

Frank Frost

.... during his time at Wests gives no clue to his real identity. It was known that this player started the 1908 season with the Western Suburbs Rugby Union Club before coming across to play rugby league in the latter half of May 1908. While playing rugby union that year, he was mostly referred to as Frost but on one occasion he was referred to as E. Frost.

A review of newspapers from the time as well as public records indicates that the player was recorded as J. Frost, F. Frost, E. Frost, T. Frost and just Frost. Trying to make sense of individual records does not give an understanding of who this person was. It was therefore necessary to develop a playing profile to determine whether there was any consistency in the recorded names and then match a likely outcome with NSW BD&M records.

If this player was to be identified, then information would need to be found both prior to and after his time at Wests. Given the general pattern of other players that came through the Wests rugby union ranks before switching to rugby league, it was most likely that this player was also from the local area.

The earliest record of a local person with the surname of Frost can be traced back to the Ashfield locality as far back as 1904. In 1906 and 1907 there was an F. Frost playing for Ashfield Rugby Union Second Grade team. While Ashfield was a stand-alone Club, many players progressed to the Western Suburbs District Club, which appears to be what F. Frost did in 1908.

Player #23 appears not to have played with Wests beyond 1908. So, what happened to him?

In 1909, an F. Frost and C. Frost both appeared in a Five Dock 3rd Grade rugby union team. If this were the Frost that played with Wests in 1908 then he would have been considered a professional and could not have returned to the amateur ranks of rugby union. The Rugby Union authorities were quite vigilant on this as it proved with the four Lithgow players that came down to play with Wests in 1910.

The answer to this question was found in a newspaper report in the Evening News on 16 April 1909. The news article was reporting on deliberations of the Metropolitan Rugby Union and noted that F. (Frank) Frost was suspended until June 30 and E. (Edward) Ellis (Wests) was suspended until May 14, after which they could resume playing rugby union.

At this point in the search there was still not a lot known about the identity of the player, so a search of NSW BD&M was undertaken for a player with the appropriate initial, within the right age range and was either born in or had moved to Ashfield or nearby suburbs. This search identified the Frost family of Five Dock and the person that fitted the profile was Frank Frost whose birth was registered at Burwood in 1888.

Frank Frost had a younger brother named Clarence who was born at Five Dock in 1892 and this was most likely the person that played with Frank Frost at the Five Dock Rugby Union Club in 1910. An extended search also indicated that a person by the name of Frost played cricket with the Five Dock Club in 1908 and Burwood United Second Grade in 1909.

A search of Ancestry family trees was undertaken, and although these sites can be inaccurate at times, they often provide additional leads, and this was the case for Frank Frost.

Frank Frost joined the AIF in 1915 but he did so from Narrandera in the Riverina District of NSW. A search of local newspapers indicated that Frank Frost was employed as a Telegraph Linesman initially

at the town of Hay and after a short time he relocated to Narrandera. Newspaper reports and his military file confirm his connection to the suburb of Five Dock in Sydney.

He would have left Sydney about the end of 1910 or at the beginning of 1911 and soon settled into country life. He joined the Suburbans Cricket Club in Hay. When he moved to Narrandera, he became involved with the Narrandera Imperials Australian Rules Football Club, playing with them from 1911 until 1915 when he went to war. He was also recorded playing for a Narrandera rugby union selection in 1914.

The local Riverina newspaper also had variations of Frank Frost's name. In early publications he was reported as J. Frost and on one occasion E. Frost, but over time that was regularised so that he was consistently reported as F. Frost in team lists and referred to as Frank Frost in specific news articles.

It should be noted for the record that on 6 May 1911 a player by the name of Frost was listed as a forward for Wests Second Grade rugby league team. As Frank Frost was most likely in the Riverina District at this time, the player that appeared in Wests Second Grade team was likely to be Frank Frost's younger brother, Clarence, who played in the forwards the previous year for Five Dock.

Frank Frost was well regarded by the towns people of Narrandera and along with a few other local boys was given a hearty send off as they left Narrandera on 21 April 1915 to start out for Sydney to formalise their enlistment. Frank Frost was posted to the 7th Reinforcements, 3rd Battalion. He embarked from Sydney in July 1915 and was on the Gallipoli Peninsula by September. However, within a month he had influenza and was evacuated out.

After recuperating in Egypt Frank Frost re-joined the Battalion and sailed for France in March 1916. The 3rd Battalion was involved in most of the major actions on the Western Front and the first major action saw it participate at Fleurbaix, better known as the Battle of Fromelles. This battle culminated in a disastrous offensive action on the 19 and 20 July when Australian forces had over 5,000 casualties.

Frank Frost missed this disaster as he had been wounded in action on 3 July in the preliminary fighting at Fleurbaix. The war diary indicates that; "between midnight and 2am, the enemy heavily shelled our front line and no man's land in retaliation for a raid by the 4th Division near our front. One of our listening posts in no man's land was hit by a shell." On that day, two officers were wounded, and eight other ranks were killed with eleven other ranks wounded.

Frank Frost was one of the other ranks wounded. He received gun-shot wounds to the chest, buttocks and hand and was evacuated to England. After recuperating he was promoted to Lance Corporal and once again sent to France. He re-joined his Battalion in January 1917.

The winter of 1916-17 was one of the coldest experienced on the Western Front, nevertheless a major offensive was being planned by the allied forces to try and take the German held Hindenburg defensive line which was proving a major stumbling block to advancing the war.

This culminated in the disastrous First Battle of Bullecourt on 11 April 1917. The towns of Bullecourt and Queant were the focus, but the battle line was much longer. The Hindenburg line was itself protected by several fortified towns which had to be taken to make headway. One of these towns was Hermies where the 3rd Battalion was posted.

The 3rd Battalion moved into Hermies on 9 April. After days of snow and rain, the 14 April was a rare day of sunshine and relative quiet, however the rain returned on 15 April and so did the war. The war diary records that at 1am on 15 April, the enemy commenced shelling Hermies and vicinity

intermittently until 4 am. From that time, the enemy opened with heavy shelling forming a barrage on the east and south sides of the town. The Battery positions west of Hermies were also heavily shelled.

A little after 4am, the enemy was observed moving forward for an attack. The 3rd Battalion opened up with Lewis gun and rifle fire. The enemy was observed in two lines about five to ten yards apart and with one yard interval between men. The Artillery was called into action to help quell the attack, however the enemy by this time were within 20 yards of the Battalion posts. Frank Frost was attached to a Bombers Company and would have been engaged at close quarters.

Withering fire, including bombs and rifle grenades, caused the enemy to "retire" in disorder. It was estimated that there were about 200 enemy lying dead in front of the 3rd Battalion line with many wounded. The battle lasted for an hour and a quarter. The 3rd Battalion casualties included seven other ranks killed, and one officer and twenty-six other ranks wounded. Frank Frost was one of the other ranks killed at Hermies on that morning.

Frank Frost was buried in an isolated grave on the south side of a track, three quarters of a mile south west of Hermies. In November 1917, the Riverine Grazier (Hay) received a letter from Private J. H. Myers, writing from France. He was giving an update on some of the local boys who were still over there including Fred Tapscott, who was with poor Frank Frost when he was killed. Fred Tapscott (from Hay NSW) buried Frank Frost in the isolated grave near the town of Hermies, France.

In December 1919, the Army notified Frank Frost's family that his remains would be reinterred in the nearby Beaumetz Crossroads Military Cemetery. He rests in Plot 1, Row E 6 at this cemetery near the town of Beaumetz les Cambrai, France.

The Narrandera Argus newspaper in May 1917 noted that; "Private Frank Frost, who was recently killed while serving his country in France, used to play a good solid game of football. He was a ruck man and was one of those who helped win laurels for the Imperial Football Club."



War Memorial at John Lysaght's Chiswick NSW