



20<sup>th</sup> Btn colour Patch

## Private Percy King REILLY 2212 – 20<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements

**Born:** 1889, Molong

**Parents:** Mary & Samuel Reilly

**Occupation:** Labourer

**District Connection:** Cumnock

**Enlistment Date:** 13 Jul 1915, Liverpool, NSW.

**Enlistment Age:** 26yrs & 3mths.

**Embarkation:** 30 Sep 1915 Sydney, *HMAT Argyllshire A8*

**Served:** Gallipoli & France

**Fate:** RTA 14 Jan 1917 on *HS Kanowna*.

**Honour Boards:** Cumnock War Memorial Gates.

### Biography

Percy Reilly was born in the parish of Burrawong, near the town of Molong in 1889, the son of Samuel and Mary Alice (nee King) Reilly. Samuel Reilly operated a carrier business between Cumnock and Molong throughout the 1880s and 1890s. On 21 Dec 1897, Samuel and his brother William bought 600 acres of ground in Cumnock. Samuel called his property 'Killarney' and William's property was named 'Sunshine'.

Percy was the fourth of ten children, and although known as Percy King Reilly, his NSW birth index for 1889 has his name registered as Percy R Reilly. He played cricket and was participating in sprint races during his youth. He enlisted on 13 Jul 1915 at Liverpool, Sydney, aged 26 years and three months. His medical examination stated that he was 5 feet 9 inches tall, had a dark complexion, blue eyes, brown hair and was of the Church of England religious denomination.

Pte Percy Reilly embarked from Sydney on *HMAT Argyllshire A8* at 8pm 30 Sep 1915, along with fellow Cumnock soldier, 2165 Lance Corporal Arthur Johnston, also with the 20<sup>th</sup> Btn. The soldiers were given a big send-off by a large crowd, with flags and banners waving, and streamers attached from shore to ship. The soldiers slept in hammocks which were put up each evening at 6pm and taken down each morning at 6am by designated soldiers. The troops were required to take part in daily physical exercise to keep fit. One form of popular entertainment throughout the journey was boxing competitions. The journey had a number of deaths and burials at sea, mostly from illness, but accidents occurred as well.

The *Argyllshire* arrived at Suez, Egypt, on 30 October and disembarked a day later with the troops then being entrained for Heliopolis Camp, just outside Cairo. Pte Reilly embarked from Alexandria on 4 Nov 1915, and was taken on strength by B Coy, 20<sup>th</sup> Btn on 11 Nov 1915 at Gallipoli.

*The Molong Argus* – 4 Feb 1916, p4:

*"Writing to his mother, Private Percy (Paddy) Reilly stated that he was in the trenches at Gallipoli on December 5<sup>th</sup>, and that the weather was bitterly cold. However, he was well, and having an exciting and strenuous time. He concluded with Christmas greetings to his friends."*

A report in the *Molong Argus* - 16 Mar 1917, p4, states Pte Reilly "*did six weeks in the trenches at Gallipoli, where he was slightly wounded.*" The 20<sup>th</sup> Battalion's role from Nov 1915 until its withdrawal from the Peninsula on 20 Dec was the defence of Russell's Top. Pte Reilly returned to Alexandria via Mudros on 9 Jan 1916.

*The Ballarat Courier* - 21 Mar 1916, p2, had this news item:

*"Mrs LL Morrison, of 11 Otway Street, has received a letter from Pte Percy King Reilly, acknowledging receipt of a Christmas billy. He was at Lemnos for Christmas and was one of the three Australian soldiers who was wounded at the evacuation and was one of the last to leave Gallipoli. He said they were like a lot*

*of schoolboys, tumbling over each other in their delight. She also received a letter from the soldier's mother, Mrs Reilly, Cumnock, via Molong, NSW, thanking her on her son's behalf."*

After further training in Egypt the 20<sup>th</sup> Btn then embarked from Alexandria on 18 March and disembarked at Marseilles on 25 Mar 1916. The 20<sup>th</sup> Btn entered the trenches of the Western front in April 1916. Pte Reilly attended the field ambulance in France on 15 April and was discharged 22 April. The 20<sup>th</sup> Btn took part in its first major offensive around Pozières between late July and the end of August 1916.

On 5 Aug 1916 the 20<sup>th</sup> Btn were on the front line at Pozières and experienced intense enemy shelling. The 20<sup>th</sup> Btn reported casualties as 17 officers and 493 other ranks between 24 Jul – 6 Aug 1916. One of these casualties was Pte Arthur Johnston who was wounded with a gunshot wound to the back on 26<sup>th</sup> July (Pte Arthur Johnston recovered and was later killed in action on 18 May 1918, Picardie, France, aged 25 years).

Pte Reilly was another casualty and was admitted with serious injuries to his left shoulder and arm, to the 8<sup>th</sup> British Red Cross Hospital on 6 August. He was transferred to England from Calais 8 Sep 1916 where he was admitted to the East Leeds War Hospital. On 15 Dec he transferred to 1<sup>st</sup> Auxiliary Hospital, Harefield, and returned to Australia per *HS Kanowna* on 14 Jan 1917. He was discharged from the AIF on 16 June 1917 and was awarded the 1914-15 Star Medal, the British War Medal 1914-1920, and the Victory Medal.

*The Molong Argus* - 23 Mar 1917, p4, reported:

*"Welcome home to Pte Percy Reilly at Leary's Hall on 19 Mar 1917. One of the speakers was the Rev. CW Leavers who mentioned that Pte Reilly was one who could look the whole world in the face, and could show for the rest of his life a mark of honor that he had received in his wound. But he trusted that he would have a speedy recovery to good health and was glad to be there to welcome him back again." Mr Bowhay then presented Pte Reilly with an inscribed medal that was in the shape of a Maltese Cross, with a kneeling soldier presenting arms as a centre figure, whilst inscribed on the face were the words, 'He heard his country's call'; the reverse bearing the words, 'Presented to Pte Reilly on his return from the War by his Cumnock friends, 12/8/17.'*

*Pte Reilly, on rising to thank the gathering, was received with cheers, and in a few modest words assured them that he felt proud of all they had said, but felt they were saying too much. He thanked them from his heart."*

Percy King Reilly is listed as working as a farmer on 'Loombah' on the 1916, 1930 & 1932 Electoral Rolls for Calare/Cumnock.

Percy married Ruby Victoria Johnston, the daughter of Susannah and Donald Johnston, of 'Silverdean', Baldry, in 1922. Two of Ruby's brothers served in the AIF during WW1: Arthur Johnston (as mentioned earlier in the profile, KIA) and Major Johnston - Sgt, 629 - 6<sup>th</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Light Horse Brigades – died of wounds 18 Aug 1916, Egypt. The couple had four children – Daphne, Samuel, William and Roy.

Percy took over his Uncle William's property, 'Sunshine', when William Reilly moved to Orange. Ruby Reilly is listed on the 1930 & 1932 Electoral Rolls for Calare/Cumnock as living at 'Sunshine', Cumnock.

Percy's mother, Mary Alice Reilly died on 2 Jan 1927, aged 66yrs. His father, Samuel Reilly, died on 29 Oct 1930, aged 78yrs. They are buried in the Anglican section of the Cumnock cemetery.

*The Molong Express & Western District Advertiser* – 1 Nov 1930, p10, published an item on his death:

*"One of the oldest pioneers of the district in the person of Mr Samuel Reilly died at his residence, 'Killarney', Avondale, on Wednesday last... He always took a very active part in all matters appertaining to the advancement of the district and was a member of the PA & H Association since its inception and had been appointed a patron of the society..."*

A dispute between Percy Reilly and John Sherringham ended up at the Cumnock Court in May 1934, whereby John Sherringham was accused of assault on Percy Reilly, and a cross case by John Sherringham made for insulting remarks to him by Percy Reilly. During the case John Sherringham stated that Percy's arm *"was not as useless as he made out."*

Dr Keirle, the Government Medical Officer, Cumnock, gave evidence regarding Percy Reilly's war injury that *"There is no movement in his shoulder, the forearm only being useful."* At the conclusion of the hearing the magistrate dismissed the case, stating that both parties to the dispute were in the wrong.

*The Molong Express & Western Advertiser* – 2 Jun 1934, p9, published the following letter to the editor by Percy Reilly:

*“AN EXPLANATION – With reference to the statement made in the Cumnock court recently and reported in your last issue regarding a war injury suffered by me to the effect that ‘my arm was not as useless as I made out,’ I would be pleased if you would publish the facts in order to correct this statement made in evidence, which is entirely inaccurate, and in a few minds may create a wrong impression.*

*I was wounded in August 1916, and up to date 29 operations have been performed. I have spent at least seven years in hospital, and at the last periodical examination by the military doctor was given a gloomy outlook concerning the future, the doctor stating my war disability was incurable, and two years could end my days. Unfortunately for me, my arm is of no use to me. Dr Matthews and Dr Keirle can verify this, and it is somewhat disappointing to find individuals with no war record making these unjust statements.*

*I have suffered extreme pain, and made sacrifices for my country, and if the worst comes I will be proud to die, never a coward, but a Digger and a Britisher.*

*PK Reilly, ‘Sunshine’, Cumnock, 31/5/34.”*

A Cumnock-Yeoval sub-branch of the Returned Sailors’ and Soldiers’ Imperial League of Australia (RSSILA, now known as the RSL) was formed in June 1933, and Percy was a member. The sub-branch received an invitation for representatives to attend the opening of the Anzac Memorial in Sydney, and Percy Reilly and Walter Forrester (Secretary of the Cumnock-Yeoval sub-branch, who owned a newsagency in Cumnock at that time) travelled by train to Sydney to attend the service.

More than 20,000 ex-service men and 24 bands marched from the Domain to the Memorial on 24 Nov 1934, prior to the Memorial being opened by the Duke of Gloucester. It would have been a memorable experience for the two Cumnock representatives to be a part of this grand opening of the Anzac Memorial at Hyde Park, Sydney.



***Photo of the opening of the Memorial, Sydney Morning Herald – 26 Nov 1934, p14.***

The ‘Sunshine’ property was sold in 1935 after which Percy and his family moved to the property ‘Coulston Springs’, Gooloogong, to farm. Percy and Ruby next moved around 1949 to live at Corrimal, a northern suburb of Wollongong.

Percy King Reilly also served in the Australian Army during World War 2. He was a Private (N271854) in the 114 Supply Dep PL, Australian Army Service Corps, serving from 6 Jun 1941 to 21 Aug 1944.



Percy Reilly died on 14 Oct 1964, aged 76yrs and Ruby Reilly died on 14 Jun 1970, aged 74yrs. They are both buried in the Bulli Cemetery, Wollongong City.

***(Photo courtesy of the Australia Cemetery Index)***

**© Dianne Strahan & Val McKenzie, Cumnock, April 1915 & reviewed May 2018.**