

A SOLDIER'S STORY



Service No.: 1153
Name: Finniss George GARDNER
Nickname: George Junior, or Finn



Medals and Decorations

British War Medal
Victory Medal

Rank: Sapper
Service: Army
Enlisted: 25 Feb 1916
Discharged 3 May 1918

Finn was born at Thorn Hill (near Willunga, SA) on 2 Mar 1887 to George Byron Gardner and Alice Gardner (nee Tapley). He was the second eldest of 7 children in the family, 4 boys and 3 girls. The family moved to White Flat in 1903, where his father purchased a farm. Finn worked on the family farm until his enlistment in the Army. Both he, and his brother Morford, enlisted on the same day, both giving their occupation as "farmer".

After enlistment he went to Mitcham for processing before being sent to 2nd Depot Training Battalion (Bn) for basic training. He was then allocated to 3rd Pioneer Bn on 16 Mar 1916. At the completion of training he entrained for Melbourne where he embarked on 6 Jun 1916 aboard HMAT "*Wandilla*", bound for Plymouth (UK), arriving 2 weeks later. After a further period of training he embarked at Folkstone (UK) on 21 Dec 1916 aboard the SS "*Princess Victoria*" bound for France.

The 3rd Pioneer Bn was raised in Victoria in Mar 1916. The unit undertook further training in the UK before arriving in France at the end of 1916 and then served on the Western Front in France and Belgium: it was assigned to the 3rd Division.

Pioneer Bns were essentially light combat engineer units organised like the infantry and located at the very forward edge of the battle area. They were used to develop and enhance protection and mobility for supported troops and to deny it to the enemy. They constructed defensive positions, command posts and dugouts, prepared barbed wire defences and breached those of the enemy: their skills and capabilities were broad and included construction and maintenance of road, track and light rail and demolition of enemy obstacles. They could also, and did quite often, fight as infantry.

After 2 months in a segregation camp at Etaples (France), Finn was taken on strength by his unit in Feb 1917. Four months later (4 Jun 1917) he was wounded in action with

shrapnel wounds but remained on duty. Not so lucky the second time when he was again wounded in action a fortnight later (23 Jun 1917); this time he was "gassed" and evacuated to 2nd Casualty Clearing Station, then to 21 Ambulance Train before being admitted to 39th General Hospital at Boulogne (France) where he remained for just over a month before being released to Base Details. However, it was only a temporary reprieve as he was again admitted to 39th General Hospital. Because of his weakened state from the gas attack he was evacuated to UK on 20 Sep 1917 and then returned to Australia aboard the HS "*Balmoral Castle*" on 1 Feb 1918 for medical discharge because of breathing difficulties. On disembarkation in Australia he was admitted to 15th Army General Hospital where he remained for over a month before being released.

He was discharged from the Army as medically unfit on 3 May 1918 and returned to Koppio.

Finn then joined with his brother, Morford, operating a contracting business. They, in partnership with Dick Meadows, worked on contracts which he had taken out with the District Council of Tumby Bay to clear and repair roads. Most of the work was repairing and resurfacing roads, especially in the "boggy patches". However, the stretch of road from Thorpe's Dam (near the Mine Hill School site) to Butler was one section that had to be cleared before the road could be constructed. He was also involved in levelling the sand dunes near the Boston Hotel in Port Lincoln.

Finn married Amina Emily Cole on 4 Nov 1922 in St Thomas' Church, Port Lincoln. He was allocated a Soldier Settlers block and the couple settled there, where they raised their family, a boy and 2 girls.

Finniss had retired to Port Lincoln when he died on 17 Oct 1951 at the age of 64; he is buried in the Happy Valley Cemetery at Port Lincoln.



RSL Cemetery, Port Lincoln