



## + PTE Ernest Garner Shipway MERRIMAN 2 410 - 20<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements

**Born:** August 1887, Gunning, NSW.

**Parents:** John and Eliza Merriman

**Occupation:** Labourer

**District Connection:** Baldry, Cumnock, Obley,  
Yeoval & Wellington.

**Enlistment Date:** 22 Jul 1915

**Enlistment Age:** 28yrs 10mths

**Embarkation:** 6 Sep 1915, Sydney, HMAT *Ballarat*, A70.

**Served:** Egypt, France

**Fate:** K.I.A. 5 May 1916, France.  
Buried at Brewery Orchard Cemetery,  
Bois Grenier, France.

**Honour Boards:** National War Museum, Canberra; &  
the Cumnock, Obley, Yeoval, & Wellington War  
Memorials.

### Biography

Ernest Merriman was born in August 1887 at Gunning, near Yass, to John and Eliza Merriman. The Merriman family were graziers in the Yass district who were well known for their merino sheep and wool production. John Merriman married Eliza Bergin Shipway in Sydney in 1877. They had a family of 6 sons and 4 daughters born between 1878–1901. Ernest was the 5<sup>th</sup> child.

John and Eliza Merriman moved to the Cumnock district around 1900 when Ernest would have been 13yrs of age. In September 1903, John Merriman was granted a stage coach licence for conveyance of the Obley and Obley Vale mails.

Ernest is first mentioned in the Cumnock columns of local newspapers on Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1905 for obtaining the highest marks in a Euchre Tournament held in Leary's Hall. John Merriman was granted a further a mail contract between Cumnock and Obley in March 1906. The family are listed in the Calare/Cumnock 1906 Electoral Roll as living in Cumnock.

A keen sportsman, Ernest was reported as playing cricket for various Cumnock and district teams (Balderodgery, Baldry, Cumnock, Yeoval and Obley) from 1906-1914; tennis 1910-1915; sprinting 1912; and billiards in 1915. John Merriman gave his daughter Eva away in marriage to James McCormack in February 1913 and afterwards left his wife and younger children in Cumnock, and returned to the Yass area to live. Ernest was best man at his sister Georgina's wedding to Frederick Pearse, on Tuesday 3 February 1914, at St Matthews Church, Cumnock, and another brother gave the bride away.

Ernest enlisted in the AIF on 22 July 1915. *The Molong Argus* – 23 July 1915, p5, has this report: "On Wednesday evening the following local and district residents proceeded through Molong to Sydney for the purpose of enlisting:- T and B Cody, Obley; Harold Sparkes, Yeoval; Ernie Merriman, Cumnock; Clarie Wilkin, Obley; and Harold Edwards, Obley." Ernest's enlistment papers state his age as 28yrs & 10 mths, he was 5ft 7½ins tall, had hazel coloured eyes, brown hair and had been working as a labourer.

Pte Harold Sparkes & Pte Ernest Merriman returned home on final leave in early September 1915 and were given a send off by the Molong band at the train station on their return for Liverpool. The two of them embarked on HMAT *Ballarat* A70 at Sydney on 6 Sep 1915, as members of the 20<sup>th</sup> Btn, 5<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements.

The *Molong Argus* – 17 Dec 1915, p4 stated:

*“During the week Mrs W Merriman received a letter from her son Ernie, who wrote from Egypt. He said in the course of his letter that he had a rough passage over, and was sea sick most of the way...”*

After arriving in Egypt, the reinforcements settled into training at Mena Camp, near the Pyramids at Cairo. Pte Merriman was hospitalised at No 4 Auxiliary Hospital at Abbassia, Cairo on the 26 Nov 1915. At the time, the hospital was treating a large number of mumps cases, including his friend Pte Harold Sparkes. Pte Merriman was discharged from hospital on 29 Dec 1915 and returned to Abbassia. On 23 Jan 1916 he reported for duty to the 20<sup>th</sup> Btn, ‘C’ Company, at Tel-el-Kebir, which is 110km from Cairo and 75km from Port Said, on the edge of the Egyptian desert.



**HMAT Ballarat A70. The ship was torpedoed by a German submarine in the English Channel on 25 Apr 1917 and sank the next day, without loss of life. Australian War Museum.**

Trooper Raymond Chappell, from Eurimbla, had a letter published in the *Molong Express & Western District Advertiser* - 18 Mar 1916, p16, written from Wordan, Egypt in Jan 1916, and he states he:

*“met L Stark, J Murray, H Sparkes and E Merriman at Heliopolis [Cairo] where they stopped.”*

On 18 Mar 1916, Pte Merriman and the 20<sup>th</sup> Btn embarked at Alexandria on HMT *Ingoma* and disembarked at Marseilles on 25 Mar 1916. The 20<sup>th</sup> Btn entered the trenches of the Western Front for the first time in April 1916 and was the first Australian unit to come face to face with the Germans.

The 20<sup>th</sup> Btn relieved the 18<sup>th</sup> Btn in the front line at the Bridoux Salient outside the town of Armentières on 1 May 1916. At midday on the 4 May, 2 Stokes Mortars were brought up to the trenches. The next day the Germans shelled the Bridoux Salient and the Australians responded with a few rounds from their medium trench mortars and the two Stokes. On the night of the 5 May, the Germans shelled the Australian trenches for several hours before assaulting, overtaking the position and capturing the mortars. Australian casualties were heavy, with 23 men of the 20th Battalion killed in the attack, 72 wounded and 13 missing in action.

One of those killed on 5 May 1916 was Pte Ernest Merriman. He was 28 yrs old when he died, and had only spent 41 days in France. He was buried at Brewery Orchard Cemetery at Bois Grenier, a village 3kms south of Armentières. He was the first Cumnock soldier to be killed in action in France during WW1.

Mrs Merriman was first informed around 12 May that her son Pte Ernest Merriman had been wounded in action, but later in the month she was notified that he had been killed in action in France. The *Molong Express & Western District Advertiser* – 3 Jun 1916, p8:

*“Cumnock Comments – A Soldier’s Death.*

*On Tuesday a gloom was cast over the Cumnock district by the receipt of a wire intimating that Private Ernest Merriman, son of Mrs F Merriman, had been killed in action in France on 5<sup>th</sup> of May. His death is very much regretted by the whole community. He was a keen “sport,” and was also well-liked by everyone in this and the Yeoval and Obley districts. He enlisted in November, and had not been in the firing line prior to going to France. In a letter received by his brother a week ago, he wrote that France was a fine country, well worth fight for, and that Pte H Sparkes was with him. Both were then well...”*

Pte Harold Sparkes went on fighting with the 20<sup>th</sup> Btn, and returned to Australia on 20 May 1919.

A service in memory of Ernest Merriman was conducted by the Rev. Leavers and held at St Matthews Church, Cumnock, on the 18<sup>th</sup> June. A memorial in his honour was erected in the church and a tombstone was also erected in the Cumnock Cemetery.

Pte E Merriman is honoured on the Cumnock, Yeoval, Wellington and Obley War Memorials, as well as at the Commemorative area of the Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

Ernest’s eldest brother, George William Merriman, also died in 1916, on 11<sup>th</sup> August, and is buried in the Cumnock Cemetery. He was 36yrs old. Ernest’s father, John Merriman of Vale View station, Yass, died aged 77yrs in 1932. His mother, Eliza Merriman, died in Cumnock aged 89yrs on 4 Oct 1948 and is buried in the Cumnock Cemetery.



**Photos:**

**Portrait of Pte Ernest Merriman, 1950  
Australian War Memorial – H06711**

**Above left: Tombstone of  
2472 Pte JH Dunn, 20<sup>th</sup> Btn, 19yrs, 5 May 1916  
&  
2410 Pte EGS Merriman, 20<sup>th</sup> Btn, 28yrs, 5 May  
1916. In loving memory of our dearly loved son  
and brother. Thy Will Be Done.  
Brewery Orchard Cemetery at Bois Grenier,  
France.**

**Above right: Tombstone of George & Ernest  
Merriman, Cumnock Cemetery.**

**Left: Memorial Plaque, St Matthews Church  
Cumnock.**

**Research assisted by Peter Tremain of Yeoval &  
'Wellington's Finest' book by  
Trevor Munro & Graeme Hoskin.**