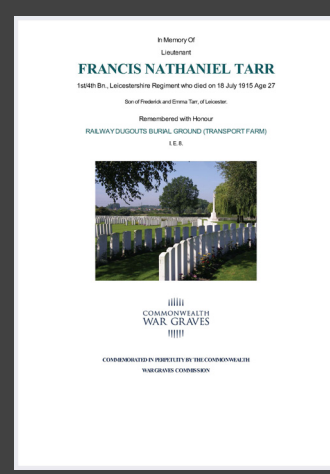


Voices of War Life Story

Francis Nathaniel Tarr
1887 - 1915





Name: Francis Nathaniel Tarr

Other names: Frank

Date of Birth: 18.08.1887

Place of birth: Ironville, Belper, Derbyshire, UK

Nationality: British

Date of Death: 10.07.1915

Place of death: Ypres, France

Burial or memorials: Leicester Tigers Memorial, Welford Road, Leicester

Service No: 2132171

Unit(s): 1/4th Battalion, Leicestershire Regiment

Rank: Lieutenant

Medals and Awards:

Education: [Stoneygate School, Leicester](#), [Uppingham School, Rutland](#), [University College, Oxford](#)

Clubs and Affiliations: [Leicester Tigers](#)



Life Story

Frank Tarr was born on the 18th August 1887 at Ironville, near Belper in Derbyshire. He the only son of Frederick Tarr, a local coal merchant, and his wife Emma. Francis had one older sister, Mabel. His father went on to train as a lithographic printer, whilst Emma's family had an engineering background. Francis was baptised on the 25th September 1887 in the local church - Christ Church, Ironville. The family had moved to Leicester by April 1891, with the census recording the family home as 90 London Road, Leicester (opposite). In March 1901 they had moved to Knighton Park Road in Leicester, and they family had been joined by the maternal Uncle William Sedgwick, a cigar manufacturer.



Francis was educated at Stoneygate School, Leicester where he developed his interest in rugby, before moving up to Uppingham School in 1902. Here he excelled in sports, being made Captain of Games and played three-quarter in the rugby team for two years. Here he also met his future Oxford and England teammate [Ronald Poulton-Palmer](#) who was playing for Rugby School at the time. In 1906 he left Uppingham for Oxford University to read law. After he graduated he returned to Leicester to practice law and joined Leicester Tigers to play rugby. He was articled to Messrs. Owston, Dickinson, Simpson and Bigg, and was about to take his final examination when he enlisted. He never married.



Rugby Career

Tarr spent the majority of his rugby career following university with Leicester, Tigers, but he also appeared for club teams Headingley and Richmond F.C. and also Midland Counties, some of which have commemorated him on their war memorials.

In his first season at university Tarr played for the 'A' team, which also included another future England player [Anthony Henniker-Gotley](#). He was later selected for the senior team and gained three Blues from 1907 to 1909, the first in the 1907 Varsity Match on 10 December. Cambridge, with some notable international players on the team, were the clear favourites on the day. After they won the toss and elected to kick off with the wind behind them, the majority of the first 40 minutes was played in Oxford's half, much of it in their 25. Yet Cambridge failed to break through Oxford's defence, chiefly that of the centres Vassall and Tarr. Just before half time, with a scrum deep in Oxford's half, Rupert Williamson fed George Cunningham. The ball came to Tarr, who drew his opposite man, K. G. Macleod, and timed his pass to Vassall so that he, in turn, drew the Cambridge left wing near the half-way line and put H. Martin to run in a try from there. Oxford went on to win 16–0.

With Oxford having won the Varsity Match in 1906 and 1907, the captain Harold Hodges opted to stick with the winning three-quarter line for 1908, which included the centre combination of Vassall and Tarr. The pair were noted for their excellent ball handling skills, were quick around the field, and



Tarr was also a powerful tackler. On 12 December, the 1908 Varsity Match resulted in a hard-fought 5–5 draw, the Cambridge pack having improved considerably since the previous year. As it turned out, Vassall had an ankle injury that took him out of the game after just five minutes into the game. The Times noted Tarr's performance saying: *"FN Tarr, at left centre three-quarter, gave a magnificent display of defensive play."*



Tarr earned his first England cap on 9 January 1909 against the touring Australians at Rectory Field, Blackheath. With both Vassall and John Birkett injured, he was selected to start. England took an early lead, when Tarr put Mobbs in for a try in the opening stages. That try has been described by contemporary rugby journalist and author E. H. D. Sewell, as being *"one of the very best ever scored, being perfect in execution from the moment Tarr first received the ball to the moment Mobbs touched it down for a try."* Unfortunately, Australia eventually won 9–3.

Tarr was then been selected to play against Wales the following week. Wales were the favourites and although England played better than expected, they beat the visitors 8–0. Two weeks later, on 30 January, England played France with a half back combination of Frank Hutchinson, earning his first cap, and Williamson; Poulton making his debut at centre alongside Tarr; and Mobbs and Tom Simpson on the wings. England won the game comfortably 22–0 with Tarr scoring two tries, one through good interplay with Mobbs and the other, a fine individual run. However, despite the tries, Tarr was subsequently dropped from the England squad.



Playing statistics

FRANK TARR England

Full name Francis Nathaniel Tarr

Born August 14, 1887, Belper

Died July 18, 1915, Ypres (aged 27 years 338 days)

Major teams England

Position Centre

Test Career

	Span	Mat	Start	Sub	Pts	Tries	Conv	Pens	Drop	GfM	Won	Lost	Draw	%
All Tests	1909-1913	4	4	0	6	2	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	50.00
Five/Six Nations	1909-1913	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	50.00

Career Statistics

Test debut England v Australia at Blackheath, Jan 9, 1909 [match details](#)

Last Test England v Scotland at Twickenham, Mar 15, 1913 [match details](#)

Rugby union career

Position(s) Centre

Amateur team(s)

Years	Team	Apps (Points)
1907–1909	Oxford University RFC Headingley Richmond F.C. Midland Counties	()

Senior career

Years	Team	Apps (Points)
	Leicester Tigers	94 (72)

National team(s)

Years	Team	Apps (Points)
1909–1913	England	4 6



There was some controversy over the selection for the 1909 Varsity Match. Cunningham had announced his choice of Poulton at a meeting on 2 December, with Vassall absent. Cunningham sent him a letter by hand informing him of the decision, but this was returned unopened. Tarr stepped up at this point and offered to give up his own place for Poulton to avoid any issue, but Cunningham stuck with his initial choice. The game was played on 11 December, with Oxford at the start having the worse of it until one moment turned the game around: after the Oxford forwards got the ball back, Gotley, at scrum-half, sent the ball to Cunningham, who passed on to Tarr and he to his fellow centre Colin Gilray. He fed the ball to Poulton on the left wing still inside the Oxford half. Poulton then broke through the defence to score under the posts. With Oxford eight points ahead at the end of the first quarter, disaster struck and Tarr broke his collarbone in a tackle. He missed the rest of what the referee F.C. Potter-Irwin described as *“the fastest and most spectacular Varsity Match he had ever witnessed”*. Oxford beat Cambridge 23–3, Poulton scoring five tries, vindicating his selection.

Tarr scored 72 points over 94 appearances, but was dropped by England in 1909. He was therefore surprised to be called up to play against Scotland in 1913. Sadly, Tarr didn't have the best game and it was to be his last international appearance.

Military Service

While at Oxford, like many students Tarr had joined the [Officers' Training Corps](#), and reached the rank of cadet sergeant with them. In 1911, he joined the Territorial Force, serving with the 1/4th Battalion, Leicestershire Regiment, as a second lieutenant, and in 1913 he was promoted to lieutenant. At the outbreak of war in 1914, Tarr enlisted almost immediately,





and became the regiment machine-gun officer.

His battalion were destined for the Western Front with the 46th (North Midland) Division and landed at le Havre on 3rd March 1915 and heading to Ypres, right into the middle of the Second Battle of Ypres, infamous for being the first mass use of poison gas by the Germans. The battalion's dugouts were situated in the mass of trenches winding between Zillebeke lake and the Ypres–Comines railway line which ran south-east of Ypres. By this point Tarr was the acting adjutant of his battalion and he had been put forward for promotion to captain. On the afternoon of 18th July 1915, he had visited the dugouts of the 5th Battalion, Lincolnshire Regiment, situated near Zillebeke, to liaise with their adjutant. During a period of German shelling, Tarr put his head out to tell some men to remain under cover when a splinter from a shell struck him in the face, killing him. If it had struck any other part of his body, he would have survived.

The unit war diary records the event quite simply:

18 Jul-15:

Fine – wind breezy Northerly. At 5.40pm Lieutenant F. N. TARR (Acting Adjutant) was killed by splinter from crump whilst visiting ZILLEBEKE LAKE dugouts. 2nd Lieutenant R. C. HARVEY took over duties of Adjutant. At 9.30pm Battalion relieved 5th LINCOLNSHIRE REGT at ZILLEBEKE LAKE dugouts. Casualties, officers killed Lieutenant F. N. TARR, other ranks 2 men wounded.

Tarr was buried in the Railway Dugouts Burial Ground that night, not far from where he was killed, around 2km from Zillebeke village. The cemetery



COPY.

COMPREHENSIVE REPORT.

GRAVES REGISTRATION REPORT FORM.

D.A.D.G.R. & E. Central S. District.

COMMUNE. ZILLEBEKE.

REPORT NO. 1.

SCHEDULE NO: 8/c. Rev

PLACE OF BURIAL. RAILWAY DUGOUTS BURIAL GROUND (TRANSPORT FARM),
ZILLEBEKE.

Land belongs to 28.I.21.c.85.90.

The following are buried
here:-

Regiment.	No.	Name.	Rank and Initials.	Date of Death.	Cross Erected or despatched.	Plot Row & Grave.
<u>PLOT 1. ROW E Continued.</u>						
7/Seaforth Hdrs.	10209	✓ REAY	Pte.R.	18.11.15.	All Crosses Erected.	4.
do. do.	4955	✓ DALZIEL	CSM., C.R.	15.11.15.		5.
do. do.		✓ MC LAUGHLIN	2/Lt. E.A.C.	9.11.15.		6.
1/5 North Staffs.		✓ GOSS	2/Lt. R.G.F.	12.8.15.		7.
1/4 Leicester Rgt.		✓ TARR	Lt. F.N.	18. 7.15.		8.
1/Derby Bty. RFA.	649	✓ TOLLEDAY	Gnr. F.	20. 7.15.		9.
do. do.	812	✓ LEE	Gnr. G.	30. 7.15.		10.
5/S. Staff. Regt.	8079	✓ ALDRIDGE	Pte. W.	10. 8.15.		11.
do. do.	9055	✓ CHAMBERLAIN	Pte. B.	do.		12.
1/5 Lincoln Rgt.	3057	✓ ROGERS	Pte. J.	15. 8.15.	(SL/LS/6/5812)	13.
5/S. Staffs.	8981	✓ MANN	L/Cpl.	2. 9.15.		14.
1/4 Lincoln Regt.	2069	✓ OSBOURNE	Pte. A.	do.		15.
do. do.	2850	✓ SHORT	L/Cpl. J.	do.		16.
do. do.	1858	✓ SMITH	Pte. A (or R) S.	do.		17.
do. do.	873	✓ PARKER	Sgt. R.	2. 9.15.		18.

Grave Registration (taken from www.cwgc.org)



was started after the terrible fighting of in April 1915. Burials continued until the Armistice, especially in 1916 and 1917, when Advanced Dressing Stations were placed in the dugouts and the farm.

Frank was a great loss to the battalion, with Captain John Milne, in 'Footprints of the 1/4th Leicestershire Regiment' describing Tarr thus:

"...the most attractive personality in the battalion, young, good-looking, full of charm, with an eye that always had a twinkle in it, a born leader, yet the kindest person possible, a Rugger international, the idol of the machine-gun section, which he commanded before he became adjutant. Everybody was heartbroken, for everybody would miss him they would not look upon his like again."

Tarr was one of 27 England rugby players killed in the First World War. There are memorials to him on the family headstone in Welford Road Cemetery, at Uppingham School, University College, Oxford, the Oxford University rugby club and the Richmond Athletic Ground.

Newspaper Reports:

Leicester Daily Post. Thursday 22nd July 1915:

LEICESTERSHIRE AND THE WAR." – DEATH OF LIEUT. F. N. TARR. – FAMOUS TIGER KILLED IN BELGIUM. HIT BY A SHELL

We regret to announce the death of Lieut. Frank N. Tarr, of the 1/4th Leicester's, who was killed in action in the neighbourhood of Ypres, Belgium, on the 18th inst. The news reached the town indirectly on



Tuesday night through a passage in a soldier's letter, but it was not confirmed until yesterday morning when his mother, who lives at The Croft, Stoneygate-road, Leicester, received a letter stating that her son was killed by a shell. Lieut. Tarr joined the Leicester Territorial's before the war broke out, and when the crisis came he was among the first to volunteer for active service. He accompanied his battalion to Luton for training preparatory to going to the front, and whilst there organised one or two teams to meet Mr. Crumbie's side in a friendly game of football on the Welford-road Ground. He was a popular and efficient officer, and not a little daring in carrying out the exacting duties he was called upon to discharge. His high conception of duty was a stimulus to all who came in contact with him, and his cheery unaffected disposition won him the affection of comrades and friends. A little more than a week ago he was given a few days leave, and visited his mother and friends in Leicester. He was then in excellent health. The only information received as to the circumstances of his death, was that he was struck on the head with a shell. The deceased officer was educated at Uppingham School and Oxford University. After concluding his career at Oxford, he commenced the study of the law, with a view to making it his profession. He was articled to Messrs. Owston, Dickinson, Simpson and Bigg, and was about to take his final examination when called up to serve with the colours. Locally he was best known as an exceedingly clever Rugby footballer, and a most valued member of the Leicester Football Club. On going up to Oxford he created such a good impression that he was given his "Blue" in 1907, and played regularly for his University, that season and the two succeeding ones. In 1909 he was capped for England, and played against Wales, France and the Australians. In the season 1912-13 he played against Scotland. The



characteristic feature of his play was its variety. He could probably pick out the weak links in the defence of the opposition as quickly as any man, and having done this he never failed to take full advantage of it, He was not one of those showy players who now and again excel on great occasions, but his work was always consistently good, and his invariable practice was to enable his colleagues to take advantage of his skill rather than seek to emphasise his own brilliance. His death is one of the greatest blows the Leicester Football Club has ever sustained. He was to Percy Lawrie what the late A. O. Jones was to Ernest Hind. In both cases the highest qualities in the wing men were developed by the brilliant work of their centres, who forgetful of themselves, always sought to bring success in combination with their colleagues. Lieut. Tarr was an ideal footballer, both in temperament and skill. He never descended to a mean action; such a thing was foreign to his nature. He was indeed, a charming man. No man could be any length of time in his company without realising that he was not only a sportsman of the highest qualities, but a gentleman. His death will be mourned, not only by those nearest and dearest to him, but by thousands of others in Leicester and the county, and indeed in many parts of England, who recognised in him a great player, and who looked to him to show those qualities he possessed to such a high degree as a footballer in the civil walks of life.

Leicester Daily Post, Monday 26th July 1915

WITH THE 4th LEICESTERS.

The Death of Lieut. Tarr. – Belgium, July 19th.

The Battalion has sustained another serious loss. Yesterday our



adjutant, Lieut. Tarr, the well known Leicester International Rugby footballer, was killed by a shell. His loss is deeply deplored by all ranks. He was a sportsman in every shape and form, and one of the bravest of the brave, never sparing himself. He was a man everybody would follow. The most dangerous duties he did himself, and by his example made dangerous work seem quite safe. Every officer and man feels his loss deeply.



1907 University of Oxford Rugby XV.
Frank Tarr is standing on the far right.

In Memory Of

Lieutenant

FRANCIS NATHANIEL TARR

1st/4th Bn., Leicestershire Regiment who died on 18 July 1915 Age 27

Son of Frederick and Emma Tarr, of Leicester.

Remembered with Honour

RAILWAY DUGOUTS BURIAL GROUND (TRANSPORT FARM)

I. E. 8.



|||||
COMMONWEALTH
WAR GRAVES
|||||

COMMEMORATED IN PERPETUITY BY THE COMMONWEALTH
WAR GRAVES COMMISSION



LIEUTENANT
F. N. TARR
LEICESTERSHIRE REGIMENT
18TH JULY 1915 AGE 27



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