

ITALO CESARI

DROMANA'S ILLUSTRIOUS FOOTBALLER & SOLDIER

Reference: 2023/19



Former Dromana FC footballer Italo Cesari (1893- 1973) played in one of the most famous football matches in the long and colourful history of Australian football. The Pioneer Exhibition Match, which was played in London in 1916 (i.e. during the Great War), was the first game of Australian Rules to be played on foreign soil; and Dromana's very own Italo Cesari was selected to participate in that notable event. Source: Darge Photographic Co.

INTRODUCTION- THE DEATH OF ITALO CESARI: 50 YEARS AGO.

Although Italo Cesari has been previously mentioned in various articles on the DFNC History Page, this item has been especially prepared to mark the fact that it is fifty years since his death in 1973.

It is puzzling as to why, following the cessation of the Great War, that the life story of Italo Cesari was not documented and preserved for perpetuity. Many would concur that Italo deserves greater recognition in the town's pantheon for his impressive record with Dromana Football Club and distinguished service for Australia during two World Wars.

Italo Cesari, a star in the local league, played in a most celebrated football match in London during World War: 1; and it hoped that this article will give younger readers an appreciation of Italo's place in football history...

" In that game...which provided a virtual blueprint for modern Anzac Day football – the Third Division took on the Combined Training Units at Queen's Club, West Kensington, in the first organised game of Australian Football played overseas by predominantly elite-level players" Source: AFL website May 2017.

BRIEF BACKGROUND OF THE CESARI FAMILY

Italo's father Arcangelo Cesare Cesari lived in the Italian town of Villa Basilica (Tuscany); and was known to be a tailor and a most talented musician. It is documented that he was enticed to migrate to Australia to take part in an Australasian orchestral tour which included concerts in Sydney, Melbourne, Tasmania and New Zealand.

Arcangelo Cesari arrived in Australia in October 1888; and in 1892 married Rosina Corra who was also from Italy (San Sisto-Perugia). Italo was born in Sydney in 1893; and was one of three children born to Rosina and Arcangelo.

Bad luck struck Arcangelo and following a series of ill-fated events, he gained work in the orchestra at the Princess's Theatre in Melbourne. Details are a little vague about this chapter of the Cesari family history but may explain the family's return to Victoria. It is thought that Italo later lived at Sorrento; and hence his connection with football on the Mornington Peninsula

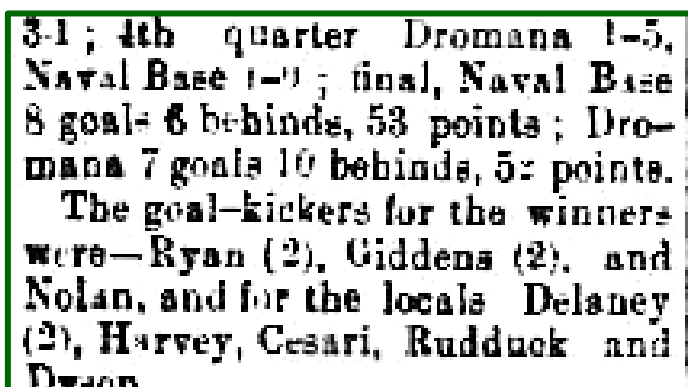
ITALO CESARI PLAYS FOOTBALL AT DROMANA FC.

Italo Cesari was an adept footballer; and it is documented that he played with Dromana and also Queenscliff in that era...

"He was very well known for his passion of Australian Rules football, and may certainly have been Australia's first Italian player being involved with the Peninsula association. He was a former Dromana and Queenscliff footballer and umpire." Source: Virtual War Museum.

One of the earliest references regarding Italo playing for Dromana was in the review of the game against Somerville in July 1914. On that day, Italo was listed among the better players for Dromana as were Ern Rudduck, and the McLear brothers. **Note:** In that report, Italo's name was spelt incorrectly (as Cesaro).

In the match against Mornington that year, Italo was mentioned for his impressive performance. Italo played with Dromana in 1915 and was regarded as one the key players of the team...



3-1; 4th quarter Dromana 1-5, Naval Base 1-0; final, Naval Base 8 goals 6 behinds, 53 points; Dromana 7 goals 10 behinds, 52 points. The goal-kickers for the winners were—Ryan (2), Giddens (2), and Nolan, and for the locals Delaney (2), Harvey, Cesari, Rudduck and Dawson.

Match details for the game against the Navy in May 1915. Source: 'Mornington Standard' May 15th 1915. Page: 2.

Football records are scant and it is not known how many games that Italo played with Dromana in 1914-15; and unfortunately there are gaps in Italo's playing career which are difficult to clarify. It is possible, but cannot be verified, that Italo may have played with Dromana in 1913.

Italo worked at various jobs in the district including as a boatman, grocer and gardener. It is known Italo married Jean Dixon in 1915.

ITALO CESARI ENLISTS IN THE A.I.F.

As can be seen below, Britain declared war on Germany in August 1914. It was a momentous and far-reaching decision that would drastically impact upon the lives of countless Australians including members of the Dromana Football Club.



Source: 'The Land' (Sydney) Friday August 7th 1914. Page: 6.

Italo Cesare was one of many members of the Dromana Football Club to enlist for military service during World War: 1. Others included: Harold Clydesdale, Bill Dyson, George McLearn, Albert Gibson, Ern Rudduck, Charlie Trewin, Ern Cairns, John Peatey, Rupert Debney, James McLearn, James Counsel, Jack Rudduck and Bob Clydesdale.

Italo Cesari enlisted in the A.I.F on the 17th July 1915; and then proceeded to undertake intensive basic training (at either the Broadmeadows or Seymour camps). From the information obtained from his AIF Service Record, Italo was 21 years and 11 months of age when he signed on with the Army. His enlistment papers indicated that he was working as a grocer and was residing at Back Beach Road Sorrento at that time.

A23906

AUSTRALIAN MILITARY FORCES.

AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE.

Attestation Paper of Persons Enlisted for Service Abroad.

No. 4070 Name Cesari Italo

Unit 10th Reinforcements

77 Joined on 17.7.15

23rd Oct 1915
10th Reinforcements

Questions to be put to the Person Enlisting before Attestation.

1. What is your Name? Cesari Italo

2. In or near what Parish or Town were you born? Sydney in or near the Town of N.S.W. in the County of N.S.W.

3. Are you a natural born British Subject or a Naturalized British Subject? (N.B.—If the latter, papers to be shown.) Natural born British Subject

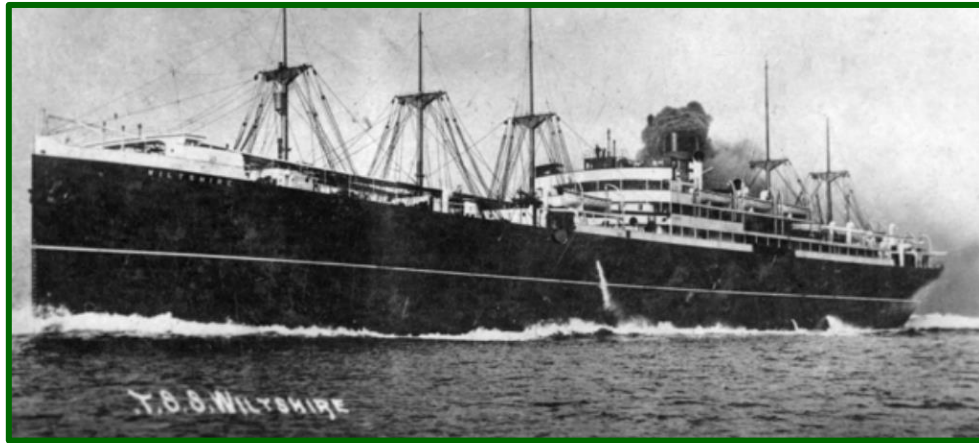
4. What is your age? 21 yr 11 mo

5. What is your trade or calling? Grocer

6. Are you, or have you been, an Apprentice? If so, when, to whom, and for what period? No

The above extract A23906 is part of Italo Cesari's enlistment papers . As can be seen, the date that Italo registered to join the AIF was the 17th July 1915. He was 21 years of age.

Italo (Service number: 4070) was a member of the 23rd Infantry Battalion (10th Reinforcement Unit) when he boarded the HMAT (i.e. Troopship) Wiltshire to sail to far flung European battlefields. The embarkation date is listed on the Australian War Memorial records as March 7th 1916.



The Troopship HMAT Wiltshire on which Italo Cesari sailed to war in 1916. Source: AWM

ITALO CESARI PLAYS FOOTBALL IN LONDON IN 1916.

The 23rd Infantry Battalion took part in some of the fiercest battles of the Great War; and it is impossible, in this brief article for DFNC, to describe its engagements during the various theatres of war. In short, the 23rd Battalion was comprised of Victorian recruits who not only trained in local camps but completed further military exercises in Egypt...

“...before being committed to the Gallipoli Campaign as reinforcements in September 1915. They remained on the peninsula until the evacuation of Allied troops in December, when they were withdrawn back to Egypt where they were reorganised before being transferred to the Western Front in March 1916. Over the course of the next two-and-a-half years, the 23rd took part in a number of significant battles in France and Belgium...”
Original source: Australian War Memorial

It is difficult to ascertain Italo’s involvement on the frontline after his arrival in France. However, sometime in October, Italo was granted military leave to take part in the Pioneer Exhibition Match at the Queen’s Club Oval in London. A poster for that legendary match is shown below:





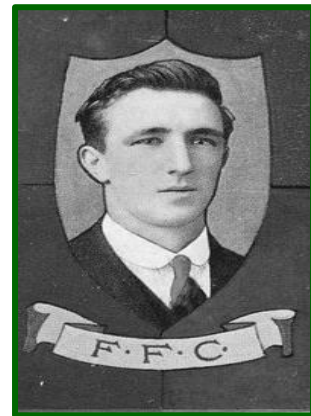
Left: Australia's most respected commander in wartime General John Monash; and on the right is the famous Australian swimmer, Frank Beaurepaire. Both men were instrumental in promoting the first game of Australian Rules football to be played overseas.

THE TEAMS

While in England, awaiting embarkation to the Western Front, Italo Cesari was selected to play in the Pioneer Exhibition Match between the Third Australian Divisional team and an Australian Training Units football team. The game was played on October 28rd 1916, at the Queen's Club in West Kensington (London); and its aim was to raise funds for the British and French Red Cross Societies.

The game received wide publicity at home and abroad; and the work that Frank Beaurepaire did in raising the interest of the English press and Londoners in the match was commendable. Londoners knew little about Australian football and even less about some of VFL champions who took part that day.

A handful of the players who Italo met that day were 'blue-ribbon' stars of VFL and interstate football (e.g. Bruce Sloss-South Melbourne, Jack Cooper-Fitzroy and Bill Sewart from Essendon). The majority of players of both teams had played in VFL or VFA ranks prior to enlisting; and it was a feather in Italo's cap (or rather his slouch hat) that he was invited/selected to play.



Three VFL champions who played in London in 1916: Bruce Sloss (South Melbourne), Billy Sewart (Essendon) and Jack Cooper (Fitzroy). Source: Boyles Football Photos.

The Third Divisional Team was: Bruce Sloss [Captain] (South Melbourne), Jack Brake (University and Melbourne), Dan Minogue (Collingwood), Carl Willis (University and South Melbourne), Leo Little (University), Bill Sewart (Essendon), James Pugh (Launceston), Harry Moyes (St. Kilda), Percy Jory (St. Kilda), Charlie Lilley (Melbourne), Les Lee (Richmond), Cyril Hoft (Perth), L. Martin (University), Ted Alley (Williamstown, ex-South Melbourne), Hugh James (Richmond), Ben Mills (Brunswick), Jim Foy (Perth) and Billy Orchard (Geelong).

The Australian Training Units training team was: Charles Perry (Captain-Norwood), Jack Cooper (Fitzroy), Percy Trotter (East Fremantle and ex-Fitzroy), Clyde Donaldson (Essendon), Harry Kerley (Collingwood), John Hoskins, Harold Boyd (VFA), Charlie Armstrong (Geelong), James Scullin (South Fremantle), Stan Martin (University), E. Maxfield (Fremantle), Thomas Paine (Northam), E. Beames, George Bower (South Melbourne) and **Italo Cesari from the Dromana Football Club**. According to the team sheet, Italo played as a ruck-rover in the game.



On the left: The two captains, Charles Perry and Bruce Sloss, toss the coin at the Queen's Club Oval. The photo on the right is of Italo Cesari wearing his Training Units XVIII team jumper with the kangaroo emblem. Source: AFL website and British Pathe Films (1916).



The Australian Units XVIII that played in London in 1916. Italo Cesari can be seen kneeling at the extreme right of the photograph. Source: AFL website.

A short film of that historic event gives some idea of the spirit of the game. It was a closely fought contest and played with 'serious intent.' Bruce Sloss described the clash as a 'real match.' His team had been trailing at three quarter time but responded to the 'call to arms' and kicked four majors while Charlie Perry's team faltered and was kept goal-less in the last term. The Third Divisional XVIII won by 16 points.

John Monash and Frank Beaurepaire achieved at least one of their aims in arranging that game in London. The skills and athleticism of the Australian soldiers impressed the English journalists; and generally the 'peculiar and foreign' game of Australian Rules was received in a most positive light...

"The English press generally offered favourable reviews, hailing the Australian game as 'a most exhilarating and exciting pastime' featuring 'extraordinarily good' high marking, 'wonderfully accurate' long kicking and what leading sportswriter EA Bland described as 'kaleidoscopic quickness'. Source: AFL website



Left: This action photograph from the game, in which Dromana's Italo Cesari played, was published in a French newspaper, 'The Excelsior', on the 20th November 1916. On the right : A goal umpire wearing khaki battle dress. Source: AFL website

THE RESULT & BACK TO THE BARB WIRE & TRENCHES

The final scores were:

- Third Australian Divisional team: 0.2 2.10 2.13 6.16 (52)
- Australian Units Training team: 2.5 2.7 4.9 4.12 (36)

Goal kickers in the game:

- Third Divisional: Moyes 2 Willis 2 Jory 1 and Lee 1.
- Training Units: Moore 1 Paine 1 Maxfield 1 and Armstrong 1.

Best Players:

- Third Divisional: James Moyes Willis Brake Minogue Alley Lilley Little Mills Foy and Lee.

- Training Units: Perry Trotter Cooper Bower Kerley Paine Armstrong Martin and Scullin.

No doubt, the game was a highpoint in the lives of the players and officials but it was over 'all too soon'; and thoughts strayed to returning to the frontline and the endless torment to survive the appalling conditions in the trenches.

It is fair to say, that the match in London was a marker on life's winding road for Italo Cesari and his comrades.. However, those Diggers who had played in the game, knew that the journey, across the English Channel to return to lines, would require far greater discipline nerve and willpower than was ever needed in playing football.

While the game at Queen's Club was 'serious business', it faded in comparison to the pitiless conditions that awaited them in the trenches on the Western Front.



One of the most famous and poignant photos of the Great War which shows the obliteration of a forest at Passchendaele in 1917. This unforgettable image was captured by Frank Hurley, the famous Australian wartime photographer.

THOSE FOOTBALLERS WHO DIED ON RETURN TO THE FRONT

At least seven of the men, who played in the Pioneer Exhibition Match with Dromana's Italo Cesari, were killed on their return to the front line. They were:

- Bruce Sloss-Died at Armentieres, France, on January 4th 1917.
- James Pugh-Died in action in France on January 28th 1917.
- Jack Cooper-Died at Passchendaele on September 20th 1917.
- Les Lee-Died at Messines, Belgium, on June 8th 1917.
- Jim Foy-Died at Armentieres, France, on March 14th 1917.
- Stan Martin-Died at Bullecourt, France, on May 3rd 1917.
- Dan Scullin-Died in action in France on September 26th 1917.

Those brave men were just seven of some 46,000 Australian soldiers who died on the Western Front. Other soldiers, involved in that match, who survived the war years, had their own frightful stories to tell (e.g. being gassed, wounded in battle and/or taken as POW's).

Younger readers may be unaware that more than 60,000 Australian soldiers died (and 150,000 were wounded) in the Great War. Most historians agree that victory came at a very high price.

ITALO CESARI RETURNS HOME

It is thought that following his time in London, Italo Cesari returned to his unit but soon fell victim to a serious case of eczema. There are virtually no details given about Italo's medical condition but he may have been in sectors that had suffered gas attacks (e.g. chlorine, mustard or phosgene).

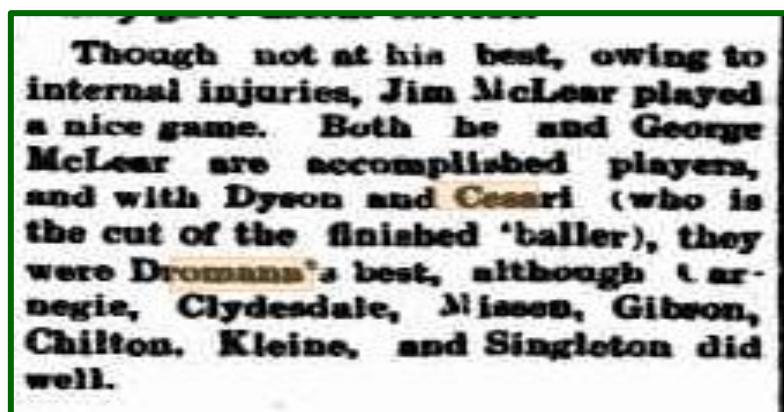
It is known that phosgene gas can cause erythema; and who really knows what may have triggered the severe inflammation and eruptions on Italo's skin? In May, Italo was repatriated home aboard the HMT Themistocles to Australia; and, consequently, was medically discharged from the Army in August 1917.

ITALO PLAYS FOR DROMANA, GEELONG & OTHER CLUBS.

With the cessation of hostilities in November 1918, life in Dromana slowly began to take on some semblance of earlier times. At that time, the town's population was approx.400 permanent residents and the war had impacted on community life (as was the case in other rural areas).

However, despite the challenges, DFC was re-formed and was back into action. Times were tough 'on and off the field' for the majority of small country clubs rebuilding in the post-war period but peace offered hope and a better life for families.

Italo Cesari returned to the game he loved; and played with Dromana in 1920 (and possibly 1921); and, as shown in the extract below, he was a stylish player for the club...



Though not at his best, owing to internal injuries, Jim McLear played a nice game. Both he and George McLear are accomplished players, and with Dyson and Cesari (who is the cut of the finished 'baller'), they were Dromana's best, although Carnegie, Clydesdale, Mission, Gibson, Chilton, Kleine, and Singleton did well.

Source: 'Mornington Standard' August 6th 1920 Page: 4.

Italo later played with Geelong (Reserves or what was then-called the 'A' side). He amassed 35 games with Geelong in the period 1922-24 and kicked 10 goals.

...and Crompton.
Geelong.
The team will be selected from Allister, Cations, Cesari, Cooper, Coles, Corfield, Digby, Elston, Ferris, Gittens, Hewitson, Harris, Kennedy, King, Laidlaw, Mellan, Noonan, Powell, Priddle, Rontley, Spindlove, and Stack.

...postponed and did not go out as far as the West Reserve.
After a chequered season through illness and injuries, **Italo Cesari** has now joined Ted McCarthy in the ruck of the Second Eighteen, and his many sporting friends wish him luck with his new team. **Italo** was granted a permit to West Geelong from the Association, and played one game. He then received an invitation to join the seconds.



Text: "After a chequered season through illness and injuries, Italo Cesari has now joined Ted McCarthy in the ruck of the Second Eighteen, and his many sporting friends wish him luck with his new team. Italo was granted a permit to West Geelong from the Association, and played one game. He then received an invitation to join the seconds." Source: 'Geelong Advertiser' August 7th 1924. Page: 9

There is also evidence that Italo played with Rhyll FC which was affiliated with the Phillip Island Football Association in the 1920's (now defunct).

ITALO CESARI UMPIRES AT VFL LEVEL

One of many interesting facts uncovered in researching this story about Italo Cesari was that he umpired three games of VFL football in 1927. After a lengthy search, it was finally discovered that he was the central umpire in the following VFL matches:

- Round: 3 St Kilda v South Melbourne at the Junction Oval.
- Round: 4 Hawthorn v North Melbourne at Glenferrie Oval.
- Round: 5 North Melbourne v Richmond at Arden Street.

After the honour of officiating in the 'big smoke' Italo was then appointed to various Victorian country league matches. He was commended in the 'Jerilderie Herald' for his control in the match between Jerilderie and Lalaly (i.e. near Berrigan) in July 1927 as shown below: It is known that he also umpired games at Swan Hill and Stratford during his time with the 'whistle.' Italo received a glowing report for his 'great exhibition' in the Peninsula Football Association's Semi-Final between Mornington and Somerville at Frankston that season. It seems that Italo umpired for only one season.

marking and handling of the wet ball was excellent. Both teams played good football, for which **Cesari**, the central umpire, was largely responsible. He kept the game clean and open, and gave the best exhibition of umpiring seen on the local ground this season.

Italo Cesari, a former Dromana footballer, umpired, and gave a great exhibition. Mornington, playing superior football in the first quarter, scored 2.4 to

Source: 'Weekly Times'. September 3rd 1927. Page: 93.

ROLLS OF HONOUR	
Great War servicemen who became VFL umpires	
Private Andrew Barlow	Private Frederick Morgan
Private Italo Cesari	Captain William Orchard MC
Private Patrick Crowe	Private Stanley Rouvray

Italo umpired three Senior VFL XVIII games in 1927 (as shown above); and accordingly his name was listed in the VFL Umpires' Rolls of Honour. Private Italo Cesari's name can be seen second on the left hand side. The names of Percy Jory and Bill Orchard, who also played in the Pioneer Exhibition Match in London in 1916, and later became VFL umpires, are also shown. Source: AFLUA website.

ITALO RETURNS TO UNIFORM

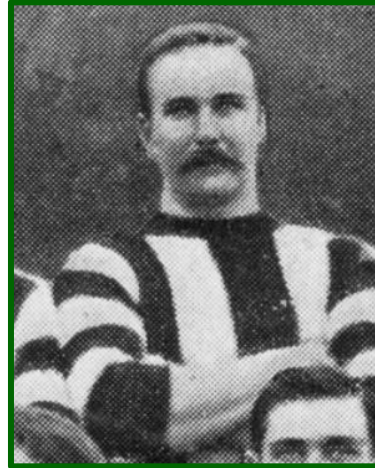
As was the case with two of his former team-mates at Dromana Football Club, George McLearn and Ern Rudduck, Italo Cesari re-enlisted in the Army following the outbreak of World War: II.

- George McLearn (born 1898) was 42 years when he re-enlisted in August 1940. George, who was a Bombardier with the 36th Heavy Artillery Unit, served abroad during World War 1.
- War records indicate that George was repatriated back to Australia with chronic pneumonia sometime in 1941-42.

- Ern Rudduck (born 1884) was 58 years of age when he re-signed for duty in 1942. As is well known, Ern saw action in France during the Great War and was seriously wounded during an enemy shelling.



George Mlear



Ern Rudduck

Italo's enlistment papers (Service No: V91112) indicated that he was 47 years of age when he decided to re-join the Army on December 9th 1940. The place of enlistment is given as Melbourne.

Italo's next of kin was given as Phoebe Cesari; and the rank shown on his enlistment papers was that of Sergeant. The photograph below shows Italo, in full uniform (note the Sergeant's stripes on his right sleeve), standing next to his grandson Aaron David Cesari. The photograph was taken in 1948.



Source: Virtual War Memorial website.

THE DEATH OF ITALO CESARI

The story of Italo may have 'some way to go' because the name 'Cesari' also re-surfaced in research about St Kilda Football Club (he may have coached the St Kilda Second XVIII in 1938); and also in regard to an article about South Melbourne FC. Further investigation is required in relation to Italo being a medical officer/ trainer at a VFL club at some time during his life.

Furthermore, the fact that a racehorse (owned by Mr Jamieson and Ms Wood) named 'Cesari' started in a Maiden Plate for fillies, at Echuca in September 2001, also generates interest and may be another possible link with Italo and the Dromana Football Club.

Echuca race file			
(1) 11.55 Concor Park Wooley Mdn Pte 1100 m. (Claims allowed) 3-y-o Fillies.			
1—	O. Bella Bionda (17).....	J M Harris	\$6.5
2—	O Buissoniere (11).....	L. Dowson	\$6.5
3—	O. Cesari (8).....		\$6.5
4—	OX Dieu's Place h (15).....	M Johnston	\$6.5
5—	745X Good Art. (11).....		\$6.5

Source: 'The Riverine Herald' September 29th 2001. Page: 39.

Italo Cesari died on 5th January 1973 at St Kilda; and he lies at rest at the Springvale Botanical Cemetery. His name is inscribed on the Melbourne Town Hall Honour Roll and can also be found on the Sorrento War Memorial.



Sorrento War Memorial

CAN YOU HELP WITH FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT ITALO?

Italo Cesari lived an incredible life; and one which deserves recognition and acclaim. The DFNC would appreciate any further information and/or photographs about Italo and his time with DFNC, umpiring and, of course, his years of military service in two World Wars.

Please contact Roger and Graham if you can assist. Thank you for any help in adding to the above information about Italo's life.

REFERENCE & RESEARCH INFORMATION

Sources: MPNFL records- DFNC files-NLA-Local newspaper as shown-Australian War Memorial, Sorrento War Memorial-VFL Umpires website-British Pathe Films- Boyles Football Photos- Geelong FC- Virtual, War Memorial website.

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