



18th Battalion

Private Arthur Reginald Roy SKILLMAN 5662 — 18th Btn, 15th Reinforcements

Born: 1896, Goulburn, NSW

Next of Kin: Mother, Mrs Mary Drennan, Mumbil.

Occupation: Assistant Blacksmith

District Connection: Mumbil/Cumnock

Enlistment Date: 23 Mar 1916.

Enlistment Age: 19yrs & 8mths.

Embarkation: 9 Sep 1916 - Sydney *HMAT Euripides A14*

Served: England, France, Belgium

Fate: RTA 5 July 1918 - Sydney *HMAT A28 Miltiades*

Honour Boards: Cumnock Memorial Gates, Mumbil Public School Honour Board.

Biography:

Mary Ann Clews was born in 1874 at Parramatta to Ann (nee Gallagher) and William Clews in the Parramatta district. Arthur Clews (later known as Arthur Reginald Roy Skillman) was born in 1896 at Goulburn, when Mary Ann was 22yrs old. She had 3 further children with Francis Walter Skillman: Mary A born 1898 at Captain's Flat; Walter T born 1900 at Captain's Flat; and Frederick born 1902 at Narromine.

Francis Walter Skillman was born in London in 1863. In 1881 he spent time as a prisoner at Wandsworth Prison London. He was 17yrs old and his occupation was listed as a baker. He arrived at Sydney, Australia, on 12 Jun 1886, aged 23yrs, having worked as a cabin hand aboard the *Ben Cruachan* from London. Francis Skillman and Mary Ann Clews have no registered marriage record. The *Queanbeyan Age* - 24 Nov 1900, p2, 'Inquest at Captain's Flat', record Mary Skillman as a witness in the death at her house of John William Glass. Mary stated that she was the wife of Francis Walter Skillman, baker, residing at Captain's Flat. Mary had another child named Francis Skillman at Narromine in 1902. According to the Australian Electoral rolls for 1930 and 1932, Francis Walter Skillman was working as a Baker at Foveaux, East Sydney. He died in Sydney in 1939, aged 66yrs.

In 1904 Mary Clews married Maurice Drennan at Warren. Maurice Drennan had been married before in 1887 to Mary Jane Davies and they had 6 children before Mary Jane died at Narromine in 1900. Mary and Maurice Drennan moved to Mumbil, NSW to live by 1905. They had around 9 children. Mary and Maurice both died at Sydney in 1933.

Arthur (known as Roy) Skillman went to Mumbil Public School and after school worked as an assistant blacksmith to James Nugent of Cumnock. The *Molong Express & Western District Advertiser (WDA)* - 4 Apr 1914, p9, reported: "The residents of Cumnock and district will no doubt be glad to welcome in their midst once again Mr. Roy Skillman. This gentleman has taken up the same position at Mr Nugent's blacksmith shop that he occupied two or three years ago." The same paper reported on 12 Dec 1914, p12: "Mr Jas. Nugent's blacksmithing business is once more in charge of Mr Roy Skillman."

The *Molong Express & WDA* - 30 Jan 1915, p10, reported that Mr Roy Skillman "Sang a comic song in fine style" at a social gathering in Leary's Hall, Cumnock. The same paper reported on 8 Apr 1916, p8, that "Roy Skillman, a Cumnockite, enlisted in Blayney a few weeks ago and is now in camp at Dubbo."

Roy Skillman enlisted on 23 Mar 1916 and was medically examined at Dubbo. He was single, his occupation was an assistant blacksmith, he was 5 feet 3 inches tall, had grey eyes, dark brown hair and a dark complexion and was of the Roman Catholic religious denomination.

The Wellington Times - 27 Jul 1916, p5, Mumbil, reported:

"Last Monday night Private Roy Skillman was entertained at a farewell social in Forrest's Hall prior to his departure for the front. Mr A W Hansford congratulated the departing soldier upon offering to do his best for the Empire, and on behalf of the people of Mumbil presented him with a very fine fountain pen as a token of appreciation. Private Skillman suitably responded..."



*HMAS Euripides A14,
Port Melbourne, 1916.*

Pte Skillman embarked from Sydney on 9 Sep 1916, on *HMAS Euripides A14*. Also on board from Cumnock was 5695 Pte James Godfrey Taylor - 17th Btn. The soldiers were disembarked at Plymouth on 26 Oct 1916.

At Rolleston, Salisbury Plains, while training with the 5th Training Btn, on 8 Dec 1916, Pte Skillman was charged with the offence of being "AWL from 2400 6 Dec until 1200 7 Dec. He was admonished by Capt, R. E. Hale and forfeited 1 days pay. Also charged with the same offence was another 18th Btn soldier, 28yr old Pte 5548 John Hamilton Black, who had been on the *Euripides* from Sydney.



**The Butte de Warlencourt,
Northern France, WW1.**

Pte Skillman embarked from Folkestone for Etaples, France on 12 Dec 1916. He joined the 18th Btn on 26 Jan 1917 at Dernancourt in the Somme department, northern France. The Battalion was in camp training until 9 February when they moved to the front line to relieve the 26th Btn and was involved in the follow up of German forces during their retreat to the Hindenburg Line.

On 21 Feb the 18th Btn again relieved the 26th Btn in the front line around the Butte de Warlencourt area. The 18th Btn as part of the 2nd Division, was involved in heavy fighting around the end of

February and occupied the Butte de Warlencourt on 24 February.

Action from 24 - 27 Feb 1917 by the 18th Btn resulted in 19 other ranks (OR) killed and 77 OR and 3 officers wounded. The 18th Btn were relieved on 2 March and moved to Fricourt "C" Camp. The battalion remained in the area during March and April, assisting the town of Bapaume on 26 March when the town hall was blown up. The Battalion returned to front line duties on 13-18 April during cold, wind, sleet and snowy conditions. May 1917 followed a similar pattern of rest, training and relieving on the front line until moving to Contay, northern France, on 18 May.

Pte Arthur Skillman must have spent some time on leave during May/June as he reported sick on 21 June 1917 with Gonorrhoea and spent 30 days being treated at the 39th General Hospital, Le Havre, France. (Around 60,000 Australian soldiers contracted venereal disease by the end of WW1. Before the advent of penicillin, the treatment was imperfect and could be lengthy, painful and not always successful. Apart from the social stigma and embarrassment of contracting VD, men risked infecting future partners or their wives, which could produce birth defects. In many cases, if treatment began quickly, the disease could be cured, but syphilis in particular was difficult to be rid of, once well established.

<https://www.awm.gov.au/wartime/article2>)

Arthur's friend, Pte John Black was wounded in action on 5 May 1917 and suffered a gun shot wound to his right elbow. He was transferred to England for treatment at the 3rd London General Hospital, Oxford. He returned to his hometown in Dumfries, Scotland, when discharged from hospital to visit his mother, Bella Black. On 6 Jun 1917 he was convicted of a civil offence of "assaulting a policeman at Dumfries on 5 June" and fined 30/-. On 11 Jun 1917 he married Bessie Black, aged 26yrs a weaver from Dumfries. Pte John Black returned to France on 21 Aug 1917, but did not re-join the 18th Btn until 3 Dec 1917.



The photo shows John Black at the top left with his arm in a sling, 3rd London General Hospital, Oxford.

The 18th Btn was located at Arques, situated 40km from Calais, undergoing training exercises when Pte Skillman re-joined his unit on 26 Aug 1917. The 18th Btn moved to the area of Westhoek Ridge, Belgium, on 10 Sep 1917. Westhoek Ridge had been captured from the Germans by Allied Forces the month before. The battalion took part in two major battles before the year was out the Menin Road (19-22 September in which the 18th Btn suffered 6 officers being killed and 6 wounded and other ranks had about 250 casualties) and Poelcappelle (9 -10 October in which the 18th Btn suffered casualties of 7 officers and 144 other ranks) in Belgium.

The Battle of Poelcappelle was fought in Flanders, Belgium, on 9 October 1917 by the British Second Army and Fifth Army against the German 4th Army. The weather and ground conditions put severe strain on all the infantry involved... On Passchendaele Ridge and the Wallemolen Spur, inadequate artillery support, the German pillboxes and extensive uncut barbed wire, rain, mud, shell-hole machine-gun nests and counter-attacks, led the attackers being forced back towards their start lines. The attacking troops were subjected to more German artillery fire than in recent battles, due to the reduced amount of counter-battery fire from the British artillery and inadequate air observation during the poor weather from 4 to 8 October. Many wounded soldiers were left stranded on the battlefield, under sniper fire, in the mud and rain. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Poelcappelle)



Towards the end of October the 18th Btn moved to a camp in the Dickebusch area. The winter months were spent in trench duty or in training camps. The Battalion spent Christmas Day 1917 at Le Rossignol Camp, Belgium. The Unit Commander's Diary reported for the 25/12/1917 that:

"Weather cold with light falls of snow. Muster parade and general cleaning up. Christmas festivities indulged in. A concert at 6.30pm was held in YMCA hut given by the 2nd Pioneer Battalion."

Pte Arthur Skillman was given leave from the 18th Btn, then stationed in the Lombres area, Northern France, to travel to the UK, on 19 Feb 1918. During his leave Arthur Skillman travelled to Dumfries, Scotland, and married Jemima White, at the Registry Office, Glasgow, on 2 Mar 1918. Arthur was 21yrs old and Jemima was recorded as 27yrs old, but was actually 34yrs old. Jemima was the elder sister of Bessie White who married Arthur's friend, Pte John Black in June 1917.

Pte Arthur Skillman returned to the 18th Btn on 9 Mar 1918, who were then on patrol duties in the Ploegsteert area, north-western Belgium. On the 28th April the 18th Btn were stationed in the Warloy area, Northern France. According to the Unit Commander's diary, a working party of 10 officers and 250 other ranks (OR) were supplied to dig a support line and accommodation for the Brigade. Five ORs were wounded, among them Arthur's friend, Pte John Black, who received multi gun shot wounds (head, arm and right leg) receiving treatment in France and transferred to England for ongoing treatment on 5 May 1918. He was considered unfit for further service and RTA on 9 Oct 1918.

Just a month later, on 19 May 1918, Pte Arthur Skillman was also wounded in action during the Australian 6th Brigade, 2nd Division's attack on Ville-sur-Ancre north of Morlancourt to clear Germans from the town and secure the high ground to the south of the town. The 18th Btn took part in the action and resulted in 4 officers killed and 4 wounded, while other ranks had 19 killed and around 70 wounded. Overall, the battle resulted in 418 casualties for the Australians and about 800 for the Germans.

Pte Arthur Skillman received severe shell wounds to the head and right eye and was transferred from the 7th General Hospital at Etaples to England on 23 May. He spent some time at Norfolk War Hospital, Norwich. His right eye was excised. He was transferred to the 1st Auxillary Hospital, Harefield on 13 Jun 1918. He had leave from 16 - 30 July and was afterwards declared unfit to serve in the AIF and returned to Australia on 26 Nov 1918. He received the British War Medal and the Victory Medal and was discharged from the AIF on 17 Apr 1919.

Jemima joined Arthur Skillman in Sydney and they had a son, Francis William Roy Skillman born on 15 Jul 1920.

The Sydney Morning Herald - 20 Sep 1927, p12, records the story of "Found Shot - Shakespearean Actor." Walter Bentley was found shot dead (by himself) in his flat at Cromer House, Phillip Street, Sydney by the caretaker of the flats, Arthur R R Skillman.

