

Pte Thomas COADY
1638 - 54th Battalion, 2nd Reinforcement

Born: 1890 Obley, registered Molong NSW.

Next of Kin: Parents Mary & Thomas Coady

Occupation: Labourer

District Connection: Obley

Enlistment Date: 26 Oct 1915, Dubbo NSW.

Enlistment Age: 25 yrs 3 mths

Embarkation: 14 Jun 1916 Sydney HMAT *Ceramic A40*

Served: Western front

Fate: RTA 5 Mar 1919

Honour Boards: Obley War Memorial & Cumnock War Memorial Gates



Biography:

Thomas Coady was born in Obley in 1890, a son of Mary and Thomas Coady, senior.

Thomas Coady senior was born in Bathurst in 1847. An Obituary report in *The Wellington Times* - 19 Nov 1917, p2, reported on his life:

"On Friday last there died, at his residence, Washpen, Peak Hill Road, Obley, and old resident of the west in the person of Mr Thomas Coady. The late Mr Coady, who had attained the age of 70 years, was a native of Bathurst, but settled in the Yeoval district when about 17 [c1864]. He found employment with Mr JA Gilmore, who had teams running on the road from Sydney to Parkes, carting wool and other produce to the metropolis and returning with general merchandise. He left Mr Gilmore after some years to follow it on his own account, and when the railway came to Wellington [June 1880] he had his teams working between Wellington and Yeoval and between Geurie and Yeoval. His sight failed him about seven years ago and he eventually became totally blind..."

Thomas Coady senior married Mary Vaughan at Wellington in 1883. Mary was born in County Cork, Ireland, and immigrated to Australia with her parents, Margaret and Michael Vaughan, when she was seven years old, in 1865. Michael worked at "Wandoo Wandong" before taking up a block of land at Washpen Creek where he and Margaret raised their family, acquiring more land as it became available.

Thomas and Mary Coady had six children: Margaret b1884; John b1885; Florence b1887; Thomas b 1889; William b1895; and Harold b1901. (The Coady name was also variously spelt as Cody or Codey in various NSW registry indexes).

The Coady children all attended the Obley Public School. Cricket was a sport played by both Thomas and William (known as Bert) and there are many local newspaper reports up until 1914 naming them in cricket teams playing for Obley.

Thomas, aged 18 yrs, had a brush with the law in March 1908, which was reported in *The Molong Express & Western District Advertiser* (WDA) - 14 Mar 1908, p15. He and a few other local lads were each charged with *"being found on the licensed premises of the Overlanders' Hotel, Obley on Sunday, March 1st Inst. They were each fined 10s, and costs 6s, in default 7 days hard labor in Obley lockup."*

Thomas enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) at Dubbo on 26 Oct 1915. His enlistment records state that he was 25 years and 3 months old, single, occupation was a labourer, was 5 feet 6 inches tall, had blue eyes, fair complexion, light brown hair and was of the Roman Catholic religious denomination. Pte Thomas Coady initially served with A company of 46th Battalion (Btn).

Thomas's younger brother, William Albert Coady, aged 21 years, joined the AIF on 16 Feb 1916. He served as a Private - 5659 13th Btn, on the Western Front, and returned to Australia on 2 Jan 1919.

Pte Coady sailed on *HMAT Ceramic A40*, as part of the 54th Btn, 2nd reinforcements, from Sydney on 14 Apr 1916. He disembarked at Suez on 17 May 1916.

The 54th Battalion was raised in Egypt on 16 Feb 1916 as part of the "doubling" of the AIF. Half of its recruits were Gallipoli veterans from the 2nd Battalion, and the other half, fresh reinforcements from Australia. The 54th battalion, as well as the 53rd, 55th and 56th battalions and the 14th Machinegun company, became part of the 14th Infantry Brigade of the 5th Australian Division.

On 28 Jun 1916, Pte Coady was charged at Tel El Kebir with the crime of *“Leaving camp after being warned for duty and for being absent without leave (AWL) for 24 hours.”* He received 14 days Field Punishment (FP) No 2 and forfeited 2 days pay, by an Officer of the 14th Training Btn. There were two types of Field punishment - FP No 1 consisted of heavy labouring duties, possibly being restrained in handcuffs being tied to a post or wheel. FP No 2 differed in that the offender was not liable to be attached to a fixed object.

Pte Coady embarked at Alexandria on 10 Jul 1916 as part of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) sent to the Western Front. He joined the 54th Btn on 8 Aug 1916 which was then stationed in the front lines south of Armentières.

On 1 Aug 1916, the 54th Unit Diary states that the Btn was stationed at Fleurbaix and its strength was 26 Officers and 575 Other Ranks (OR). After a spell away from the front line, the 54th returned to the trenches in the Fromelles Sector on 8 Sep 1916, at place called Wye Farm. On 15 September, Pte Coady was admitted to the 1st Australian Casualty Clearing Station with a bullet wound to his right thigh. He was transferred to No 7 General Hospital at Boulougne, northern France, the following day. On the 22nd he embarked for England on the *Hospital Ship (HS) St. David*, and was admitted to the 2nd Western General Hospital, Manchester.

The Molong Express & WDA - 9 Dec 1916, p7, reported:

“Mrs Coady is in receipt of a letter from her son, Pte T. Coady. He was wounded some time ago in France, and writes from Manchester Hospital. He is almost recovered from his wounds now, and speaks very highly of the treatment he received during his time in the hospital.”

Pte Coady returned to France from England on 14 Dec 1916, spending three weeks at the 5th Australian Divisional Base Depot, Étaples, and did not rejoin the 54th Btn until 16 Jan 1917. The Btn was then stationed at Fricourt, Picardy in the Somme area.



After enduring the coldest winter in 40 years in the Somme, the 54th joined the Allied pursuit of the Germans as they withdrew to the Hindenburg Line in early 1917. The United States declared war on Germany in April 1917.

During the Second Battle of Bullecourt 3 - 17 May 1917, the 54th Btn undertook a defensive role, which saw them repel an attack by troops from the Imperial Prussian Guard. The 5th and 6th Brigades and the Australian 1st and 5th Divisions took part. While the 6th Brigade were successful in meeting most of its objectives, within an hour of the start, the 5th Brigade had ceased to exist as a fighting force.

A period of intense training behind the lines followed, before the battalion moved to the Ypres salient after the 5th Division was transferred to Belgium. In September, after playing a supporting role around the Menin Road, the 54th launched a major attack in September during the Battle of Polygon Wood. The attack commenced at 5.50 am 26 Sep 1917 with the Australian 4th and 5th Divisions and five British divisions following an artillery barrage on a 10 kilometre front. The Australian 4th and 5th Divisions were responsible for a front of about 2,500 metres. The Australian 4th Division captured all its objectives and sustained 1,717 casualties. The more heavily engaged Australian 5th Division suffered 5,471 dead and wounded.

Pte Coady was Wounded in Action for the second time on 26 Sep 1917 during the first day of the Battle of Polygon Wood. He was transferred to a clearing station before being admitted to No 3 Canadian General Hospital at Boulogne on 27 Sep. He was then transferred to England and admitted to the 2/1st Southern General Hospital, Birmingham on 29 Sep 1917. There are varying reports that he suffered a shell wound to his left arm and an ankle. He was discharged from hospital on 15 Nov 1917. From 17 - 26 Nov 1917, Pte Coady was sent to an Isolation Hospital at Hurdcott. Back in Australia, Thomas's father, Thomas Coady senior, died at his home at Washpen, aged 70 yrs.

Pte Coady was again charged with the offence of being AWL from 9 pm 22 Jan to 9 pm 23 Jan 1918 at Hurdcott, Wiltshire. He received 4 days of Field Punishment No 2 and forfeited 6 days pay.

On 23 Mar 1918, Pte Coady returned to France and rejoined the 54th Btn on 28 Apr 1918. The 54th Btn had just finished taking part in the Second Battle of Villers-Bretonneux which took place from 24 - 27 April. During May, the unit spent time on and off relieving on the front line and carrying out patrols in the area around Villers-Bretonneux. By 1st June, the 54th Btn had moved to Querreui, in the Somme Department of Northern France for a rest period, plus training and sports events.



The 54th Btn Unit Diaries for 17th June: *“The influenza epidemic is developing. Officers and men are out of action. Portions of bivouac are being isolated for affected personnel. The medical personnel has been increased and separate catering arrangements have been made in each company. A special diet of soup, gruel, milk etc is being given to sufferers... The whole area is disinfected daily with Cresol [although Cresol has antiseptic qualities, it is now known that breathing high levels of cresols for a short time results in irritation of the nose and throat and has other harmful health effects] and the 14th Field Artillery Coy is constructing light, bunkered, modern shelters for further isolation.”*

19th June: *“The total number of men now sick is 89 and all the officers with the exception of four.”*

26th June: *“The number of the epidemic seems to have abated. The total number of cases to date including officers is 166, and evacuations 3 officers and 10 OR. All evacuations developed pneumonia or bronchitis.”* The 54th Btn also returned to the front line to relieve the 29th Btn on 26th June.

29th June 11 pm: ... *“A working party of 4 Officers and 130 OR worked in the same place as last night. At about 11.30 pm a Blue Cross gas shell landed in a group of men and caused the following casualties- 2 killed, 3 wounded, 7 gassed.”*

One of the wounded in action for the 3rd time, was Pte Thomas Coady. He was wounded in the left thigh and invalided to England on 2 Jul 1918. He was admitted to Graylingwell War Hospital, Chichester, on 4 July with wounds to his left thigh, hip joint and ankylose fractured head of femur. Later at Chichester he developed an abscess in his left hip joint which required surgical draining. This left Pte Coady with very limited movement of his left hip and stiffness of his knee joint. On 30 Oct 1918 he was judged unfit for General Service. He embarked from Devonport on SS *Margha* on 19 Jan 1919 and arriving in Australia on 5 March.

Thomas Coady received his final discharge from the AIF on 29 Jun 1919. He was awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Thomas returned to Obley after the war. It is likely he lived with his mother Mary at Obley. In August 1929, Thomas was admitted to Dubbo Hospital for treatment and surgery and died at the hospital on 10 Oct 1929. He was 39 years old. Thomas was buried at the Washpen Cemetery, Obley. His mother Mary died on 2 May 1946, aged 88 years, at Yeoval, and is buried near her husband at the Washpen Cemetery.

Thomas is remembered in the book, “Obley on the Little River” by Colleen Medley, published 1993, and in “Wellington’s Finest” by Trevor Munro & Grahame Hosken, published 2005.

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