

CAPTAIN ALLAN MELROSE PURVES MC – A.A.M.C.
2nd Tunnelling Company

Born on February 1, 1885, Allan Melrose Purves was the son of Thomas Peter and Alice Matilda (nee Roberts) Purves of South Yarra, Melbourne, Victoria. He attained two medical degrees of Bachelor of Medicine and a Master of Surgery. Medical experience was gained at the Government Hospital Lidcombe, NSW in 1910 and as Medical Superintendent at Newcastle Hospital, NSW 1910-11. Further knowledge was attained as House Surgeon, Gordon Hospital, London in 1912 and with Charing Cross Hospital, London in 1913. He returned to general practice in Sydney, NSW specialising in Anatomy and Surgery.

His military experience was as Honorary Captain with the Aust. Army Medical Corps Reserve attending at Victoria Barracks and the Bondi Recruiting Depot.

He enlisted for service overseas on May 24, 1917 aged 32 years and applied for a Commission with the A.M.C., A.I.F. the same day. Approval of his appointment as a Captain was granted the following day and Gazetted in issue 107 dated July 5, 1917. A routine medical examination for the appointment describes his height 175cms (5ft 9ins), weight 70kgs (154lbs), with a chest measurement of 82-94cms (32-37½ins) and good vision.

Attestation forms were signed on May 28 adding further details of religion, Church of England, and nominating his father Thomas P. Purves of 117 Pitt Street, Sydney, NSW as next-of-kin with whom he had lodged his Will.

Captain Purves left his address of “Chester” Bondi Road, Bondi, NSW to depart on the transport HMAT A20 *Hororata* on June 14, 1917 from Sydney as Senior Medical Officer for general duty. The ports of call during the voyage were Durban, Cape Town and Sierra Leone.

In preparing the final paperwork before arrival another medical examination took place on August 21, 1917 giving details of age 32½ years, 178cms (5ft 10ins) tall, weighing 72.7kgs (160lbs) with a chest measurement 89-97cms (35-38ins). Fair was his complexion with brown eyes and brown hair. An Appendix scar was a distinguishing mark.

The reinforcements disembarked at Liverpool, England on August 26, 1917 marching in to No 2 Camp at Parkhouse and on August 27 to the A.M.C. Training Depot for further training for the front.

He was transferred on September 14, 1917 to No 4 Command Depot at Codford, England then three days later to Larkhill as Medical Officer to 69th Battalion, Codford.

On February 2, 1918 he proceeded to Boulogne, France progressing to Abbeville the next day and was taken on strength with the 3rd Aust. General Hospital.

By June 1, 1918 he had been transferred to 13 Field Ambulance nearby. Temporary duty as R.M.O. was taken up with the 51st Battalion on July 18, rejoining 13 F.A. on July 25, 1918.

A detachment duty with the 13th Infantry Brigade “Nucleus” occurred on August 18 until again rejoining the 13 F.A on August 22, 1918.

Captain Purves was posted to the 2nd Tunnelling Company on August 22, 1918. On September 8 he proceeded on leave to Paris returning on September 17, 1918.

On the 29th and 30th of September, 1918, elements of the 1st and 2nd Australian Tunnelling Companies, supporting the Infantry attack on the Hindenberg Line at Bellicourt and Bony, charged with the usual Engineer tasks of clearing enemy mines and booby traps from roads and dugouts following the attacking

Infantry, clearing and maintaining the tactical roads, clearing wells and setting up water points. When the attack stalled and became disorganized, the Sappers continued with their assigned tasks, assisted to re-organise the line, captured prisoners, carried messages for their own and other units, organized a party of American Infantry, helped feed an artillery battery with ammunition, assisted and carried wounded, all being achieved under heavy shell and machine gun fire and while their own sections suffered 50 and 75% casualties.

The following is an account taken from *My Story of the Great War* written by Captain O.H. Woodward, MC+2bars:

At 5 a.m. on the 29th September, I arrived at Benjamin Post with 82 men of No.4 Section and 65 men of the 102nd "B" Company U.S. Engineers. The attack was launched at 5.50 a.m. and shortly after we commenced work on repairs to the road. When we approached Quennet Copse and Guennemont Farm we were held up by machine gun fire, owing to the failure of the Americans to "mop up" these positions. Before we realised what had happened, we lost one officer and one sapper killed and twenty others wounded. At 9 a.m. I received an order from the C.R.E. Australian Corps to report immediately on the condition of the road leading to Hargicourt, and then as far as possible toward Bellicourt. I took Sapper Mooney with me and left the Section with instructions to proceed with the repairs to the road to Bony as early as possible. We had a particularly exciting task inspecting these forward roads since they were subjected to heavy artillery and machine gun fire. It was not until 6 p.m. that I completed the inspection and again returned to Benjamin Post.

The Unit War Diary records:

Cartigny 62c P.2.J.4.4

September 28: Much rain – Road work being proceeded with.

September 29: Fine – misty morning, Offensive started. Sections carry on in accordance with instructions Appendices 2 & 8. Lt Johnson severely wounded, 18 Sappers wounded. 1 Sapper died of wounds.

September 30: Wet & cold. Sections carrying on Road work as above. Lt Johnson died of wounds. 1 Sapper wounded. Lt Thomson left for English leave.

Crumps and Camouflets – Australian Tunnelling Companies on the Western Front – Damien Finlayson, p365:

Captain Allan Purves, a medical officer with the Australian Army Medical Corps who, at the time, was attached to the 2nd Australian Tunnelling Company, was awarded the Military Cross for establishing a forward aid post and tending the wounded in the open under a six-hour artillery barrage. At times the gas shelling was so severe that he was forced to wear a gas mask while treating the wounded men. Working under the same conditions alongside his medical officer was Sapper 67 Angus Bethune who had originally enlisted in 1914 and served with the 10th Field Ambulance before transferring to the tunnelling company in April 1917. He worked until he was wounded and was awarded the Military Medal for his outstanding dedication under such trying conditions.

Leave to the U.K. took place from October 30 until November 14, 1918. After the Armistice he reported to the 3rd Aust. F.A for further duty.

A form about his Commission with the British War Office dated January 15, 1919 advised his father of the appointment to the 3rd Australian General Hospital as temporary Captain. The receipt card was signed by his father on February 22, 1919 and duly returned to Base Records.

On February 8, 1919 he was detached to 55 Casualty Clearing Station.

Captain Purves was awarded the Military Cross on February 15, 1919:

AWARDED THE MILITARY CROSS
Captain ALLAN MELROSE PURVES MC

On the 29th September, 1918, during the operations against the Hindenburg Line, in the neighbourhood of Bellicourt, he formed an aid post in a forward position. At this point the enemy put down a very heavy barrage, which lasted about six hours, and caused very heavy casualties amongst the road party and the infantry in the vicinity. The whole of this time he attended to the wounded in the open, showing great gallantry and devotion to duty, and undoubtedly saved many lives.

A posting to 2 F.A. on March 10, 1919 from 55 C.C.S took place and later on March 27, 1919 he proceeded to D.M.S. to take up Non-Military-Employment for three months from April 5 to July 5, 1919 with pay and subsistence. The reason given was to study.

A number of medical officers of the A.I.F. were granted N.M.E. leave to visit several U.K. hospitals allowing them to become acquainted with Medical Science's latest developments. The leave would be of the utmost value to Captain Purves when he returned to his Profession in Australia.

Further leave was granted but he was recalled to D.A.A.G. for orders as duty Senior Medical Officer on board H.T. *Indarra* departing in July 12, 1919 for return to Australia. On August 5, 1919 his next-of-kin was notified of his impending return to Australia.

His father received advice on July 29, 1919 of his son being awarded the Military Cross which had been approved by His Majesty the King. Included in the advice was the number of the *London Gazette* dated February 15, 1919 in which the announcement appeared and of the *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette* No 75 dated June 17, 1919.

No details of the arrival date in Australia were recorded but his appointment as an Officer in the A.I.F. was terminated on October 9, 1919 in the 2nd Military District (NSW).

Another letter dated December 23, 1919 was sent regarding the publication dates of his award for a Military Cross in the *London Gazette* and the *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette*.

Captain Allan Melrose Purves of A.A.M.C. (including 2nd Tunnelling Company) was awarded the Military Cross, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal for service to his country.

A Statement of his Service was sent to the Repatriation Department on November 30, 1953.

On November 14, 1960 Dr Allan M. Purves wrote from "Stratford" 49 Bondi Road, Bondi Junction, Sydney to obtain his Regimental Army number from WWI. Base Records replied advising that officers who served during in the Australian Imperial Force 1914-1918 did not receive regimental numbers.

Dr Allan M. Purves died in Sydney in 1961 aged 76 years.