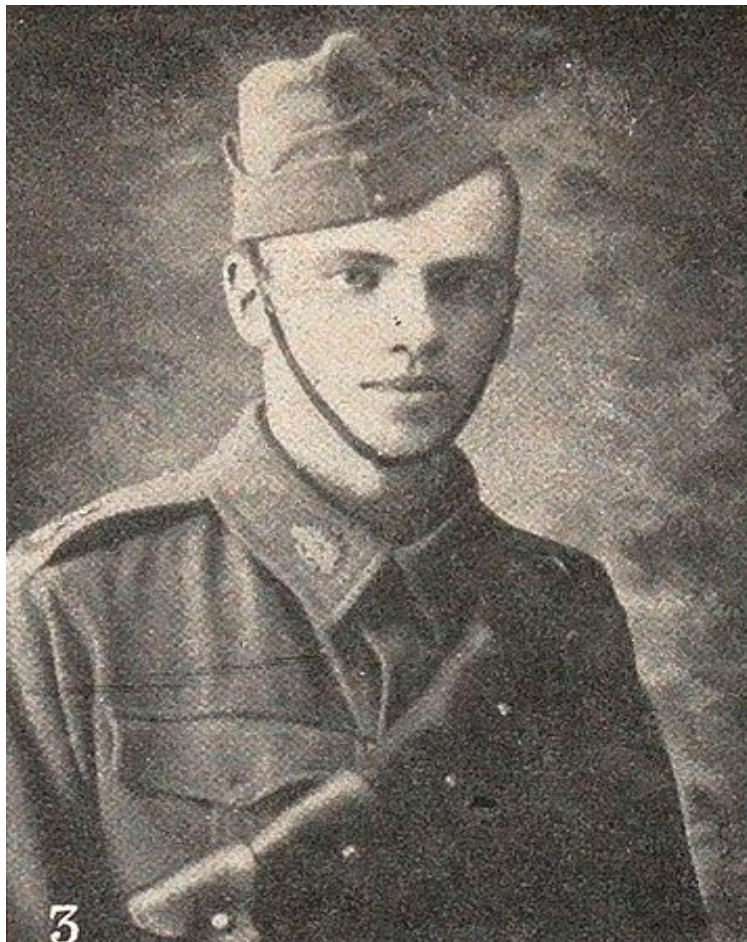


**2027 GUNNER ATHOL WYNNE PARRY**  
**FIRST TASMANIAN GUNNER KILLED IN WORLD WAR 1**  
**THE ONLY 9<sup>TH</sup> BATTERY GUNNER KILLED AT GALLIPOLI**

"God help me, I was only 19" John Schumann of *Redgum* 1983

To the young Athol Parry the military was Artillery. Educated at the Launceston Church Grammar School, Athol joined the school Cadet Corps<sup>1</sup> which was attached to the Launceston Volunteer Artillery. Serving as a school cadet through his secondary education he went on to serve two years as an Artillery Senior Cadet prior to enlisting in Launceston's 40<sup>th</sup> Battery, Australian Field Artillery. With the outbreak of war in 1914 it was not surprising to find he was among the first to volunteer for the Australian Imperial Force.



**Gunner Athol Wynne Parry**

Photo courtesy Ross Smith Queen Victoria Museum & Art Gallery from *The Weekly Courier* Thursday 19 August 1915.

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<sup>1</sup> Launceston Volunteer Artillery (LVA) sponsored cadets from 1890, an initiative of Lt Col Alfred Harrop, Commanding Officer and prominent Launceston Merchant. The Launceston Church Grammar School Cadet unit had been raised in 1896 under the auspices of the LVA by Lt H Gillett.

Gunner Parry was born at Strahan on Tasmania's isolated West Coast. By 1914 his family, including three sisters and a younger brother, had relocated to Deloraine where his father was the Station Master. His older brother, Cyril, had joined the new Australian Department of Defence in Hobart and subsequently enlisted in the Australian Army Pay Corps<sup>2</sup>.

Athol's civilian employment upon leaving school was as a clerk at the Lands Department in Launceston. However, his interest in Artillery saw him serve 15 months as a Gunner and subsequently Bombardier with the 40<sup>th</sup> Battery prior to volunteering for service with the 1<sup>st</sup> AIF.

At Pontville (later Brighton Camp) he was interviewed by the Battery Commander, Major Burgess<sup>3</sup>. Selection for the gun-line prioritised the over 20s.<sup>4</sup> Possibly because of his youth yet recognising his experience and enthusiasm, Burgess posted him to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade Ammunition Column being raised in Melbourne under the command of Lt I Randall also from the 40<sup>th</sup> Battery.



*L to R: Guy Briggs (cousin), Athol Parry, Cyril Parry (Brother), Charles Lee (Cousin)  
Mena Camp, Egypt 1915. Photo: Steven Cornish collection.*

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<sup>2</sup> Cyril Parry survived the war serving in Egypt, France, England and ultimately as a Captain and Divisional Paymaster for the ANZAC Mounted Division, Egypt, prior to returning to Australia in 1918.

<sup>3</sup> Later Major General Sir William Livingston Hatchwell Sinclair-Burgess KBE, CB, CMG, DSO.

<sup>4</sup> The Launceston Examiner 3 September 1914 p8.

The Ammunition Column sailed from Melbourne on 17 September 1914 aboard HMAT *Geelong*, joining the HMAT *Katuna* and the Tasmanian AIF contingent (including the 9<sup>th</sup> Battery) in Hobart. With his cousins Guy Briggs<sup>5</sup>, a corporal and Charles Lee<sup>6</sup>, both in the 12<sup>th</sup> Battalion, he left Hobart on 20 September 1914. With the remainder of the 1<sup>st</sup> AIF including his older brother Cyril, who had been posted to the Divisional Cash Office, he sailed from Albany in Western Australia for service overseas.

Intensive training in the Egyptian desert preceded Gallipoli. Conditions were demanding. As one officer wrote: "... heat and blinding sandstorms. My eyes were all silted up and my mouth so parched that I often lost the power of speech."<sup>7</sup> Gunnery training, deployments and live firing occupied the three field artillery brigades of the Division. Marches with the divisional and brigade ammunition columns, water carts, general service wagons including each battery of four guns in 'column of route' would stretch some five kilometres across the desert.

In down time, however, Athol was able share the sights of Egypt with his brother and their mates. Cyril records that he would be taken to the gun line where Athol would show off the 9<sup>th</sup> Battery's 18 pounder gun: "He would walk around it, patted it as though it were an animal. He knew every bolt and screw."<sup>8</sup>

As with his fellow ANZACs he would have contemplated what may lie ahead; writing home: "You can depend on me doing my duty bravely, and as a soldier should be". Again, he wrote: "I will do my best and I am sure God will guide me". He was regarded as "a good and game lad"<sup>9</sup>.

Following the Gallipoli landing, Gnr Parry was back on the gun-line. The 9<sup>th</sup> Battery's were detailed for various tasks until with the help of over 100 infantrymen they were able to drag each gun up the cliffs to their eventual platform on the heights above the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade positions on the right flank of the ANZAC position. In the interim they provided respite from the constant action for the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Battery's gunners. These positions were well forward and under constant fire. Otterman artillery high explosive and shrapnel fire was complemented by small arms and sniper fire. Casualties were constant.

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<sup>5</sup> Cpl Briggs was deemed killed in action on the 28 April 1915 at the first 12<sup>th</sup> Battalion roll call following the ANZAC landing held on the 29 April 1915.

<sup>6</sup> Corporal Lee was wounded at Lone Pine 7 August 1915, dying of his wounds while being evacuated to Lemnos. He was buried at sea 12 August 1915.

<sup>7</sup> Geoff McCrae letter quoted in "Pompy Elliot" by Ross McMullin. Scribe Publications 2002 p106.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in eulogy to Athol Parry by Rev George Wong at Deloraine Tasmania.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

On 11 May 1915 the 9<sup>th</sup> Battery gunners were relieving the 8<sup>th</sup> Battery in the vicinity of Lone Pine. Parry was sitting on No 4 gun layers seat chatting with Sgt McKenzie, the gun sergeant on No 3 gun. Suddenly, with an 'agonising cry' he fell forward mid-sentence into the sergeant's arms, mortally wounded from a sniper's bullet.<sup>10</sup>



Gunner Parry's original grave at Browns Dip and his present headstone at Lone Pine cemetery.  
Photos: AWM P00046058; findagrave.com

Gnr Parry was the first member of the 9<sup>th</sup> Battery to be killed and the only member killed at Gallipoli.

He was initially buried in a temporary grave prior to a more formal site at "Browns Dip" behind the gun position at the head of Artillery Road. Throughout the remainder of the campaign his fellow gunners would visit his grave in quiet times sitting with him for a "quiet pipe" (smoke).

Following the war, Gnr Parry was reinterred at the Lone Pine Cemetery.

Contributed by Mark Cameron with additional family information from Marion Sargent and Stephen Cornish.

<sup>10</sup> The Diary of W G McKenzie; entry 11<sup>th</sup> May 1915; unpublished.