

## *Percival Claude O'Toole*

Percival Claude O'Toole was born in Mandurama NSW in 1892, the sixth child of James and Jane O'Toole. Despite poor health he was determined to serve his country and he enlisted in the army three times! He first enlisted at Liverpool (Sydney) on 20 January 1915 but was discharged three weeks later, suffering from pleurisy (an inflammation of the lining around the lungs). He enlisted at Liverpool again on 23 March 1915 and was discharged on 7 April due to Ptomaine poisoning (food poisoning). His final enlistment occurred at Newcastle on 28 February 1916 and he was posted to C Company, 36th Battalion.<sup>i</sup>



Above: HMAT *Beltana* on which Percy O'Toole went to war.

On 13 May 1916 he embarked with his unit on the HMAT *Beltana*, a P & O cruise ship leased by the government as a troop carrier, and disembarked at Plymouth, England on 9 July. Again he was dogged by illness, contracting typhoid fever during the trip. On 22 November 1916 Percy arrived in France to serve on the western front just three days after the Somme offensive was closed down for the European winter.<sup>ii</sup>



Above: Percy O'Toole.

We do not know if Percy came under enemy fire. Family information says he was gassed in the war, although this is not mentioned in his medical or service records. By mid December Percy was in hospital in France, suffering from influenza, and by the end of the month he was dangerously ill with pleurisy. On 29 January 1917 he was sent to England suffering from severe myalgia (inflammation of the muscles) and he spent the next few months in English hospitals. In August 1917 he was moved to an isolation hospital because he had contracted tuberculosis (TB), an infectious lung disease.

Percy embarked at Devonport on 27 August 1917 bound for Australia and arrived home on 25 October 1917 with TB in both lungs. He was discharged from the army as medically unfit on 24 April 1918 and passed away on 25 May 1918 at the age of 26. He is buried in Brady's Gully cemetery at Gosford along with his parents but unfortunately most headstones were later removed and the area is now a small park.

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<sup>i</sup> official army service record for Private Percival Claude O'Toole, service number 852.

<sup>ii</sup> *Anzac – An Illustrated History 1914-1918* by Richard Pelvin, 2004.