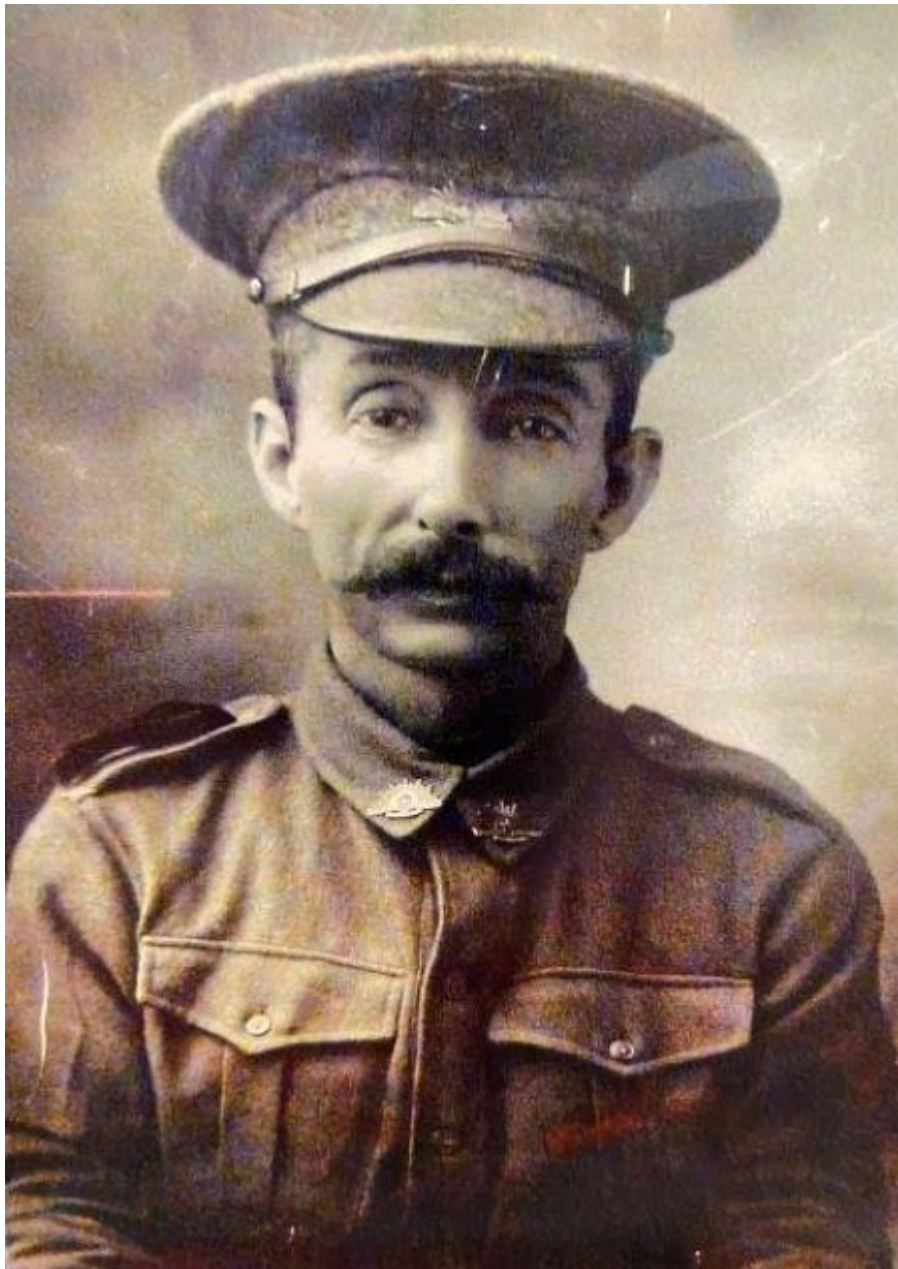


TWO MATES- TWO ANZAC TRAGEDIES

12 months ago we discovered that Olinda Football Club's first captain, James Walker Wyles, had tragically lost his life in WW1.

But did the death of the Club's 1913 Best Player Award winner Peter Johnston inspire James to sign up and lead to his own demise ?

Before we get to "what we know" about these two players we need to thank the Mt. Dandenong Historical Society for unearthing the only pic we have of James Wyles, Olinda's first skipper in 1908.



Olinda's first skipper - James Walker Wyles.

When we look closely at this picture it's apparent that James was not an excited young man off to a big war adventure in Europe. In fact he was 38 years old and at the upper age level for recruitment by the AIF.

You can't help but think he would have been better served tending his market garden in Coonara Rd

than joining the slaughter in France.

So what motivated him to join up in July 1916, just as one of the bloodiest battles in human history- The Somme - was getting underway ?

Well we can never know for certain but two years into the War there was immense social pressure on men who hadn't joined up to go and help their mates.

One year earlier, in May 1915, local footy star Peter Johnston died from wounds he suffered at Gallipoli.

This is how the Camberwell Advertiser described Johnston's passing -

"Mingled pride and sorrow rose in the breasts of the Olinda people when news reached here that one of the local boys had fallen during the recent fierce fighting at Gallipoli. Peter Johnston was one of the cheeriest and most good natured lads and his face will be missed by all. He will be missed on the football field because he was a good little player and his fair hair was conspicuous at hard contests."

The article goes on to say that Johnston had lived in the area for seven years and he would therefore have almost certainly played alongside Wyles.

Doubtlessly his death had a big impact on Wyles, and the whole community.



1912- we are fairly certain James Walker Wyles is fifth from the left in the back row. We think Peter is in the back row, third from left.

So James Wyles went to War, and this is the tragic dateline -

1916- July- signs up

1917- February- arrives in England

1917- February- arrives in France two days later

1917- February 8- joins unit in France

1917-May 5- Missing in Action

1917- December- confirmed dead.

What is extraordinary about this timeline is that we have no indication James was involved in any other action except the second Battle of Bullecourt.

He was dead within 12 weeks of arriving in France.

Just as we can't confirm that James joined up because of Peter's death we will also never know what went through his mind as he waited in the trenches for the "attack whistle" which would signal it was time to charge the heavily fortified German "Hindenburg Line".

The cleared ground he had to charge across had been pre targeted by German artillery. Intersecting machine gun fire lines covered every inch of that ground. The troops were aware of the daunting odds they faced after the debacle of the First Battle of Bullecourt and yet they still went over the top together.

James Walker Wyles was a world away from the peaceful Hills community where young men and women from the Olinda, Ferny Creek and Upwey communities clash this week.

Lest We Forget.



1913 Best Player- Peter Johnston-the pic was taken in Egypt before he departed for Gallipoli where

he was mortally wounded.
