



In Memory of

Private

JOHN DERRICK 'JACK' SMITH

3911, 1st Australian Pioneers

who died age 22

on 25th July 1916

Son of John Thomas and Rebecca Smith, of "Tricot", Oakey, Queensland.

Remembered with honour

VILLERS-BRETONNEUX MEMORIAL, FRANCE



PRIVATE
JOHN DERRICK 'JACK' SMITH
1ST AUSTRALIAN PIONEERS, AUSTRALIAN INFANTRY
SERVICE NO: 3911

This soldier came from Victoria to live on the Darling Downs before the Great War. His full name was **John Derrick Smith**, (the middle name coming from his mother's family), but he preferred on all army forms, including his enlistment papers, to use the simpler name **Jack Smith**. He was born at Lancefield in Victoria but before the war his family farmed at a property called "Tricot" near Oakey, about 25 kilometres west of Toowoomba. His parents were John Thomas and Rebecca Smith; upon enlistment he nominated his father as NOK, of the same address. He was 21 years of age and wrote his own occupation as well-driller, implying that he worked to some extent independently of the family farm. He was educated at the Toowoomba Grammar School, graduating in 1911.

Jack enlisted in Toowoomba on 10 August 1915. He had his medical examination with Dr David Horn the same day. He was 5'10" tall and weighed 140 pounds; his complexion was medium, with grey eyes and dark brown hair, and he stated his religion as Church of England. Jack trained at Enoggera until his posting to the 9th Battalion and embarkation soon afterwards for Egypt. He sailed from Brisbane with the 12/9th Battalion aboard A50 *Itonus* on 30 October.

Jack spent several months of further training in the camps at Zeitoun and Serapeum in the Nile Delta region. He had arrived too late to fight at Gallipoli but he was on the path to the Western Front and some of the worst fighting of the war. He sailed with the 9th on 26 March 1916 for Marseilles. A week later he was on a train bound for northern France and the trenches. He also received a transfer to the 1st Pioneer Battalion, essentially a work battalion of the 1st Division, the same division to which the 9th Battalion belonged.

In July 1916 the British army began one of the biggest offensives of the war, in the Somme Valley north-east of Amiens. The AIF began its role in the great battle at Pozieres. The 1st Division took the village on 23 July and in the following days pushed beyond towards an area known as Pozieres Heights. On 25 July the Australians attempted to seize enemy positions known as OG1 and OG2 (standing for Old German trenches). In two days of bitter fighting over about a square kilometre of ground the two armies fought a determined struggle of attack and counter-attack.

On 25 July Jack Smith was reported killed in action. He received a battlefield burial but, as the Somme battle continued until November, all trace of his grave was obliterated. His name was placed on the Australian Memorial at Villers-Bretonneux. John senior signed receipts for the medals, mementoes, commemorative scroll and plaque for his 22-year-old son. It took less than one year for Jack to go from a Darling Downs farm to an unknown battlefield grave.

Toowoomba Grammar School Archive Records state that he started at the school on 24th July 1909 and left on 11th April 1910.

External Links:

[CWGC](#)

[AWM4 AIF 14/13/5 1ST PIONEER BN JULY 1916](#)

[Australian War Memorial Honour Roll](#)

[Australian National Archives Military Record](#)