

Athol Garner



Private Athol Garner
45th Battalion, AIF
Service Number: 2185

Born: 1895, St Marys

Died: 28th March 1918, Dernancourt, Somme, France

Athol Garner was born at home at The Cedars, Great Western Road, Quarry Hill, St Marys in 1895, the 15th of 16 children born to William and Mary (nee Healey) Garner. Garner's father was elected the first mayor of St Marys in 1890 and was a well-known and respected local timber merchant. As a boy of nine Garner witnessed the tragic drowning of his friend Frank Hackett in a local waterhole. After attending St Marys Public School, he worked at Bales Tannery at Botany as a tanner.

Garner enlisted on 13 March 1916 and undertook training at the Bathurst Depot Camp before being allocated to the 4th Reinforcements, 45th Battalion. It was noted in the *Daily Telegraph* that Garner had been the 68th soldier to leave from St Marys. Garner's parents signed a letter of acceptance on 2 June 1916 for their son to join the AIF. He departed Sydney on 22 August aboard *HMAT Wiltshire*, disembarking at Plymouth England on 13 October 1916. He was accompanied by Penrith railwayman Reg Cheesman. After a period of training at Codford, Garner embarked for the war front and marched into No 4 Australian Divisional Base Depot at Etaples on 8 January 1917. He then joined the 45th Battalion in the field. The 45th Battalion took part in the Battle for Messines from 7- 14 June 1917. Garner suffered gunshot wounds to the back and lungs on the first day of the battle. In a letter home, he wrote that he had lain in No Man's Land for 17 hours before being rescued. His friend from Penrith Luke Hughes was killed during the same battle and died by Garner's side. Garner was admitted to the 5th General Hospital at Rouen before being transferred to London. In August 1917, he was transferred to the 1st Australian Auxiliary Hospital at Harefield. After a brief furlough, Garner reported to the Depot at Weymouth and in January 1918 he returned to France.

At the time the 45th Battalion were rotating in and out of the front line. On 28 March 1918 during the Battle of Dernancourt, Garner was killed by a shell near the railway embankment at Dernancourt, on the outskirts of Albert. Garner and three other soldiers were buried on Easter

Monday alongside the Sunk Road. They were later moved to Heath Cemetery, Harbonnieres. Out of 125 men in his attacking party, only 77 reached their target and held it. It was estimated that 2000 shells fell in the area in 15 minutes. Garner's personal effects were lost en route to Australia when the *Barunga* was sunk by enemy fire. Two brothers, William and Harold also enlisted. William was killed on 11 August 1918 and Harold returned to Australia in June 1919. By this time, the family were living in 'Athol', Third Avenue, Eastwood.

Memorial Details:

- Heath Cemetery, Harbonnieres, France
- Honour Roll, St Marys Public School, St Marys
- Honour Roll, Victoria Park, St Marys

Sources:

- [National Archives Australia](#): GARNER, A
- Australian War Memorial First World War Nominal Roll
- Australian War Memorial Roll of Honour
- Penrith City Library Biography files
- Lyn Forde, Timeless heroes (1997)