Before enlisting Patrick Rahilly was Headmaster at St John’s School, Hawthorn.

“With the Army” in “The Xaverian” 1916, p. 62

Patrick Rahilly — the last letter written by poor Patrick (in Lewis Gun Section) bears date 27/6/16. Some time shortly after he fell with many others, who lost their lives in the fearful charges on the Western front. The only facts we can gather about him are from the pen of a comrade who, in a letter to his own father, writes thus: “under cover of a fog some of us sneaked across the parapet to bury the dead who lying outside. We covered them up in shell holes, after removing their discs, pay-books and wallet. Several of the poor fellows I knew, having come across with them, and among these was P.V. Rahilly. We buried him as best we could, and you may tell his folk he died a hero, as did every man who fell in the awful charge of that awful day.”

His last letter to his sister in mainly taken up with admiration of the country (France) around him: “Your brother is in France at last! What a contrast after Egypt. Tell ’em that France is ‘God’s own country.’ If I were a Frenchman I would never leave it. There’s a beautiful church in the village wherein we are billeted at present, and there today I sought the Master’s help by going to Confession and Communion. Pray hard for me, for it is our turn now to do our bit. Pray God that I come through safe and sound for home’s sake …” He did not come through, but went through safe, for Pat Rahilly was a good man, who faced death with the fearlessness of one who had prepared to meet it. May consolation come to his sorrowing wife and family, and to him rest in peace.

AWM ~ Roll of Honour
Private Patrick Vincent Rahilly

Service Number: 4994
Rank: Private
Unit: 60th Australian Infantry Battalion
Date of death: 19 July 1916
Place of death: France
Cause of death: Killed in action
Age at death: 30
Place of burial: No known grave
Place of association: North Carlton, Australia
Memorial details: V.C. Corner Australian Memorial (Panel No. 22), Fromelles, France

The VC Corner Cemetery is unique because it has no gravestones and is the only “all-Australian” cemetery in France. It contains the remains of 1181 Australians of the 5th Division killed in the calamitous attack on 19/20 July 1916.

On the wall at the rear are the names of Australians who died in the battle and have no known grave. The unidentified bodies are buried in the lawns, each marked by a rose bush.

The bodies were not separately identifiable at the time of their recovery immediately after the Armistice in 1918. They had lain on the field for 2 1/2 years. Their ID tags had largely been removed by comrades in the immediate aftermath of the battle, in an effort to recover the wounded and to ensure that the fate of the fallen was confirmed to families. This was done at great personal risk and many additional casualties were sustained in the process.

The cemetery was situated in no-man’s land between the Australian and German lines in 1916.