



## Lieutenant Richard William MAY

[1877 – 1917]



42<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Battalion

Richard William May, one of five sons and two daughters of the Reverend John Henry and Helena Jane May (nee Dunn), was born on the 16<sup>th</sup> of March 1877 at Geelong in Victoria. He was raised by his mother, widowed in 1881, in the Victorian country town of Kyneton. In 1893 he gained his University of Melbourne matriculation at Brighton Grammar and in due course was employed by the Union Bank of Australia (now ANZ Banking Group).

After Brighton Grammar, one or two references mention an early interest in rowing. Most frequently his name is associated with the Banks Rowing Club, Melbourne, notably in the crews from Victoria who won the Men's Interstate Eight-Oared Championship in Melbourne in 1903 and again in 1904 in Brisbane. Until 1909 he continued to participate in all aspects of club management and competition organisation.

May was then appointed by his employer to the Forbes NSW branch as its accountant. There he was very active in the local tennis club until February 1912 when he left on promotion to manage the bank at Kilcoy in Queensland.

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In Queensland he maintained his connection with the community. Occasionally he gave a recitation at a social event; and he won prizes for roses entered in the Kilcoy show in May 1913. An absence of reports thereafter suggests promotion to another position elsewhere, possibly Brisbane where on 15 November 1915 he stated his home address was 'Sydenham', Wickham Terrace, Brisbane. It seems likely his membership of the then United Service Institute was effected after leaving Kilcoy.

On 16<sup>th</sup> of August 1915, in his 38<sup>th</sup> year, Richard William May enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) and was allotted to the 12<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements, 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion.

Doubtless his education, skills, personality and character were recognised early and in just over a month he was promoted to acting sergeant at No 2 Depot Battalion. Unsurprisingly this led to his application in early November for a commission in the AIF.

A month later on the 9<sup>th</sup> of December 1915 he was appointed Second Lieutenant to the just-raised 42<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, a unit of 3<sup>rd</sup> Division. The battalion then began an intensive period of individual and unit training in Australia which continued in Britain after its arrival there on the 23 July. A few weeks later on 1 October 1916, May was promoted to Lieutenant.

At the end in November 1916 the 42<sup>nd</sup> entered the Armentieres Sector in France. A severe winter saw it either in the front line undertaking sub-unit and unit patrols, or rotating to rear areas where training and labouring continued in support of other units then in the front line.

Important activities included development of personal skills in bombing, sniping, scouting, weapon handling, communications, bayonet fighting, gas protection and officer inspections of front-line trenches.

On the first day of the New Year, May with two other officers and 80 other ranks began a week of training in the conduct of raids. A month later the first operation by this group clearly demonstrated skilful conduct and execution albeit unsuccessful, due to the presence of intense, unsuppressed enemy machine gun fire.

For the efforts made by May during the raid, his Commanding Officer said: *I wish to specially mention the cool manner in which Lieut May handled the retirement. Any loss of nerve or control would quite easily have resulted in disaster.*

It was but a few days later on the night of 11/12 February 1917 that retaliatory indiscriminate artillery fire wounded May. Unit stretcher bearers took him the 10<sup>th</sup> Australian Field Ambulance where his death was recorded at ten minutes past twelve.

He was the third of eight Club members who fell on the Western Front.

Lieutenant May now lies in the Cite Bonjean Military Cemetery, Armentieres, France.



Sources included:

- Australian War Memorial
- National Archives of Australia
- Various web pages
- *United Service Club, Queensland: The First Century, 1892-1992* by Flight Lieutenant Murray Adams and Lieutenant Colonel Peter Charlton
- Club Meeting Minutes, Annual Reports and sundry documents