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Martin John Cullen

Martin John Cullen was born in Pyalong in 1884, the son of Thomas and Hanora Cullen (nee Fitzgerald). When Martin enlisted his father was a miner living at Tooborac.

Martin, a labourer, enlisted at Bendigo on February 15, 1916, aged 31 years. He joined the No 5 Tunnelling Company as a sapper, 3820, and after training departed Melbourne on May 25, 1916 for Plymouth, England.

Martin joined the 5th Tunnelling Coy in France in August but returned to England for hospital treatment in at Weymouth till late December. He remained in England for training until May 1917. During that time he had two periods of being absent without approval. In May Martin returned to France where he joined the 2nd Australian Tunnelling Company on the Western Front.

This Company, like others, was occupied in offensive and defensive mining involving the placing and maintaining of mines under enemy lines, as well as other underground work such as the construction of deep dugouts for troop accommodation, the digging of subways, saps (a narrow trench dug to approach enemy trenches), cable trenches and underground chambers for signals and medical services. It was very dangerous work.

Martin would have probably taken part in the preparations for the Battle of Messines in June 1917, as the 2nd Australian Tunnelling Company began work on deep dugouts in the Ypres Salient area. This would have been the kind of work he would have carried out until he was gassed on February 28 1918. The Kilmore Free Press of April 6, 1918 reported that Martin had been wounded at the front.

Again Martin was transferred to England where he spent recovering before returning to France to join his unit. Again Martin was wounded in August 1918 with a septic right thigh and transferred to Frensham Hill Hospital in England. He left England on January 8, 1919 on the Orsova arriving Melbourne on February 27, 1919 and was discharged at Melbourne on April 6, 1919.

Martin was awarded the 1914/15 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. His name appears on the Pyalong State School Honour Roll and the Pyalong Shire Honour Roll.

Martin married Mary Amy O'Keefe in 1920 and died in 1951 at Collingwood.



AUTUMN 1918. BIRMINGHAM.

1918-19