

Desmond Gavan DUFFY



Desmond Gavan Duffy was born on 13 December 1888. He was the brother of (Sir) Charles Gavan Duffy, who also served in the War and became a Supreme Court judge in 1933. Desmond studied at Riverview in Sydney, where he was prolific prize-winner, before completing his law degree at Melbourne University. He was a member of the Melbourne University Rifles.

Once admitted to practice in 1913, he was associate to his father, Sir Frank Gavan Duffy, a judge of the High Court, in Melbourne. He then moved to Sydney and was admitted to practice in New South Wales in May 1914 and set up as a barrister in Denman Chambers.

Desmond Gavan Duffy enlisted at the Sydney Town Hall in November 1915. He embarked with the 3rd Divisional Cyclists Battalion aboard the HMAT *Demosthenes* in May 1916. In October 1916, he became a 2nd lieutenant in 20th Australian Infantry Battalion. Gavan Duffy was killed on 15 November 1916, with two other men, when a shell landed on their tent at Carlton Camp, near Flers, in France.

The 20th Battalion provided reinforcements for the attack near Flers between 14 and 16 November 1916, in conditions described as the worst ever encountered by the AIF and it was at this time that Gavan Duffy was

killed. Sir Frank Gavan Duffy wrote a poem to his son which was published in the *Anzac Memorial 1917* and was also published in some newspapers at the time. The poem reads:

“How can I shut my ears to Honor’s call
I cannot stay, Dear Father, bid me go”
“Answer it then”, I said “And if you fall
God take you, and God help us in our woe.”
So you strode unfearing, proud, elate,
To quit the ordered quiet of your life
And share the soldier’s harsh, uncertain fate,
Your eyes aflame with rapture for the strife.
And we who stayed behind foreboding ill,
Counted the cost, but put our fears aside
And set a halting but insistent will

To dream of meeting in some happier tide.
Or summon pleasant pictures from the past –
the smiling babe frank schoolboy, trusted friend,
...And now our foolish hopes and fears are cast
Into oblivion, for the dreaded end
Has come upon a battlefield in France.
Sleep, son, beneath the soldier’s rugged cross,
Your duty done, nor time nor evil chance
Can stain your name, or bring you sense of loss.
And we – we whisper while the hot tears run
Down our worn cheeks, “Dear Lord,
Thy will be done”.