Francis Rayburn Wickham

Francis Rayburn Wickham was born in 1897 in Sheep Hills, Victoria to David and Annie Wickham (nee Thomas). David and Annie had six children in different towns in rural Victoria, including Myrtle who was born in Wandong in 1906. They were still there in 1911 when David was carrying out fencing work in the district.

By 1914 the family had moved to Launching Place, with the Electoral Roll listing David as a farmer. By early 1916 the family had moved to Balmain Street, South Richmond. David died in East Melbourne in late September 1916.

Francis enlisted on February 8, 1916 at Melbourne, aged 18 years, with his mother as next-of-kin. Following some training at Ballarat he was allotted as private 1746, to 2nd Reinforcements, 60th Battalion on March 8, 1916 at Broadmeadows. On May 4, he embarked in Melbourne on HMAT Port Lincoln having transferred to 1st Reinforcements, 60th Battalion.

Arriving in Suez, Egypt, Francis joined his Battalion to undertake further training. On August 8 he travelled to Marseilles, France where two weeks latter he became ill and was transferred to hospital in Bulford, England.

Three months later Charles was fit to join his Battalion on the Western front. However he then had several periods in hospital with bronchitis. He returned to the Front in late Feruary 1917.

Early in 1917, his Battalion participated in the advance that followed the German retreat to the Hindenburg line, where Francis took part in defending gains made during the second battle of Bullecourt. The 60th's successful major battle was at Polygon Wood on 26 September 1917.

On January 18, 1918 Francis took leave in Edinburh. On return he became ill and was admitted to hospital at Bulford in Wiltshire, then transferred to nearby Sutton

Veny camp where on April 5 he was admitted to hospital with an injury to his ankle.

Francis remained at Sutton Veny until late July when he transferred to Weymouth in Dorset, to prepare to return to Australia.

On behalf of his sister-in-law Agatha, on August 1, 1918, Francis wrote to the Australian Red Cross in London enquiring about his brother Charles' burial. Charles was killed in action in France in April 1917. Francis wrote from No 2 Command Depot at Weymouth.

Charles embarked as an invalid with a fractured ankle, on August 24, 1918, on HT Medic. He arrived in Melbourne on October 11, 1918 and was discharged there on October 29, 1918.

Francis was awarded the British War Medal, the Victory Medal and 1914/15 Star. His name is recorded on the Kilmore Shire Roll of Honour at the Memorial Hall.

After the war Francis married Victoria Florence McEachern in Victoria in 1920. He opened a shop in Launching Place, became a leading member of the Upper Yarra RSL, a local Councillor, and later operated a Timber and Hardware business in Yarra Junction. He died at Heidelberg in 1975.

Contributed by the Kilmore Historical Society