name: his file spells it "Felis Haven" and, once, "Felix Haven" [4: pp. 1, 19, 21][5]. His next of kin was his mother, Mrs L. C. Jones, at the same address [4: pp. 1, 21][5].

His own name gave the record-keepers trouble too. The Embarkation Roll lists him as "Waldon Emerson Jones" [5], and the Nominal Roll as "Walds Emerson Jones" [6]. Every other record says Waldo [1][2][3][4].

A soldier before the war

Waldo was no raw recruit. His attestation paper records two years in the "Militia Forces" [4: pp. 1, 12], and the Embarkation Roll names his unit as the "17th Inf." [5]. A rank

abbreviation beside his militia service on the attestation paper is partly obscured, and may read "L/Cpl" [4: p. 1].

Even the date he joined the AIF is recorded two ways. One page of his file says he "joined on" 18 August 1915, and another says 18 September 1915 [4: pp. 1, 12]. The Nominal Roll follows August [6], and the Embarkation Roll follows September [5]. His medical examination took place in Sydney on 18 September 1915 [4: pp. 10, 14], and he swore the oath at "Holdsworthy" (Holsworthy) on 2 October 1915 [4: pp. 4, 13]. He was posted as a private to the 15th Reinforcements of the 3rd Battalion [1][5].

Star of England: a stripe lost at sea

On 8 March 1916 the reinforcements embarked at Sydney aboard HMAT A15 *Star of England* [4: p. 31][5]. In the Remarks column of the Embarkation Roll, beside his entry, are the words "Acting Corporal" [5]. The printed rows are crowded, and the note sits at the foot of his entry and the next man's. We read it as his (our interpretation), and the rest of his story supports that reading.

At sea, things went wrong. He was charged with "Disobeying a lawful command" aboard Transport A.15 [4: pp. 7–9]. Most of the charge papers date the offence 26 March 1916, while another page says 27 March [4: pp. 7–9, 31]. The punishment is clear: he "forfeited 14 days pay and reduced to the ranks" [4: p. 15]. He reverted to private on 28 March 1916 [4]. You can only be reduced to the ranks if you hold a rank, which is why we read "Acting Corporal" as his (our interpretation).

His mates remembered it. Months later, one of them told the Red Cross: "Jones had been a Cpl. and got reduced in Egypt" [3: p. 3]. He had the place wrong, but not the fact.

Egypt and the new 55th

The AIF was doubling in size in Egypt. The 55th Battalion was raised there in February 1916, and half its men were Gallipoli veterans from the 3rd Battalion [7]. Waldo joined it at Ferry Post, on the Suez Canal. The AIF Project dates this 20 April 1916 [1], while his dossier records the transfer on 21 April [4].

In May he went down with parotitis, the illness better known as mumps. He was admitted to No. 14 Field Ambulance at Ferry Post on 17 May 1916 and rejoined his unit on 30 May [1][4: p. 2].

On 19 June 1916 the battalion sailed from Alexandria aboard HT *Caledonian* to join the British Expeditionary Force. It landed at Marseilles, in the south of France, on 29 June [4: p. 2][1]. The 55th entered the front-line trenches for the first time on 12 July [7].

On 10 July 1916 Waldo was promoted Lance Corporal [4][1]. He had his stripe back, ten days before his first battle.

Fromelles

The Australian War Memorial calls the attack at Fromelles on 19 July 1916 "a bloody initiation for Australian soldiers to warfare on the Western Front" [8]. It was meant as a feint, to stop the Germans sending reserves south to the Somme. In the Memorial's words, "The feint was a disastrous failure" [8]. The men of the newly arrived 5th Australian Division attacked "over open ground in broad daylight and under direct observation and heavy fire from the German lines". More than 5,500 Australians became casualties, and almost 2,000 were killed or died of wounds [8].

The 55th was part of the 14th Brigade. It began the battle in reserve, "was quickly committed to the attack", and ended up "forming the rearguard for the 14th Brigade's withdrawal" [7]. The 14th Brigade had captured part of the German front line and held it overnight on 19–20 July [8].

Waldo Jones did not come back. He was posted missing, and then recorded as killed in action on 20 July 1916, "In the Field France" [4: pp. 5, 16, 23].

Three mates, four stories

None of the records we have seen says exactly how Waldo died. What survives is what his mates later told the Australian Red Cross Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau, which collected statements from soldiers, many of them in hospital. Three of them gave four statements between them, and no two accounts agree [3].

Pte J. R. Hankinson, 4819, speaking at No. 1 Australian General Hospital, Rouen, on 3 November 1916, said [3: p. 3]:

> *"He was killed on the 19th July near Laventie. I saw a man who buried him at Sailly. Jones was aged 22, stood about 5 ft.9 and fair."*

Cpl W. G. F. Nixey, 4861, at No. 8 Stationary Hospital, Boulogne, on 24 November 1916, said [3: p. 4]:

> *"Killed by machine gun on retiring from German lines, saw him lying dead. We had an armistice the next morning for burial. He was buried in the rear of our lines while I*

> *was close by."*

On 30 November 1916, at Etaples, Hankinson gave a second and quite different account. This time the file records his initials as "J.E." but the same number, 4819, B Company [3: p. 6]:

> *"He was killed at Fromelles on July 20th, by shell concussion. There was not a mark on his body. This occurred before we went into the charge. Several of my mates saw him. Amongst these was Pte. Greenaway, 4812, B.Co. He gave me the facts as an eye witness."*

Finally, on 15 January 1917, Pte H. J. Robinson, 3124A, at No. 6 General Hospital, Rouen, said [3: p. 7]:

> *"I was with a burial party on the 20th July, and I buried him. He had been killed by a bomb. He is buried in an Australian Cemetery on the right hand side of the road to Sailly. There was a parson to conduct the service and he has a cross over him."*

Machine gun, shell concussion or bomb; 19 or 20 July. Even his height is in dispute: Hankinson remembered about 5 feet 9, while the army measured 5 feet 6¼ [3: p. 3][1]. We can't tell you which account is true, and neither could the Red Cross. All four statements agree that Waldo was killed in that first battle and was buried, and three of them place the grave at or near Sailly [3: pp. 3, 4, 6, 7].

"The French Peasants often put flowers on the graves"

The family did not wait passively. The Red Cross in London wrote in January 1917 that "Cpl. Jones' people" had "cabled in August asking us to obtain particulars" [3: p. 11].

The official news moved slowly. The Red Cross card records him as missing, certified by a Headquarters cable of 9 August 1916, and then as "Now killed in action", certified by a cable of 24 August 1916 [3: p. 2]. The AIF Project gives the date of the change from missing to killed as 28 July 1916 [1], one more small disagreement in the paperwork.

A fellow soldier of the 55th, L/Cpl A. P. Callinan, 4766, told the Red Cross at Havre on 25 November 1916 that a "Cpl. Dixon of the 55th battalion, C Co." could "give information about the death of Jones" [3: p. 5]. The Bureau wrote to him in December [3: p. 9]. By January 1917 Dixon, now a sergeant, was on furlough in Fulham, London, and he answered in letters dated 16 and 20 January [3: pp. 10, 12, 13]. The Bureau typed up the key passage [3: p. 8]:

> *"The position of the grave of L/Cpl W.E. Jones is, Australian Cemetery, on the right of Sailly, Estaires Road, about 700 yards from Sailly Cross Roads. Each grave is marked by crosses with the names of the men on them, and the French Peasants often put flowers on the graves in memory of our fallen lads."*

The Red Cross had already thanked Dixon for an earlier letter, noting that "you and the Chaplain both wrote and gave them all details of his death and burial" [3: p. 11]. Dixon asked whether he could have a photograph of the grave himself [3: p. 13]. The Bureau replied that under the Graves Registration rules "one photograph only is supplied and only to the next-of-kin" [3: p. 14].

The AIF Project records that he was buried at Sailly-sur-la-Lys by the Reverend W. Meredith Holliday, with no date stated [1].

Anzac Cemetery, Sailly-sur-la-Lys

Unlike the 1,335 Australians from Fromelles who long remained "missing" [8], Waldo Jones has a known grave. He lies in Plot II, Row C, Grave 6 of Anzac Cemetery, Sailly-sur-la-Lys [4: p. 28][11]. His record with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission notes that he was a "Native of Victoria" [11].

His few belongings came home: an identity disc, a silver boomerang, a pocket book and a letter. They travelled on the *Benalla* and were sent to his mother on 17 April 1917 [4: pp. 18, 20]. One inventory also lists a chevron [4: p. 6].

He was entitled to the British War Medal and the Victory Medal [1][4: pp. 33, 34]. The Memorial Scroll, Memorial Plaque and Victory Medal went to his mother, Mrs L. C. Jones [4: p. 34]. A death notice for "W. E. Jones", "in France, late of Cremorne", was published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 9 September 1916 [9]. His name is on the Roll of Honour at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, at panel 161 [2].

Perhaps the last word belongs to the burial-party man who said simply that "he has a cross over him" [3: p. 7].

Timeline

Date	Event	Source
c. Jan 1895	Born at Fairfield, Melbourne (birth registered 1895)	[4: p. 1][10]
Before 1915	Two years in the militia, 17th Infantry	[4: pp. 1, 12][5]
18 Aug or 18 Sep 1915	"Joined on" date (the file gives both)	[4: pp. 1, 12]
18 Sep 1915	Medical examination, Sydney	[4: pp. 10, 14]
2 Oct 1915	Oath sworn at Holsworthy; private, 3rd Bn, 15th Reinforcements	[4: pp. 4, 13][1]
8 Mar 1916	Embarks at Sydney on HMAT A15 *Star of England*; "Acting Corporal" on the roll	[4: p. 31][5]
26 (or 27) Mar 1916	Disobeying a lawful command aboard A15; 14 days' pay forfeited, reduced to the ranks	[4: pp. 7–9, 15, 31]
20/21 Apr 1916	Joins the 55th Battalion at Ferry Post, Egypt	[1][4]
17–30 May 1916	In hospital with parotitis (mumps)	[1][4: p. 2]
19–29 Jun 1916	Alexandria to Marseilles on HT *Caledonian*	[4: p. 2][1]
10 Jul 1916	Promoted Lance Corporal	[4][1]
19–20 Jul 1916	Battle of Fromelles	[7][8]
20 Jul 1916	Killed in action, "In the Field France"	[4: pp. 5, 16, 23]
9 Aug / 24 Aug 1916	Missing, then "Now killed in action" (Headquarters cables)	[3: p. 2]
9 Sep 1916	Death notice in the *Sydney Morning Herald*	[9]
Nov 1916–Jan 1917	Three mates give the Red Cross four different accounts	[3: pp. 3, 4, 6, 7]
16 & 20 Jan 1917	Sgt H. Dixon describes the grave near Sailly	[3: pp. 8, 10, 13]
17 Apr 1917	Personal effects sent to his mother	[4: p. 18]
After the war	Plaque, Scroll and Victory Medal to his mother	[4: p. 34]

Sources

Primary and official records

1. The AIF Project, UNSW Canberra: Waldo Emerson JONES, 4830. https://aif.adfa.edu.au/showPerson?pid=158477 *(used only for details not seen in the original files; marked [1])*
2. Australian War Memorial, Roll of Honour: Waldo Emerson Jones (AWM145 Roll of Honour cards). https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/R1643890
3. Australian Red Cross Society Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau files, 1DRL/0428: 4830 Lance Corporal Waldo Emerson Jones, 55th Battalion (AWM RCDIG1049184, 14 pages; quotes checked against the scans, page numbers are PDF pages). https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1399603
4. National Archives of Australia: B2455, JONES W E, barcode 1823130 (First AIF Personnel Dossier), pages as cited. Viewed 14 Nov 2026. https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/NAAMedia/ShowImage.aspx?B=1823130&T=P&S=1
5. Australian War Memorial, First World War Embarkation Roll: "Waldon Emerson Jones", AWM8 23/20/3, p. 109. https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/R2067897
6. Australian War Memorial, First World War Nominal Roll: "Walds Emerson Jones" (AWM133). https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/R2214087
7. Commonwealth War Graves Commission, casualty record 187493 (Anzac Cemetery, Sailly-sur-la-Lys, II. C. 6.), as reproduced by A Street Near You: https://astreetnearyou.org/person/187493/Lance-Corporal-Waldo-Emerson-Jones *(check against https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/casualty-details/187493/)*
8. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 September 1916, death notice "JONES, W E", as indexed by the Ryerson Index (https://ryersonindex.net). *(Index entry; the notice itself is to be read on Trove.)*
9. Births, Deaths and Marriages Victoria, historical index: birth, JONES Waldo Emerson, Fairfield, 1895, reg. no. 3244/1895. https://my.rio.bdm.vic.gov.au/efamily-history/-

Reference

7. Australian War Memorial, "55th Australian Infantry Battalion" (unit history). https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/U51495
8. Australian War Memorial, "Battle of Fromelles" (encyclopedia). https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/fromelles

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