



**Private Cecil Frederick JOHNSON +  
2924 – 53<sup>rd</sup> Btn, 14<sup>th</sup> Training Btn & 54<sup>th</sup> Btn.**

**Born:** 1899, Young, NSW.

**Parents:** Catherine & Alfred H Johnson

**NoK:** Mother, Mrs Catherine Tierney.

**Occupation:** Labourer

**District Connection:** Cumnock

**Enlistment Date:** 14 Jun 1916, Dubbo, NSW.

**Enlistment Age:** Stated 18yrs 3mths (Actual 17yrs)

**Embarkation:** 25 Oct 1916, Sydney, *HMAT Ascanius A11*

**Served:** France, Belgium

**Fate:** DOW 17 Nov 1917, Belgium, 18yrs.

**Buried:** Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery, Belgium

**Honour Boards:** National War Memorial, Canberra;  
Cumnock War Memorial Gates.

### **Biography:**

Frederick Cecil Johnson's birth was registered in 1899 at Young, and his parents were Alfred and Catherine (Kate, nee Hanrahan) Johnson. He had an older brother Herbert Joseph Johnson (1897-1968). Catherine had another child, Daphne, at Orange in 1903. *The Molong Express and Western District Advertiser* – 3 Nov 1906, p10, Cumnock, reported the wedding of "Mrs A Johnson (widow) housekeeper at the Commercial Hotel, Cumnock and Mr William Tierney, at the Roman Catholic Church at Cumnock."

The Johnson children attended the Convent School at Cumnock. Catherine and William Tierney's children included: John (died 1906), John J, William and Margaret.

There is only one early mention in local newspapers of Cecil, and that was in the *Leader* (Orange) 13 Jan 1914, P1, Cumnock: "*Diphtheria is again our midst, Cecil Johnson, of Loombah, was taken ill with dread complaint. He was removed to the Wellington Hospital.*"

There are quite a few local news reports of his older brother, Herbert, winning sprint races and playing football for Cumnock. Herbert Johnson had a preliminary medical examination by Dr Ivie Aird to join the AIF at Cumnock on 15 Aug 1915 but was found to have a Cardiac Murmur and Varicocele and was not deemed fit for military service. Herbert reenlisted at Orange on 11 Jan 1916, stated aged 18 years and 6 months. He was assigned to the 46<sup>th</sup> Battalion and was at Dubbo Camp when he was discharged from the AIF on 23 Feb 1916. His war dossier stated that he was "*Not likely to become an efficient soldier.*"

Cecil Johnson enlisted in the AIF at Dubbo on 14 Jun 1916. He stated his age as 18 years 3 months but was actually only 17 years old. His medical examination stated that he was 5 feet 9 inches tall, had a dark complexion, hazel eyes and black hair. He was of the Roman Catholic religious denomination and his next of kin was his mother, Mrs Catherine Tierney, Park Farm, Cumnock.

Pte Cecil Johnson was reported in the *Molong Argus* - 28 Jul 1916, p4, as being on home on weekend leave from the Liverpool camp, after suffering from an attack of pneumonia. *The Molong Express and Western District Advertiser* – 28 Oct 1916, p10, reported: "*Privates Cecil Johnston [Johnson] and Dan Murphy [2937 Pte Daniel Murphy – 57<sup>th</sup> Btn] were entertained at a farewell social evening at Cumnock last Friday night. Mr WM Hudson, on behalf of their district friends, presented each with a shaving outfit and a roll of notes...*"

Pte Johnson embarked at Sydney on 25 Oct 1916 on *HMAT Ascanius A11* with the 53<sup>rd</sup> Btn. On board the *Ascanius* was another soldier with Cumnock connections, 19-year-old 2959 Pte William O'Neill, 19<sup>th</sup> Btn, (KIA 4 Oct 1917, France).

The troops disembarked at Devonport on 28 December 1916. The trip had been longer than usual as the *Ascanius* stayed in Capetown for five days and in Sierra Leone for fourteen days, a trip of over nine weeks.

Gunner Phillip W Tarlinton, 28059 5<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Bde, (RTA 21 Jul 1917 due to illness) wrote a letter about the journey which was published in the *Tweed Daily* – 16 Mar 1917, p2, and some extracts from it are: *“The run across from Australia to South Africa was devoid of any particular interest, except that we saw whales in astonishing numbers and that we were blessed with a remarkably smooth trip...”*

He described what activities the soldiers did on the ship as: *“Every conceivable kind of sport, compatible with the limited deck space available, has been provided for, such as tugs-o’-war, foot running, teams racing, boxing, single-sticks, cock-fighting, quoits, wrestling, etc, whilst musical competitions are held at night time, when prizes are awarded for vocal items, recitations, pianoforte and mouth-organ competitions. Added to these are the physical culture parades, three of one hour each every day, Sundays excepted...”*

Of the ship’s stay in Capetown he wrote: *“We were aware that the transport would have to coal here so we looked forward to getting a few days’ leave... We were certainly taken off the transport and treated to long route marches; but at no time were we free from the thraldom of the King’s regulations. Nevertheless, we were enabled to get some idea of what Capetown and its inhabitants were like...”*

*“It is the 10<sup>th</sup> of December, which reminds me that is the 46<sup>th</sup> day of our voyage; and we are lying at anchor in the bay off Freetown, Sierra Leone, only about 8 degrees from the Equator. We have been held up here ten days now, and as I write there are no indications of us moving out and onward to old England. German submarines are said to be operating with some success off the Spanish coast; hence, we have to bide our time here until the Admiralty considers it safe for us to resume our voyage.”*

Gunner Tarlinton’s article ended there, but another letter by 1384 Pte Samuel Forster, 35<sup>th</sup> Btn, (KIA 25 May 1917), printed in the *Dungog Chronicle; Durham & Gloucester Advertiser* – 20 Mar 1917, p3, takes up the record of the trip of the *Ascanius* at Freetown, Sierra Leone:

*“Several days passed before we were allowed ashore. Then on a particularly hot day a small steam tug brought over several lighters, into which we slowly filed until they were completely filled. We were not long in reaching the wharves, which are small, and it was for that reason that the *Ascanius* was unable to steam into the wharf. We were dismissed, and were free to wander whither we will, but our time was limited. What a quaint town! The town is almost completely negro. Most of the trade, such as it is, is run by negroes, though there are a few Europeans in possession of the larger establishments...”*

*After several more days waiting several transports, [the *Ascanius*] followed an auxiliary cruiser out of port, and soon we had left Freetown and Sierra Leone behind. In a few days the weather became cool. After leaving port we travelled in a dark ship, and wore life belts continually except at night when they were close by us for the rest of the voyage. When we reached more dangerous waters several destroyers, in addition to the cruiser, escorted us. At length on a cold, misty morning we sighted the shores of England. Destroyers in great numbers, and several mine sweepers escorted us into Devonport. Late at night we disembarked and were entrained to camp... We were glad to be on the land again, however, for a voyage of over nine weeks becomes very monotonous, especially when freedom of movement is curtailed for several days.”*

After arriving in England at the end of December 1916, Pte Johnson spent the next five months in training camps. He was assigned to the 14<sup>th</sup> Training Btn, Hurdcott, south-west Wiltshire, from 10 May – 16 May 1917. The Hurdcott Camp featured a map of Australia cut into the side of a hill overlooking the camp. It was constructed by Australian soldiers in early 1917 by excavating a series of shallow bedding trenches into which chalk rubble was inserted and compressed into place over a period of approximately 17 weeks. Chalk AIF badges were cut at the nearby military camp at Fovant and also at camps on the Salisbury Plain. (<https://map-of-australia.com/the-badges/>)

*The photo shows some of the huts at Hurdcott Camp and soldiers playing “Two Up”. On the hill in the background can be seen the outline of the map of Australia.* (<https://collections.slsa.sa.gov.au/resource/B+72281>)



The AIF War Diary of the No. 3 Command Depot, Hurdcott Camp, March- December 1917, on the Australian War Memorial website, contains the follow extract:

*“The Camps are of the hutment type and each has, in round figures, accommodation for 1000 men. They are well laid out and drained, and each is quite self-contained, possessing shower-baths, ablution-huts, cookhouse, dining-rooms, recreation rooms, concert hall, Officers & Sergeants Messes, stabling, barber’s shop etc. Each camp has sufficient ground for training purposes and also covered sheds for use in inclement weather.*

*The huts are of corrugated iron, lined and floored with wood; each accommodates 30 men and has ample window space. The lighting of the camps is by electricity, supplied from a central power house, which serves the whole of the area; heating is by coal fires, each building having one or more stoves, according to its size. Specially worthy of mention are the camp kitchens. These are splendidly equipped, 12 large ovens and 3 boilers making it an easy matter for four thousand meals per day to be cooked in each.”*

Pte Cecil Johnson embarked from Southampton for France on 26 Jun 1917 as part of the 14<sup>th</sup> Training Btn. He was assigned to the 54<sup>th</sup> Btn on 21 July 1917, then stationed at Hérissart, a small village located in the department of Somme in the north of France. The 54<sup>th</sup> Btn moved by rail to Renescure on 30<sup>th</sup> July where they trained until 17 Sep 1917 when they moved closer to the front line near Ypres, Belgium.



The 54<sup>th</sup> Btn took part in action at Glencorse Wood on the front line from 24<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> September. During this period the Btn suffered 1 Officer & 34 Other Ranks (OR) killed and 3 Officers & 136 ORs wounded. On 2<sup>nd</sup> Oct the 54<sup>th</sup> Btn moved to Renghelst (now known as Rengelst) for recuperation and further training.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> Oct, the 54<sup>th</sup> Btn relieved the 59<sup>th</sup> Btn at Westhoek Ridge. Here the 54<sup>th</sup> Btn came under heavy enemy shelling, including gas. An extract from the 54<sup>th</sup> Btn Unit diary for the 16<sup>th</sup> Oct 1917 states:

*“...During the night 15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> the enemy shelled all tracks in rear area very heavily. Areas such as Westhoek Ridge, Anzac Ridge, Nonneborschen, Glencorse Wood were also very heavily shelled. A great percentage of the shells falling in the rear areas were gas shells. At 1.15pm the enemy opened concentrated fire on Westhoek Ridge, the majority of the shells being gas shells. Enemy aircraft displayed considerable activity in our locality today, some of his planes flying very low. Our casualties for the day were very heavy. 5 ORs were killed, 28 ORs were evacuated gassed and 11 in consequence of wounds...”*

Pte Cecil Johnson was one of the wounded. He was admitted to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Aus. Field Ambulance on 17 Oct with shell wounds to his legs and thighs and then transferred to the 17<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearance Station where he died of his wounds the same day. He was 18 years old and was buried at Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery, Belgium. His British War and Victory medals were later sent to his mother.

A Red Cross report by 2351 L/Cpl JC Garrett, 54<sup>th</sup> Btn, stated that: *“...On 16<sup>th</sup> Oct we were in reserves at Westhoek ridge. Gadd [3122 Pte Arthur Ernest GADD, 25 years from Ipswich, QLD], Hall [5378 Pte Henry George HALL, 25 years from West Wyalong] & Johnson were in a dugout next to where I was. I had just been into their dugout taking their rations – about 5 minutes after I saw a shell drop on the dugout. I went up to the place, and found Gadd and Hall dead, and Johnson badly wounded. I saw Johnson taken away towards the D/Station and I heard afterwards that he died. I helped bury Hall and Gadd, their graves were side by side, close to where they were killed. We put up a rough cross with their names. Pte Smith was in the dugout with the above. I saw him carried away on a stretcher wounded. [2980 Pte Wilfred Francis Smith, aged 19 years from Bonalbo, NSW, also died of his wounds at the dressing station on 17 Oct 1917]”*

A further Red Cross report of Pte CF Johnson from the Commanding Officer, No. 17 Casualty Clearance Station stated that: *“He was admitted to this Station suffering from severe shell wound of the legs and thigh and in a critical condition. His condition gradually grew worse, and I regret I have to inform you of his death which occurred at 2am on the morning of the 17.10.1917 as a result of these wounds. He was buried the same day in the Soldiers’ Cemetery near to this Hospital, his grave being duly marked and registered.”*

Cecil’s step father, William Tierney died on 21 Mar 1949, aged 87 years and his mother, Catherine Tierney died on 9 Jul 1961 at Dubbo, aged 89 years. Both are buried at the Cumnock Cemetery.

# CUMNOCK.

Quite a gloom was cast over the town on Tuesday when word was received that Private Cecil Johnson had died of wounds on Oct. 17th. Cecil, who was the second son of Mrs. W. Tierney, of Park Farm, Cumnock, had just attained his 18th year, and enlisted about eighteen months ago. He was a fine stamp of manhood, and his many sterling qualities and kindly disposition endeared him to all with whom he came in contact. We extend our sincere sympathy to the bereaved mother and family in their sad loss of a brave and noble son and brother, who gave his life while fighting for King and country.



Top left: *The Molong Argus* – 2 November 1917, P4

Top right: Stretcher bearers of the 13<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance resting at a dressing station on Westhoek Ridge, October 1917. Photograph by Frank Hurley (AWM P03631 176)

Below: Section of the Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery, Belgium & the War Memorial Gates and WW1 Honour Roll, 46 Obley Street, Cumnock.



IN MEMORY OF THOSE FROM THIS DISTRICT WHO SERVED IN WORLD WAR I 1914-1918

AIRD I.	JOHNSON C.	MOORE J.
APPELBY S.	FOUNTAIN E.A.	MURPHY D.
+ ASTILL A.	FOX A.	MURRAY J.C.
AUBREY A.	GILLIS D.	MURRAY J.W.
BARNETT W.	GILLIS J.	MURRAY W.G.
BELLAMY W.R.G.	GOW D.	NUCENT J.
BOURKE M.	CRAY A.	O'LEARY H.
BROWN A.	CRIMSON C. D.C.M.	O'NEIL M.
BROWN S.	CRIMSON F.	O'NEIL W.F.
BRUTON E.	HART A.V.	PATTERSON J.
BURRELL J.	HART B.	PEASLEY F.W.
BYRNE D.	HART F.	REILLY P.
CAHILL W.J.	+ HAYMAN G.	REYNOLDS A.
+ CHAPPELL R.	HOLMAN T.H.	SKILMAN R.
CLEMENTS C.	INGLE C.	SPARKES H.
COADY A.	JENNINGS F.	STARK L.
COADY T.	JOHNSTON A.	STARR R.
COOPER H.	+ JOHNSTON M.	TAYLOR E.
COOPER L.	KEEGAN T.H.	TAYLOR F.
CRANNIS F.J.	LENTZ L.	TAYLOR J.C.
CRANNIS R.	MACCULLOCH A.	TRICCS W.V.
CURNOW W.	MACCULLOCH J.	WEST T.H.
DENNY T.	MACCULLOCH M.J.	WESTON C.L.
DORWOOD W.A.	MACCULLOCH M.J.	WHITE D.H.
EDWARDS H.	McFARLAND J.N.	WILKIN C.
ECCLESTON E. Nurse	+ MERRIMAN E.G.	WILKIN F.
ELY H.T.	MEURANT F.	YOUNG W.
	METHAN A.	

+ PAID THE SUPREME SACRIFICE