

Geoffrey Besant Woodruff



Lieutenant Geoffrey Woodruff
18th Battalion, AIF
Service number: 753

Born: 7 January 1894, Penrith, NSW

Died: 19 May 1918, Heilly, France

Geoffrey Besant Woodruff was born the son of Francis Henry and Margaretta Mary (nee Tingcombe) Woodruff of 'Combewood', Penrith on 7 January 1894. Woodruff's great great grandfather, Captain Daniel Woodruff RN, was granted 1,000 acres where Penrith now stands. Young Woodruff was educated at Lennox School Penrith and received his secondary education at Sydney Grammar School. At the time of his enlistment, Woodruff was a member of the 41st Infantry Regiment.

Woodruff enlisted on 10 May 1915 and was originally allocated to the 7th Reinforcements, 4th Battalion, but later transferred to the 18th Battalion. He left Australia aboard the *HMAT Ceramic* on 25 June 1915 and joined the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force on 18 August. His Battalion landed on the Gallipoli Peninsula on 20 August and two days later the Battalion took part in a diversionary battle for Lone Pine (Hill 60). On 27 August, Woodruff received shrapnel wounds to his arm, leg, back and hand. He was evacuated to Mudros and then to Hunt's Green Hospital, Hampstead England.

Woodruff returned to Egypt in January 1916 and rejoined the 18th Battalion on 7 March, shortly before the Battalion sailed for France. He was promoted to Temporary Sergeant on 26 June 1916 shortly before the Battalion took part in the attack at Pozieries. In August he requested to be returned to Corporal. On 5 November, Woodruff was promoted to Sergeant. Shortly afterwards, he was hospitalised suffering from trench feet and a few weeks later, with influenza. He rejoined his unit on 28 February 1917. On 27 June 1917, Woodruff attended Number 4 Officer Cadets Training School in Oxford England. On 29 September, he was promoted to 2nd

Lieutenant and rejoined the 18th Battalion in France on 14 October 1917. On 1 January 1918, Woodruff received his second star.

On 19 May 1918, Woodruff took part in an operation designed to straighten a large bend in the Australian lines. Woodruff successfully led his men in an attack on a heavily defended crossroad and established their own strong post. A German machine gun started firing on the platoon's position killing several soldiers. Woodruff, along with two of his men attacked the machine gun post. He was hit in the chest and killed. The machine gun was destroyed. Although it was reported at the time that Woodruff had been buried in Heilly Military Cemetery, by 1922 his grave could not be located. This Cemetery contains 2890 World War One soldiers and of these, 12 are unidentified – maybe Woodruff is one of them. Woodruff's two brothers, Francis Henry and Daniel also joined the AIF and returned in 1919. After Woodruff's death, his father had an ongoing battle with the Department of Defence to obtain his late son's personal effects and pay.

Memorial Details:

- Villiers-Bretonneux, France
- Honour Roll, Memory Park, Penrith
- Honour Roll, St Stephen's Anglican Church, Penrith

Sources:

- [National Archives Australia](#): B2455, WOODRUFF GEOFFREY BESANT
- [Australian War Memorial First World War Nominal Roll](#)
- [Australian War Memorial Roll of Honour](#)
- Penrith City Library biography files

Trove:

- [Nepean Times](#) 2 October 1915, Pg 3, Col 5
- [Nepean Times](#) 1 June 1918, Pg 2, Col 3
- [Nepean Times](#) 8 June 1918, Pg 3, Col 2
- [Nepean Times](#) 3 August 1918, Pg 4, Col 2

Acknowledgment: Thank you to Michael Vickers for providing biographical details of Geoffrey Besant Woodruff.