

## Private Sylvester Organ – KIA 1917

Private Organ's story is interesting on several counts. The first is that he is proof that the war touched all Australian families, from the labourers and miners living in poverty, to the well-off (some anyway) farmers and pastoralists of the western plains. The second is that rest in peace is not always possible.

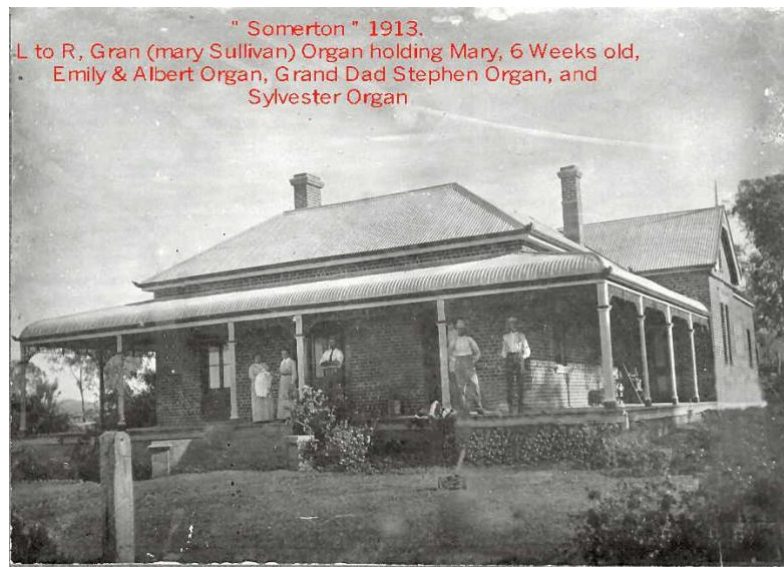
Sylvester Organ was born in Coonamble, NSW in 1887. His father, Stephen Dominic Organ, was a pioneer of the western district and his family became well known around Dubbo. The family moved from Coonamble to Narromine after acquiring a property there and then moved to the Mudgee district. Stephen was a 'noted horseman and a man who held shearing records with the blades.'



The family prospered. There is a photo of Stephen and his wife Mary Alice (nee Sullivan) in a motor vehicle – a rare and expensive form of transport back then.



There is another photograph of the broader family, including Sylvester, on the veranda of a large pastoral home in Bective, near Tamworth NSW (1913).



Sylvester married Annie Wilson in Narromine in 1912. They had three children, Walter (1913), Robert (1914) and Hazel (1916).

Sylvester was 27 when he enlisted on 19 April 1916. His occupation is listed as farmer. Unlike many poorer recruits from the cities he was tall, just over 6ft, and strong at 13 stone.

Private Organ embarked Sydney on the Mashobra on 14 September 1916 and arrived in Plymouth on 2 November 1916. He then travelled to France on the ship Princess Henrietta and joined the 53<sup>rd</sup> Battalion where he was assigned to the Brigade Mining Company.



Like many he suffered various ailments, including influenza, and had several hospital admissions. On 11 September 1917 he was admitted with scabies and was discharged one week later. He was killed in action only one week after discharge from hospital.

D30138

**FIELD SERVICE** Army Form B. 2090A.

REPORT of Death of a Soldier to be forwarded to the War Office with the least possible delay after receipt of notification of death on Army Form B. 213 or Army Form A. 56, or from other official documentary sources.

REGIMENT **53rd INFANTRY BATTALION A.I.F.** -- --  
OR CORPS Battalion, Troop, Battery or Company

Regimental No. **2467** Rank **Private.**

Surname **O R G A N,** Christian Name **Sylvester.**

Date **23rd September, 1917.** Place **In the field, FRANCE or BELGIUM.**

Died Cause of Death **KILLED IN ACTION.**

Nature and Date of Report **ARMY FORM B. 213, dated 28/9/17.**

By whom made **C.O., 53rd Infantry Battalion A.I.F.**

\*Specially state if killed in action, or died from wounds received in action, or from illness due to field operations or to fatigue, privation or exposure while on military duty, or from any other cause.

State whether he leaves (1) in Pay Book (Army Book 54) **Will NOT received.** (2) in Small Book (if at Base)  
 a Will or not (3) as a separate document. -- --

All private documents and effects received from the front or hospital, as well as the Pay Book, should be examined, and if any will is found it should be at once forwarded to the War Office.

Any information received as to verbal expressions by a deceased soldier of his wishes as to the disposal of his estate should be reported to the War Office as soon as possible.

A duplicate of this Report is to be sent to the Field Centre Paymaster at Home, or to the D.F.A. (Cyprus) Indian Expeditionary Force, or Field Engineering Office, as the case may require, together with the Deceased's Pay Book and withdrawal of any will from the latter. If the deceased's Small Book is at the Base, it should be forwarded to the War Office with this Report.

**ANZAC SECTION 3rd REGIMENT C.M.G.**

Station and Date **1st November, 1917.** U. 1/8 **Captain. Records.**

WORKSHEET 20, 200-11 & 20-12 (1917) Form 2090A/5

Army Form 2090A states simply 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1917 - In the field, France or Belgium – Killed in Action. He is remembered at the Menin Gate Memorial.

For many diggers, this is where the families grieve and look to a difficult life without a husband and father, and a small allotment from the government.

However, in Private Organ's case, this is where things get interesting.

On 8 November, just a few short months after his death, his wife writes to defence (OIC Melbourne) inquiring 'if you have any post or any belonging to my husband' ...?

This was a natural thing to do as Sylvester's Last Will and Testament dated 3 May 1916 makes his wife the sole beneficiary of his estate.

Defence responds on the 17<sup>th</sup>, explaining that insufficient time has passed for such items to have made their way to Australia.

On 26 November Kelly & Waterford Solicitors of Wellington NSW, acting for the widow, write to Defence stating that they are acting for the Executrix of the Will and attach a copy of the Will. They also request a copy of any death certificate to assist with application for Probate.

The use of a solicitor for someone from a well-off family would be appropriate. Otherwise all seems to be running smoothly.

But on 15 January 1918 Defence receive a letter from another solicitor, Herbert O'Halloran of Dunedoo, acting on behalf of Fitzherbert Joseph Comber of Dunedoo. This letter asks if Sylvester left a will and to whom it might have been handed over. The letter claims that Sylvester told Mr Comber, prior to embarkation, that he would make Mr Comber, who was married to Sylvester's sister, an executor of the will along with Sylvester's younger brother, the Reverend Father George Organ. The letter goes on to claim that Sylvester's widow has been unable to obtain any information concerning the will. This is despite Mrs Organ being actually named in the Will.

Defence's response, familiar in style to those of us who have served, is short and to the point:

"With reference to your communication of the 15<sup>th</sup> instant I have to advise you that the above-mentioned dead soldier left a will, the sole beneficiary being his wife, Annie Elizabeth Susan Organ, for whom Messrs Kelly & Waterford, Solicitors, Wellington, NSW are acting."

In other words, sod off!

Further correspondence from the widow's solicitors ask if Private Organ's effects and paybook have arrived yet, the latter being needed for probate.

Defence's response is that any personal effects will be forwarded to the next of kin, that the paybook is actually government property and will not be released, but that a financial statement will be provide in good time.

On 10 March 1918, now five months later, Mrs Organ again writes to Defence asking for information and her husband's effects. Four days later Defence again responds with "nothing yet".

Another two months goes by and Defence finally writes to Mrs Organ stating that her husband's personal effects are on the way in a separate registered post.

On 16 July 1918 Mrs Organ's solicitors again write to Defence seeking information for Probate and requesting a Formal Certificate of Private Organ's death, and his paybook. This is despite Defence's previous response about the paybook and Mrs Organ previously receiving a formal certificate of death on 4 February 1918.

Defence write back on 26 July 1918 referring the solicitor to the previous correspondence – paybook retained by Defence, death certificate was provided to widow, personal effects have been forwarded to widow – nothing else has been received.

Mrs Organ's solicitor writes back a few days later to demand the death certificate in triplicate, the paybook and any other of Private Organ's belongings in Defence's possession!

Defence respond again on 2 August – here is the death certificate in triplicate, and please forward the Will and/or Probate to us to pass to the Paymaster so that Private Organ's military affairs can be finalised according to his testamentary instructions.

On 30 October 1918 another player enters the fray! The National Mutual Life Association of Australasia Limited writes to Defence asking for identifying information including personal appearance and next of kin. This is presumably to pay a life insurance claim. Defence respond with this information on 4 November 1918.

Fast forward to 4 January 1919 and Mrs Organ writes to the Minister for Defence to try and obtain a photograph of her husband's grave. This request was forwarded to AIF HQ in London.

Two and a half years later, in August 1921, Mrs Organ finally receives a Memorial Scroll and King's Message.

All up, it took four years before Private Sylvester Organ might finally rest in peace.