

Charles Richard Martin

Researched by Bridie Latimer,

Charles Richard Martin was born 21 January 1884, in Harford Tasmania. Charles was the youngest of eight siblings; seven brothers and one sister to John Martin and Edith Willie. Before the outbreak of the First World War, Charles and his family lived and worked on a farm out in Harford as labourers. Their property resided next to Greens Creek. My grandfather's family currently still owns and lives on that same property today.

When World War One was declared in Europe, Charles immediately enlisted to aid the war effort when Australia declared its alliance with Great Britain. Charles enlisted on 19 July 1915, aged 31 years old, his next of kin was listed as his elder brother Isaac Martin, as John his father had previously died in 1896 and his mother Edith in 1905. Charles was assigned to X Coy 1st Depot battalion at Seymour Military Camp. He passed his medical examination and was described as having grey brown hair, blue eyes, was 147 pounds and was a height of 5 feet 6 inches. Seymour Military Camp in Victoria was established as a major army base in 1910 and was favourable as a training area from there onward. Charles left Tasmania shortly after he enlisted, heading straight for Victoria; he would never return home to his family.

Charles arrived in Victoria and proceeded to Seymour Military Camp 90km out from the City's centre where he would spend three months in basic training, however, on 25 October 1915, after months of arduous military training and heavy lifting Charles began to experience immense pain and was examined by an on base medic. That day he was discharged from the A.I.F after being deemed medically unfit for active service. His diagnosis was varicocele, a type of varicose vein in the male groin, it was a common injury for labourers like Charles. Charles was instructed that if he wished to re-enlist in the A.I.F, he must have a procedure to remove the varicose vein or he wouldn't be allowed to re-enlist. Charles initially refused treatment and was sent back to civilian life in Victoria.

When Charles returned to mainstream life he contemplated what he would do. He knew he couldn't return to the A.I.F without the necessary procedure and ultimately, his eagerness to serve for King and Country got the best of him and he ultimately had the necessary procedure. There is a blurry spot in his timeline, with a period of about 4 1/2 months where there is no record of him. There is evidence on his enlistment form, however, stating that Charles stayed in Victoria, stating his permanent address is in Koo-Wee-Rup, Gippsland Victoria. It is not known why Charles stayed in Victoria and didn't return home to Harford; one can only speculate.

Almost a year and a half had passed since the ANZACs had landed on Gallipoli when Charles re-enlisted. His record states that he re-enlisted on 18 October 1916, near Warragul, Victoria, aged 32 years and 9 months at the time. He was assigned to the 7th battalion which happened to be one of the first infantry units raised for the AIF during the First World War. On November 28, 1916, Charles was re-assigned to the 8/57th battalion as a Private.

On 16 December 1916, Charles embarked from Melbourne as a part of the 8/57th battalion as reinforcements, he would disembark from Plymouth, England on 18 February 1917. The same day he arrived in England, Charles was admitted to a military hospital in Devonport, Plymouth after reportedly falling slightly ill with scabies; he was released a week later. On 1 March 1917, Charles marched into a depot in Perham Downs, one of four Australian command depots in

the UK dealing with soldiers who had been discharged from Hospital and needed training before being sent back to active service. After meeting up with his battalion, Charles and the 8/57th marched out to Dinton Hurdcott on 3 March 1917, another military camp the British Army handed over to the Australian Imperial Force. Thomas Kermode of the 8th Battalion noted in his diary:

“We had practice in real trenches with dinkum bombs & catapults throwing bombs, we were to have practised one of the raids you see so much about in the papers. - Men advancing in the mud with sandbags around knees & elbows. When a rocket goes up, every man lies flat & still. Just like real war.”

Dinton Hurdcott Military Camp was for many soldiers including Charles, their first real taste of warfare. On 28 April 1917, Charles was yet again transferred, this time to the 67th battalion where he marched out of Dinton Hurdcott and proceeded to Windmill Hill, a summer-camp used by British and Australian soldiers. There, Charles met with his new battalion. On May 5, 1917, Charles was Taken On Strength by the 57th Battalion where he was sent to the Western Front in France.

The 57th joined the brief advance the Allies undertook when the Germans withdrew from the Hindenburg Line. Charles returned to the 67th at Windmill Hill on 6 August 1917, where five days later Charles was again admitted to hospital, this time with influenza. Charles would stay hospitalised for a fortnight. After his release, Charles and the 67th joined the 37th battalion as reinforcements in Southampton England on 25 August. There they embarked across the English Channel to France on August 27; the two battalions then disembarked at Rouelles on 28 August. During his time in Rouelles, Charles was Taken On Strength again on 1 September 1917, by the 37th; Charles would remain with the 37th until his unfortunate death. While with the 37th, Charles fought in two major attacks, The battle of Broodseinde on 4 October and the battle of Passchendaele on 12 October. The battle of Broodseinde Ridge was the third operation launched by British general Herbert Plummer as part of the Ypres offensive of 1917. The attack began shortly before dawn on 4 October where Australian troops were heavily shelled, a seventh of these men became casualties even before the attack began, luckily Charles wasn't one of them. After the Allies steadily drove the Germans back to the top of Passchendaele ridge, Charles and the 37th joined the offensive on 12 October. Through October and into November, wet weather and sheer exhaustion meant further attacks became hopelessly bogged down. Though the final ridge was eventually gained, no breakthrough was possible. Losses were horrendous on both sides. Charles was admitted to a military hospital in Arques, France for the third time in 1917 on 5 November, again for scabies. Charles was released on 12 November where he returned to the 37th on the front. Charles was admitted for a fifth time to a military hospital for influenza again on 8 February 1918, he was released one final time on 17 February.

The 37th battalion was involved in fighting in the Somme Valley in early 1918, during the first phase of the massive German “Spring Offensive” in the Picardy sector of the Western Front. The German spring offensive, which began on 21 March 1918, created the biggest crisis of the war for the Allies. British and Australian forces were driven back towards Amiens. By comparison with the last three years of trench warfare, the action was now fast-moving. The Germans swept across the old Somme battlefield of 1916 and the broad uplands to the south of the Somme. Charles and the 37th were in Amiens, France when Operation Michael was launched by the German Army. The Germans wanted to capture the strategically important area of Amiens, to divide the Allied armies and to weaken them to the point where a combined counter-attack would be a near impossible feat. Sixty-three German divisions attacked over 60 miles of the front held by 26 divisions, including Charles and the 37th, ultimately overwhelming Allied defences and driving them west. The Germans concentrated on

infiltrating strongly in one central area, whereas commanding British forces expected that the attack would be spread out, and that the Germans would attempt to outflank them in the Somme woods and valleys. With a surprise onslaught of German fighting, the Allies were divided and forced to retreat. German troops then rapidly advanced across the Somme battlefield towards Amiens. In five days, they had recaptured all the land they had lost around the Somme in the previous two years. This was disastrous for the Allies. Not only had they lost all the land which thousands of men had died to capture, but also the Germans were now dangerously close to Amiens, a vital rail junction, which in March lay defenceless. In the short space of ten days since launching the offensive, German troops were almost at the gates of Amiens. The Allies had to prevent the Germans from passing through Villers-Bretonneux, the main area before Amiens. On 4 April 1918, Charles Richard Martin was shot and killed in action in France. Charles' body was laid to rest at the Mericourt-l'Abbe Communal Cemetery alongside 411 Commonwealth soldiers, 121 of them being Australian. For his service, Charles was awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.