



Army Museum of Tasmania

Anglesea Barracks
HOBART

Information Sheet No. 12



315 Lieutenant Colonel Henry William “Harry” Murray **VC, CMG, DSO & Bar, DCM, CdeG, MID ******

1 December 1880 – 7 January 1966

Harry Murray was an Australian recipient of the Victoria Cross, the highest decoration for gallantry “in the face of the enemy” that can be awarded to members of the British and Commonwealth armed forces. He rose from the rank of private to lieutenant colonel in three and a half years. He is described as the most highly decorated infantry soldier of the British Empire during the First World War and Australia’s most decorated soldier.

Born near Evandale in Tasmania, Harry Murray left school at fourteen years of age to work on the family farm. He joined the Launceston Volunteer Artillery Corps in 1902, serving until 1908 when he left and travelled to Western Australia. He worked as a farmer, courier and timber cutter before enlisting in Perth on 30th September 1914. He was posted to A Company of the newly formed 16th Battalion, 4th Brigade and was assigned to a machine gun crew. The 4th Brigade at this time was under the command of Colonel John Monash. Murray served during the Gallipoli Campaign, where he was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal. After being commissioned he was transferred to the 13th Battalion and was later deployed, along with the rest of his battalion, to France for service on the Western Front, where he was awarded the

DSO during the Battle of the Somme. In February 1917, Murray commanded a company during the battalion's attack on the German position of Stormy Trench. During the engagement, the company was able to capture the position and repulse three fierce attacks, with Murray often leading bayonet and bombing charges himself. For his actions during the battle Murray was awarded his VC. Soon after his VC action, he was promoted to major and earned a Bar to his DSO during an attack on the Hindenburg Line near Bullecourt. Promoted to lieutenant colonel in early 1918, he assumed command of the 4th Machine Gun Battalion, where he would remain until the end of the war.

Returning to Australia in 1920, Murray eventually settled on "Glenlyon" station near Richmond in Queensland. He re-enlisted for service in the Second World War and was appointed as commanding officer of the 26th (Militia) Battalion until it became an Australian Imperial Force (AIF) unit. He then commanded the 23rd Queensland Regiment, Volunteer Defence Corps until taking his discharge on 8th February, 1944. Murray then returned to his property where he was a successful wool grower. He died in 1966 at the age of 85 following a car accident and was interred with full military honours.

On February 2006 in Evandale, Tasmania, Governor-General Michael Jeffery unveiled a statue of Murray by sculptor Peter Corlett. The military training camp situated at Stoney head in Tasmania is also named the Murray VC Camp, a fitting tribute to Australia's most decorated soldier and one of thirteen Tasmanian VC winners. Regarded as a shy and modest man, he was described as the most distinguished fighting officer of the AIF.

Citations

Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM)

May 1915

For distinguished service on several occasions from 9th to 31st May 1915 during operations near Gaba Tepe (Dardenelles) (sic) when attached to the machine-gun section. During this period he exhibited exceptional courage, energy and skill, and inflicted severe losses on the enemy, he being himself twice wounded.

Distinguished Service Order (DSO)

August 1916

Although wounded twice, he commanded his Company with the greatest courage and initiative, beating off four enemy attacks. Later, when an enemy bullet started a man's equipment exploding he tore the man's equipment off at great personal risk. He set a splendid example throughout.

Victoria Cross (VC)**May 1917**

For most conspicuous bravery when in command of the right flank Company in attack. He led his Company to the assault with great skill and courage, and the position was quickly captured. Fighting of a very severe nature followed, and three heavy counter-attacks were beaten back, these successes being due to Captain Murray's wonderful work. Throughout the night his Company suffered heavy casualties through concentrated enemy shell fire, and on one occasion gave ground for a short way. This gallant officer rallied his command and saved the situation by sheer valour. He made his presence felt throughout the line, encouraging his men, heading bombing parties, leading bayonet charges, and carrying wounded to places of safety. His magnificent example inspired his men throughout.

Bar to DSO**May 1917**

He rendered conspicuous service for the attack near Bullecourt on 11/4/17. He led his Company with courage and skill through 1,200 yards of shell and machine-gun fire and he and his Company still kept on although they lost 75% of their strength before reaching the second objective. Captain Murray being the senior officer of the 4th Brigade in the 1st and 2nd objectives went along the whole frontage, 900 yards, directing the defence, always encouraging the men of all units by his cheerfulness and bravery and always moving to the points of danger.

When the bomb supply was running out and the men gave ground he rallied them time and time and fought back the Germans over and over again. When there was no alternative but to surrender or withdraw through the heavy machine-gun fire, Captain Murray was the last to leave the position. He is not only brave and daring but a skilful soldier possessing tactical instinct of the highest order. He has already been awarded VC, DSO, DCM.

Croix de Guerre (CdeG)**October 1918**

During the period 23rd March to 24th April 1918 and 2nd to 7th August 1918 he commanded the 4th Australian machine-gun Battalion with remarkable skill. Under heavy fire from enemy artillery he was successful, by his bravery, in maintaining in the most difficult circumstances a close liaison with French troops.

Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George (CMG)**June 1919**

This officer has commanded the Machine Gun Battalion of the (4th) Division since its inception on the 15th March 1918. His work has been marked by conspicuous gallantry, ability, tactical knowledge and devotion to duty. During the period 18th September to 11th November he commanded the machine-guns of the Division with marked success in the operations which resulted in the capture of the Hindenburg Outpost Line. He also, as Liaison Machine Gun Officer with the 2nd American Corps, largely contributed to the successful work of the machine-guns of that Corps in the operations resulting in the breaking of the main Hindenburg Line near Bellenglise. He is recommended for high distinction.

Mentioned in Despatches x 4 (MID*)**

Murray was Mentioned in Despatches on 4th January 1917 following a period of patrols and trench raids in late 1916. For his actions at Passchendaele, Murray was garnered a mention in Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig's dispatch of 7th November 1917.

His final honour came in 11th July 1919, when he was Mentioned in Despatches for the fourth time, having received his third mention on 31st December 1918.