

Austin Stanley O'Toole

Austin Stanley O'Toole was born in the Jerilderie district of NSW in 1888, the third child of James and Jane O'Toole. He enlisted in the Australian army at Liverpool (Sydney) on 23 March 1915 and was posted to C Company, 20th Battalion.¹

The 20th Battalion was raised at Liverpool in New South Wales in March 1915 as part of the 5th Brigade. Austin left Australia with his Battalion in June, trained in Egypt from late July until mid-August, and landed at Anzac Cove, Gallipoli on 22 August 1915 just as the August offensive was ending. The 20th's role there was purely defensive. From 26 August until its withdrawal from the peninsula on 20 December the 20th Battalion was responsible for the defence of Russell's Top.

Austin left Gallipoli on 25 September 1915 when he was hospitalised with dysentery. He was transferred to Malta and then to Lambeth General Hospital in London. He returned to duty in Egypt in February 1916.



Above: Austin O'Toole.



959 Private A.S. O'Toole, 20th BN Australian Inf, 12 May 1916

After further training in Egypt, the 20th Battalion went to France. Austin's service record shows he disembarked at Marseilles, France, on 25 March 1916. His unit entered the trenches of the western front for the first time in April 1916 near

Armentieres, which is in the north of France, close to the Belgium border. On 5 May 1916 the 20th was the first Australian battalion to be raided by the Germans.ⁱⁱ Unfortunately it was almost certainly during this raid that Austin O'Toole was fatally wounded. The Battalion's diary recorded an intense German bombardment of its position at Bridoux Salient which is in the Bois Grenier area a few kilometres south of Armentieres. Following the bombardment a German raiding party entered the Australian trenches. In that action on 5 May 1916 one officer was killed and two were wounded while 23 'Other Ranks' were killed and 75 wounded. Austin was very likely one of the 75 wounded.

Austin was admitted to the 26th General Hospital in France on 7 May 1916 and died of his wounds on 12 May 1916. He is buried in France at Etaples military cemetery, plot 5, row C, grave 14. Below is a transcript of a letter written by the Matron of the Hospital in response to an inquiry from the Red Cross on behalf of Austin's parents. It must have been incredibly sad for James and Jane O'Toole when they received a copy of this letter providing details of their son's death.ⁱⁱⁱ

20th. Battn.
A.I.F.

O'Toole,
A. S. 959 or 958

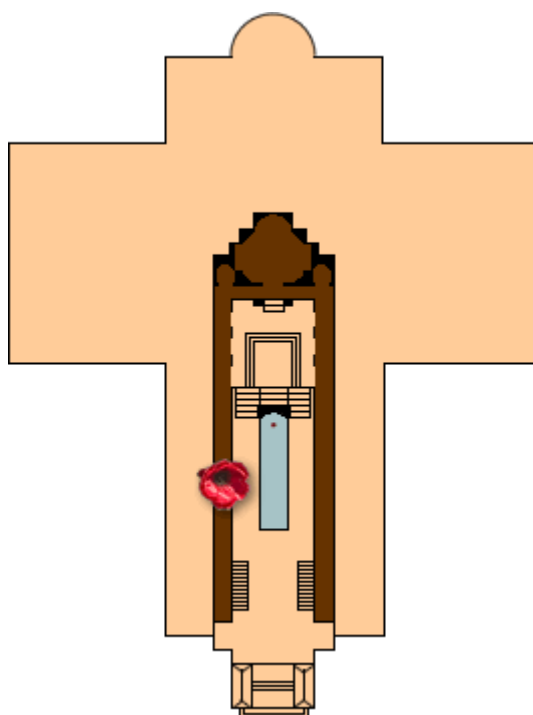
"Died 12-5-16"

Number 958 Private A. S. O'Toole who died in C. Ward of this hospital on May 12th. He was admitted here on May 7th. suffering from very severe gunshot wounds of arm, legs and head. His condition was very critical; he was extremely weak. He had every possible care but responded little to treatment. He was conscious for short intervals but delirious the greater part of the time. He was visited by the Roman Catholic Chaplain frequently and had Extreme Unction. He was most patient in his great sufferings. I feel he knew he was dying, but I cannot remember now if he left any message. If he did I feel sure the Sister in charge of the ward would have sent it to the wife. We try to give the relatives all details as soon as possible. The Sister is no longer here, but I remember O'Toole perfectly. He was so brave. He died at 2.45 a.m. on 12/5/16. Our little cemetery is beautifully kept; a mass of colour still, the graves are tenderly looked after at all times and at Christmas, Easter and All Souls' day we put a wreath of fresh cut flowers on each grave. *1 copy plus*



Above: Etaples military cemetery in France where Austin O'Toole is buried.

In Canberra, Austin Stanley O'Toole's name is on panel 92 in the Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial as indicated by the poppy on the plan below:



ⁱ official army service record for Private Austin Stanley O'Toole, service number 959.

ⁱⁱ Australian War Memorial, unit history http://www.awm.gov.au/units/unit_11207.asp

ⁱⁱⁱ Australian Red Cross Society Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau files, 1914-18 war, 959 Austin Stanley O'Toole, 20th Battalion.