

Cornelius August Willam BREEN

Cornelius Breen was born in Kilmore in 1872 to John and Bridget (nee Kinsella) Breen. He was aged 42 years and 11 months when he enlisted at Bendigo in July 1915. His attestation form shows Cornelius was an unmarried labourer. He admitted to a previous conviction for larceny and had a previous attempt to enlist rejected on the grounds of poor teeth.

Cornelius arrived at Alexandria in May 1916 attached to the 21st Battalion with the rank of Private, service number 3773. In August he marched in to France with his battalion. The 21st were at this time engaged in the Battle of Pozieres (23 July – 3 September) and at that stage several ultimately futile attempts to capture and hold Mouquet Farm which was occupied by the Germans. Within a very short time Cornelius sustained a gun shot wound to his left foot resulting initially in hospitalisation in the field and then transfer to England for treatment.

Following treatment and convalescence Cornelius was able enough to go AWOL on several occasions. On the final occasion he was apprehended by the Military Police in London and forfeited 14 days pay. He returned to Australia as “medically unfit” in August 1917.

Cornelius was awarded the British War Medal, the 1914/15 Star and the Victory Medal. His service is remembered on the Kilmore Honour Roll.

A second attestation form dated February 1918 is included in his military file – an application to join the 3rd District Guards. Post war Cornelius continued working as a labourer and lived in a number of Victorian towns. In 1922 he was once again convicted of larceny and sentenced to 12 months hard labour at Pentridge Prison. He does not appear to have married. He died at Parkville in 1956 aged 83years.

Compiled by Kilmore Historical Society.

Pozieres and Mouquet Farm 1916.

