

PTE THOMAS ANDREW DENNY, DCM
5002 - 17th Battalion, 1-13 Reinforcements

Private Thomas Denny was one of two soldiers associated with Cumnock who were awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for serving in the Australian Imperial Forces during WW1. The other soldier was Lance Corporal Charles Grimson who won his DCM during the Gallipoli Campaign. The Distinguished Conduct Medal was regarded as second only to the Victoria Cross in prestige. Only 1,767 DCM medals were awarded to Australians during WW1.



Thomas stated his age at enlistment in the AIF on 20 Nov 1915 as 18yrs 5mths, and place of birth Orange. There is no birth record for a Thomas Andrew Denny in the NSW index for the relevant birth year of 1897, but there is a birth index for Thomas A Roberts, Mother Annie Roberts, (no father named) registered in 1898 in the Wellington district. Anne (Annie) Roberts was born in the Molong district in 1876, the daughter of Thomas and Mary Jane Roberts. Annie Roberts married James Denny in 1901 in Molong. They had several children born in the Molong district between 1902 and 1913, including: Nancy, Pearl, Gladys, and Norman.

James Denny was born in Molong in 1879, the son of Elizabeth and William Denny. James Denny served in the Boer War, from 1899-1900. *The Molong Argus*, 31 Aug 1900, p4, records a Welcome Home banquet for Farrier-Sergeant "Jim" Denny at the Cumnock Hall. He set up as a blacksmith in Mr Nesbitt's shop in 1901, and continued working as a blacksmith for Mr Nugent in 1904. He placed his business up for sale in 1907 and moved to Manildra around 1912, and set up there as a wheelwright, blacksmith and horseshoer. Their son Norman died in Manildra on 28 Jan 1914.

Thomas Denny went to the Cumnock Public School and there is a 1908 school photo in the 'Seeds of Wisdom' by Joan Marriott - 1979, with Thomas and his sister Nancy in it. There is also a news report, *Molong Argus* - 11 Aug 1911, p4, of Tom taking part in a concert at Yeoval:

"A highly successful concert took place in the local hall on Wednesday night, in aid of the Curate fund. There was a crowded attendance, and each item was splendidly received. Master Denny (Cumnock) brought down the house with his renditions, and was vociferously encored... Comic song, Master T Denny, Cumnock (encore)."

Thomas worked at the Molong Post Office in July 1914 as a telephonist. He enlisted in the AIF at Orange on 20 Nov 1915 and stated his occupation as a clerk. His parents, of Edward Street, East Orange, signed their consent for him to enlist. He had previous experience in the Senior Cadets. He was 5ft 5ins tall, had fair complexion, grey eyes, brown hair, and was of the C of E religion.

Thomas Denny served at the Bathurst and Lithgow Depot Camps with the 17th Btn, 1-13 Reinforcements. *The Molong Express & Western District Advertiser* - 29 Apr 1916, P9:

"On Tuesday night, Pte Thos. Denny, home on final leave, was entertained by the Recruiting Committee at the Shire Hall, and presented with a pipe and smoker's outfit. He returned to camp on Wednesday."

Pte Denny embarked from Sydney on 4 Jun 1916 on HMAT *Kyarra A55*. On route to England the *Kyarra* stopped at Capetown on 6 Jul 1916, where the troops took part in a march to Green Point Common. Pte Denny and several other soldiers did not return to their ship as ordered but went into town. They were later charged with being 'AWL' on 6 Jul 1916 and 'Disobedience of Orders'. Pte Denny also had the additional charge of 'Drunkenness' and received 4 days Field Punishment and was fined 5 shillings.

Pte Charles Goldspink - 5019, 17th Battalion, from Molong, wrote home about the incident (which letter was published in the *Molong Argus*) that when they were at Durban the men were promised more leave when they arrived in Capetown. However, that promise was never kept and all they got was a route march.

"So, when we were camped for dinner which was in the town, about 90 of us went off to have a look round. Next morning we were all brought up and the old Major went crook a treat. About ten days afterwards we were up again for the same thing. I got fined £1/1/- and some of them went as high as £2/16/-. Of course it wasn't the right thing to do, but we wanted to have a look what the place was like."

Charles also commented that Len Starr (Pte Leonard Starr – 5088 17th Btn, also from Molong) and Tom Denny were also fined and that 900 from another boat did the same.

After arriving in England, Pte Denny was transferred to the 5th Training Btn on 4 Aug 1916. On 18 Aug 1916 he was admitted to the Military Hospital at Bulford and returned to 5th Training Btn on 23 Aug. On 18 Sep 1916 he was charged with being AWL from 2400, 11 Sep to 2400, 15 Sep and deprived of 18 days pay.

Pte Denny proceeded to France on 7 Oct 1916 and on 20 Oct rejoined the 13th Btn, which was then stationed in the province of West Flanders, Belgium. The 13th Btn moved on to Northern France over the next few days. On 4 Feb 1917 the 13th Btn, as part of the 5th Australian Division, took part in a successful battle near the village of Gueudecourt, Picardy, France. On 22 Feb 1917, the 13th Btn moved to billets in Ribemont, France, and the following day Pte Denny was admitted to hospital with a gunshot wound to his right leg. He was transferred to the No 7 Canadian General Hospital, Etaples, on 3 Mar and then transferred to England and admitted to the Horton Hospital, at Epsom, Surrey, on 13 Mar 1917. He had furlough from 28 Mar – 11 Apr, and then spent some months at No 1 Command Depot at Perham Downs, Salisbury.

Pte Denny returned to France on 10 Nov, and while at Le Havre, was injured on 11 Nov 1917. A report of the incident stated that “*Pte Denny was in Stephanie Hall on the evening of 11th inst. in the company of several other Aust. soldiers, when a disturbance took place in which he was stabbed.*” He received several wounds to his left hand, which were deemed unlikely to interfere with his military work. Pte Denny was stated as being partially to blame for the injury and the person who inflicted the wound was unknown.

On 20 Dec 1917, Pte Denny rejoined the 13th Btn and, on 7 Feb 1918, was wounded in action by mustard gas. At that time most of the 13th Btn were at Curragh Camp, France, having been relieved from the front, but the War Diary for the 13th Btn records that 2 officers and 50 ordinary ranks were detached with the 4th Field Coy on 7 Feb, and Pte Denny may have been with them when gassed. After being treated at the 55th General Hospital, Boulougne, he was transferred across to England on 18 Feb and admitted to the 1st London General Hospital, Camberwell, on 19 Feb. He recuperated at the 1st Australian Auxiliary Hospital, Harefield from 15 – 20 Mar, when he was granted furlough until 3 April.

Another disciplinary offence occurred when Pte Denny was charged with being AWL and neglecting to obey orders relating to ‘Train Travelling’, from 9.30am to 11pm on 18 Apr. He received 4 days Field Punishment No 2, which consisted of heavy labouring duties, possibly being restrained in handcuffs or fetters for up to two hours per day.

Returning to France on 24 May 1918, Pte Denny rejoined the 13th Btn on 30 May. The 13th Btn was involved in the fighting around Amiens on 8 Aug 1918, which produced considerable gains for the Allies and was subsequently described as one of the greatest successes in a single day on the Western Front. On 18 Sep, the 13th Btn took part in its last offensive action, around Le Verguier, on the Hindenburg Line. Pte Denny won a Distinguished Conduct Medal for gallantry actions on the same day. Between 18 Sep and 5 Oct 1918 the Australian Corps, fighting with British and American troops, opened a 10km wide hole in the Hindenburg Line, Germany’s last hope of holding up the Allied advance on the Western Front.

DETAILS OF DCM AWARD FOR PRIVATE THOMAS ANDREW DENNY

During the advance on the 18th Sep 1918, near Le Verguier, Pte Denney was acting as Company Runner. On return from delivering a despatch he came across a small party which had become detached from the Company and were lost in the fog. Denny took charge and led them towards their objective. The portion of the trench they struck, however, proved to be still in occupation by *the enemy*.

With fine initiative Denny led his little party forward, and bombing vigorously up and down the trench, established touch with his own Company and also with the Unit on the flank. He led the way the whole time and it was mainly owing to his wonderful courage and resource that his little party of 7 men captured over 100 prisoners and 7 machine guns.

Later, when his Company was consolidating on the Red Line, he carried messages to Battalion Headquarters under exceptionally heavy enemy artillery and machine gun fire.

Throughout the day his conduct was conspicuously gallant.

The award was promulgated in the 6th Supplement to the London Gazette dated 17 Oct 1919, and Commonwealth Gazette No 35, dated 15 Apr 1920.

The 13th Btn was moved to the Bovelles area of the Somme on 24 Sep and took no further action in the war. The breach of the Hindenburg trenches was a vital factor influencing Germany's request for an armistice to end the war on 11 Nov 1918. Pte Denny left France for England on 10 Feb and on 18 Feb 1919 was admitted with influenza to the 3rd Auxiliary Hospital, Dartford. He was discharged from hospital on 20 Feb and granted furlough.

He returned to Australia on *HMAT A73 Commonwealth* on 12 Jun and was discharged from the AIF on 27 Jul 1919. He received the 1914/15 Star Medal, British Medal and Victory Medal and a gratuity of £20 for being awarded a DCM.

The Molong Argus – 20 Jun 1919, p4, reported:

“Mr J Denny, accompanied by his daughter, Pearl, journeyed to Sydney last week to meet his son, Pte. Tom Denny, DCM, and returned home last Saturday. The returned hero looks little the worse for his years on active service. “

A further report in the *Leader* – 8 Aug 1919, p8, gives a report of his welcome home:

“On Monday night last the people of Cumnock and district gave a welcome home to a number of soldiers recently returned, viz., Private TA Denny, DCM, Trooper L Stark, Driver E Bruton, Corp JG Murray, Pte E Taylor and Pte J Murray.

They were each presented with a gold medal, suitably inscribed. The welcome took the form of a supper at the School of Arts, and a dance in Leary's Hall.

Some two and a half or three years ago, when Corporal C Grimson, DCM, was welcomed home, Mr S Reilly promised that the next Cumnock soldier who won the DCM he would make him a present of £25, and true to his word he has done so, and soldier TA Denny, DCM, has proved to be the lucky man.”

On the 7 Oct 1919, Thomas Denny was presented with his DCM by the Governor-General, Sir Ronald Munro Ferguson, at a Military Honours Ceremony at Victoria Barracks, Sydney.

Thomas's mother Annie Denny was a nurse and at various times ran a hospital in Cumnock. Local newspaper reports show that Annie was living in Cumnock in Jan 1926 and had established a private hospital in Cumnock by Jan 1929. She is listed in the 1930-1936 Electoral Rolls for Calare/Cumnock as living at Wyoming, Obley Street, Cumnock, with the occupation of 'nurse'. The Electoral Rolls also show that in 1937 Annie had moved to Forbes to work as a nurse, and by 1943 was living in Wellington. Annie Denny died in 1953, aged 76yrs, and was buried at Wellington.

The 1930-1943 Electoral Rolls for Gwydir/Boggabri showed James Denny working as a blacksmith at Dubbledah, Gunnedah. He died in Gunnedah in 1946, aged 67yrs.

Thomas Denny advertised the service of a thoroughbred stallion, Oscolor, in the *Molong Argus* -12 Dec 1919, p9. Thomas later moved to Queensland and was living and working as a labourer at Edmonton, a sugar cane town, in the 1925 Electoral Roll for Herbert/Cairns.

Thomas Denny, aged 36yrs, married Alice Day on 7 Nov 1934 in Cairns, Queensland. Alice had been married previously to Albert Day and her parents names were Maxillian Koppe and Ann Hanrahan. They were both residing at the Federal Hotel, Cairns, when married.

In the 1936 and 1943 Electoral Rolls for Herbert/Bowen, Thomas and Alice were living in Bowen, and Thomas's occupation was listed as a labourer. Alice Denny died on 9 Aug 1953.

In the 1949 and 1963 Electoral Rolls for Leichhardt/Cairns, Thomas had moved back to Cairns, where he was listed as a waterside worker in 1949, and had no occupation in 1963.

Thomas Andrew Denny died on 2 Jun 1968, aged 70yrs. He was alone at home at 106 Sheridan Street, Cairns, and died in his sleep. He was buried on 5 Jun 1968 in the Church of England portion of the Martyn Street Cemetery, Cairns.

He is remembered on the WW1 Cumnock Public School Honour Board, the WW1 plaque on the Cumnock War Memorial Gates, the WE Agland MBE Memorial Museum, Orange, and by a plaque at the Queensland Garden of Remembrance, Brisbane.

Thank you to Lorraine Hodgkins, daughter of Len Starr, for the information about the Capetown incident in 1916, and for the wonderful photo of the three friends, Tom, Len and Charlie.

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Left: Pte Tom Denny, Pte Len Starr & Pte Charles Goldspink. Sydney 1916.

Below: The DCM medal which Tom received.



Below: Plaque for Thomas Denny at the Garden of Remembrance, Pinnaroo Lawn Cemetery, Bridgeman Downs, QLD.

Below left: Cumnock Public School WW1 Roll of Honour.

Below right: Cumnock Memorial Gates.

