

FROM THE ARCHIVES

With the recent ANZAC Day Service celebrated in the School Quadrangle on Thursday, 24th of April it is perhaps opportune to write about the significant role two Past Grammarians played in the lead up to the crucial Battle of Messines in June 1917.

A recent article in The Townsville Bulletin featured a story concerning a local mining engineer, Ross Thomas, and his attempt to get a film to be called *The Silence* off the ground. The intention of the film is develop the background to the blowing up of Hill 60 on the outskirts of Antwerp in June 1917. This military action was later to signify the start of the Battle of Messines, a turning point in World War I. Mr Thomas is also keen on setting up a display concerning Hill 60 and its significance when the new Military Museum at Jezzine Barracks is finally opened.

What is not widely known, however, is that two Past Grammarians played a key role in organizing the blowing up of Hill 60. **LI COL CECIL ALBERT FEWTRELL**, a student at Grammar from 1899 to 1901 became the Officer in Charge of the 1st Australian Tunnelling Corps, a Corps consisting of some 1400 men and the largest Australian Corps at that time. The Corps was made up of three sections divided into Victoria, New South Wales and a combined group from Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australia. The latter group consisted of a rather rebellious group of miners, navvies and sewer workers and **Major JAMES DOUGLAS HENRY** was invited to take charge and to instil some discipline. Henry enrolled at Grammar in 1890 as a nine year old but left after a few weeks. He again enrolled in 1894 but once again left after a few weeks. He came back in 1896 and lasted the year but failed the Sydney University Junior Examinations.

Fewtrell had a successful three years at Grammar winning various academic prizes and being a Prefect for two years. He is best known at the School for the speech he made at a House Supper where in a toast to the "Old Boys and Girls" of Grammar he suggested the formation of an Old Boys' Union. The then Headmaster, Mr Miller, took up the idea and the association was formed in the following year. On leaving Grammar, Fewtrell moved to Sydney where he became an apprentice engineer on the New South Wales Railways.

There is no record of Henry achieving academically or on the sporting fields while at Grammar. On leaving school he returned to his parent's property near Cardwell before going to the Boer War in 1899. Henry had two tours of duty in South Africa rising to the rank of lieutenant and winning medals for bravery in the process. On his return to Australia in 1902 he went to work in the mining industry. It was in this industry that Henry learned to discipline men in what was, at times, a rough work environment.

Fewtrell was to have a rapid rise through the military. He enlisted in 1915 and was immediately promoted to the rank of lieutenant. By 1916 he had been promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and was placed in charge of the Tunnelling Corps. It is obvious from research that Fewtrell was an intelligent man who had great organizational skills and he was an excellent speaker. He was not lacking in bravery either as his efforts were rewarded with the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) which at the time was the highest award behind the Victoria Cross. He was also Mentioned in Despatches and won the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for his leadership skills.

When Henry enlisted in 1915 he was made a Captain on the basis of his experience in South Africa. On taking charge of the combined group of Tunnellers he was promoted to Major. Henry distinguished himself in combat winning the DSO and OBE as well as being mentioned in Despatches on three occasions. When Hill 60 was finally blown on June 7, 1917 at 3.10 am Henry was in the firing party that set off the blasts. It is believed that Henry was the Officer in Charge of the count down.

Mr Pieter Wessels, a great nephew of J.D. Henry, and a journalist currently researching a book on his great uncle tells me that as a result of his great uncle's work at Hill 60 James Henry was invited to meet the King of England, George V. As the King had a busy day ahead the meeting took place while the King was dressing and Henry took the opportunity to tell George V a ribald story. According to Mr Wessels the King was so amused by the story he made Henry repeat the story to Queen Mary. (For those of the older generation reading this article you will not be surprised to know that Queen Mary was not amused!)

Very little is known of what Henry did after the end of the war but it is rumoured that he remained in the Northern Hemisphere and lived in England for some years. Fewtrell returned to Sydney and had a distinguished career as Chief Engineer in the New South Wales Railway System. He also continued in the Military and was for a period of time the Commander of the 9th Infantry Brigade.

For those parents and friends who are able to visit the School in the next week or so please take the opportunity to visit the Library and see the Hill 60 Display set up to commemorate the work of our two past students. It is an interesting display and I would like to thank Mrs Julie Cowan (Library), Mr Michael Moores (Teacher) and Miss Kim Lambert (School Office) for their help in mounting the display.

On a sad note it should be added that two past students in **THOMAS ARMSTRONG** and **ANDREW KNEATH** both lost their lives in subsequent skirmishes after the blowing up of Hill 60. Andrew Kneath was just twenty years of age when he died.

LEST WE FORGET

Mr W.J. Muller
School Archivist