

From the Archives

As this edition of the Principal's Newsletter falls close to Founders' Day [April 16] and ANZAC Day it is, perhaps, appropriate to write about one of our earliest students, **James Douglas Henry [1896]**. It is also appropriate to write about Henry because 2006 has been designated Year of the Tunnellers and Henry is regarded as one of the bravest of all those intrepid men who put their lives at risk tunnelling under enemy lines during the Great War 1914-18.

James Henry holds a unique record at Grammar because he is the only student to have enrolled on three occasions. Born on May 26, 1881 he enrolled for the first time, as an eight year old, in April 1890. He had two older brothers who were part of the inaugural twenty-three students at Grammar. He left at the end of 1890 to return to the farm at Ingham. He re-enrolled for the second time in April 1894 only to leave at the end of that year. His third enrolment occurred at the start of the academic year 1896 and he managed to last the year completing his Junior Certificate.

Henry and his brother A.D. Henry were two of five Grammar students who served with Queensland forces during the Boer War [1899-1902]. James Henry served two terms in South Africa. On the first occasion he was a Private in the 4 Queensland Imperial Bushmen contingent and on the second occasion he served as a Lieutenant in 3rd Battalion Australian Horse Company [Queensland]. He was awarded the Queens South Africa medal in 1899.

On his return from South Africa, Henry maintained his military interest in the Queensland militia while developing a career as a mining engineer. He enlisted for the First World War in October 1915 in Sydney and was appointed 2nd Lieutenant 1st Tunnelling Company: Mining Corps. Due to the unruly nature of the Queensland Tunnellers Henry, who had worked with many of them during his militia days, was posted to Queensland to instill some discipline into the group. He was such a success that, by the time the Tunnellers sailed for France on 20 February, 1916 he had been appointed a temporary Major. This appointment was confirmed on 1 November 1916.

In 1917 Henry was involved in two major battles that resulted in him being mentioned in Despatches [on three occasions] and awarded the Distinguished Service Order [DSO]. The first major battle occurred at Hill 60, Messines [Belgium]. The 1st Tunnelling Command, under Henry's direction took over this strategic mine and, under sustained pressure from the German forces, managed to blow the mine on June 7. This feat is still commemorated at Hill 60, Messines although the actual Memorial is now riddled with bullets, a result of combat during the Second World War.

From 20-26 September, 1917 Henry was involved in the crucial Menin Road Battles. It was during this battle that Henry was awarded the DSO. The citation for the award, in part, states that Henry, with a total disregard to the danger surrounding him, inspired his men to an important and strategic victory. In December 1917 Henry was moved from the front in Europe and posted to the Middle East where he served out the rest of the war with the 1st Camel Brigade Headquarters. In recognition of his work in the Middle East Henry was awarded the Order of the British Empire [OBE] Military.

On demobilization from World War One Henry returned to Sydney where he worked as an Engineer. He is Grammar's second most decorated soldier. Captain John White [33rd Middlesex Regiment] is the most decorated. White was the recipient of the DSO, MC and the Croix de Guerre for his bravery in World War One.

NOTES:

A description of the battles at Hill 60, Messines and at Menin Road can be found on Google.

James Henry's grandson, Pieter Wessels, is currently writing a biography of his grandfather for the records at the Australian War Memorial.

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