

Michael Joseph Deegan

Figure 1 1913 Nunn Wedding Party. Left to right: – Nunn relative, Mary Deegan, Arthur (sport) Nunn, Michael Deegan, Maud Leahy



Michael Joseph Deegan, son of William Deegan and Mary Ann Goram was born on the 25th of June 1893. Michael grew up with seven other siblings – Patrick (Jack), William (Will), Charles (Charlie), Thomas (Tom), Helen (Eileen) and a younger sister Mary. Michael's parents owned a successful dairy farm in Lynchford Tasmania with the hospital and butchery as customers.¹

In 1912, Michael, his older brother Jack and another man named John Lester “fought gallantly but unsuccessfully to rescue a neighbor's baby in a house fire, being badly burned in the process but being held in high regard by the Lynchford folk for the attempt.”²

Michael's brother, Thomas Michael Deegan, aged 30, enlisted for the Australian

Imperial Force as a Driver in the 3rd Field Artillery Brigade, 9th Battery on the 27th of August 1914. His attestation papers show that he was 5'10, had a dark complexion, grayish eyes, and brown hair. During his service Thomas was admitted for illness on various occasions and awarded field punishment number 2 for quitting picquet without leave. Thomas

¹ Noreen Stubbs, *The Deegan: An Irish Medley*, (Loongana Print, 1995,) 44.

² Stubbs, *The Deegan: An Irish Medley*, 44.

returned from the war in 1918. He received the 1914/15-star, British War medal, and the Victory medal.³

On the 10th of February 1916, at the age of 22, Michael also enlisted for the First World War as a Driver in the 8th Field Artillery Brigade, 31st Battery. His attestation papers state that he was a blacksmith by trade and had previously been “convicted by the civil power” for fighting. He had a medium complexion, blue eyes, brown hair, was 5’7 and weighed 158 pounds.⁴

The 8th Field Artillery Brigade, almost 2000 men, spent April of 1916 in Victoria at the Maribyrnong Camp preparing for war. “The best of these were selected and formed into the four batteries.” Embarkation was set for the 20th of May 1916 at 11am on board the HMAT A7 Medic.⁵

On the 20th of May the 8th Field Artillery Brigade embarked in Melbourne. Unit diaries describe a carnival scene where:

...the public swarmed on to the pier about 11am. There was a huge crowd the colored streamers formed absolutely a wall from boat to pier. The boat cast off and commenced the trip about 1:30pm.

- Excerpt from war diaries, 8th Field Artillery Brigade – Australian War Memorial (AWM)

The HMAT A7 Medic sailed from Melbourne to England stopping in Albany Western Australia, Durban, South Africa, Cape Town, Africa, the island St Vincent and then to Plymouth in England.⁶

The 8th Field Artillery Brigade spent the late months of 1916 training in places like Camp 16, Larkhill and in Hillsea and Codford.⁷ During this time Michael endured an injury being admitted to the Fargo Military Hospital, Larkhill, returning before the brigade proceeded overseas to France.

³ The National Archives of Australia, Record Search: Thomas Deegan, <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/DetailsReports/ItemDetail.aspx?Barcode=3496940&isAv=N>, 1914-1920.

⁴ The National Archives of Australia, Record Search: Michael Deegan, <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/DetailsReports/ItemDetail.aspx?Barcode=3496930&isAv=N>, 1914-1920.

⁵ The National Archives of Australia, War Diaries: 8th Field Artillery Brigade, <https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/awm-media/collection/RCDIG1018541/bundled/RCDIG1018541.pdf>, 1916.

⁶ The Australian War Memorial: 8th Field Artillery Brigade, <https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/awm-media/collection/RCDIG1017016/bundled/RCDIG1017016.pdf>, 1916.

⁷ The Australian War Memorial: 8th Field Artillery Brigade, <https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/awm-media/collection/RCDIG1017023/bundled/RCDIG1017023.pdf>, 1916.

*"Although the "infantry went off to France fully trained, but the inspector general would not allow us to go. So, we had to go on training in England."*⁸

- Excerpt from war diary, 8th Field Artillery
Brigade -- AWM

Michael's rank during the beginning of his service was a Driver.⁹ This role involved driving a team of horses hauling heavy limber to the soldiers operating the artillery on the front lines to deliver ammunition shells. Horses faced uneven terrain and enemy fire delivering these carriages.¹⁰

Figure 2 First World War Nominal Roll, 4th Divisional Ammunition Column - Australian War Memorial

DEEGAN.									
553	Pte	DEEGAN	John	11th Battalion	19.8.14	R.T.A.	3.9.15		
2974	Pte	DEEGAN	John Joseph	1st L.H.	4.2.16	R.T.A.	16.11.18		
2001	Pte	DEEGAN	James Thomas	60th Battalion	10.1.16	D.of W.	27.9.17		
	Lt	DEEGAN	Leslie Aloysius	15th A.L.H.	8.2.15	R.T.A.	7.2.19		
190	Pte	DEEGAN	Michael Joseph	A.F.C.	20.9.15	R.T.A.	17.7.18		
19909	Cpl	DEEGAN	Michael Joseph	4th D.A.C.	10.2.16	R.T.A.	12.5.19		
4476	Pte	DEEGAN	Robert	6th Battalion	10.8.15	R.T.A.	16.9.19		
7897a	Sgt	DEEGAN	Stanley Edward	3rd Echelon	1.10.15	R.T.A.	13.4.19		
8521	Pte	DEEGAN	Thomas Curtis	14th Battalion	24.8.14	R.T.A.	14.1.19		
1970	Gnr	DEEGAN	Thomas Michael	3rd Army Bde AFA	27.8.14	R.T.A.	8.10.18		
82a	Dvr	DEEGAN	William	3rd M.G.Bn.	24.2.16	R.T.A.	1.4.19		
4382	Pte	DEEGAN	William Clement	10th Battalion	21.1.15	R.T.A.	25.8.17		
3227	Pte	DEEKER	Maurice Phillip	5th Battalion	21.2.16	R.T.A.	19.2.19		
414	Pte	DEEKER	Vernon Alexander	4th M.G.Bn	12.4.16	R.T.A.	20.4.19		
1631a	Pte	DEER	Albert Joseph	3rd M.T.Coy	10.8.15	R.T.A.	3.7.19		
2061	Pte	DEER	Frederick John	36th Battalion	24.8.16	R.T.A.	10.9.17		
347	Pte	DEER	John William	28th Battalion	17.2.15	R.T.A.	24.9.18		
20683	Spr	DEEL	Charles James	13th Fld Coy Engrs	26.7.17	R.T.A.	1.7.19		
	2/Lt	DEELEY	Charles Clifford	A.F.C.	2.8.16	R.T.A.	15.9.18		
6495	Pte	DEELEY	Daniel	7th Battalion	24.5.16	R.T.A.	27.8.17		
6921	Pte	DEELEY	Frank Edwin	36th Battalion	14.5.17	K.I.A.	3.3.18		
3337	2/Cpl	DEEM	James Livingston	6th Fld Coy Engrs	4.8.15	R.T.A.	8.4.18		
2308	Pte	DEEM	Leslie William	36th Battalion	25.7.16	R.T.A.	23.6.17		
2413	Pte	DEEM	Perceval Edwold	47th Battalion	12.6.16	K.I.A.	7.6.17		
2156	Cpl	DEEM	William Stanley	51st Battalion	30.3.16	R.T.A.	23.7.19		
7234	Pte	DEENEY	Jack	2nd M.G.Bn.	22.11.16	D.of W.	2.9.18		
2396	Pte	DEENEY	John	36th Battalion	6.2.16	R.T.A.	2.8.18		
5779	Pte	DEENEY	Niel	1st Battalion	25.11.15	R.T.A.	8.6.18		
406	Pte	DEEPROSE	David Donald	1st M.G.Bn	12.1.16	R.T.A.	12.6.19		
1934	Pte	DEEPROSE	William	15th Battalion	19.1.15	K.I.A.	8.8.15		
6776	Pte	DEER	George	48th Battalion	10.8.17	R.T.A.	23.7.19		
116	Pte	DEER	George Henry	9th L.H.R.	26.9.14	R.T.A.	5.3.19		
2654	Pte	DEER	Herbert	50th Battalion	30.8.16	K.I.A.	19.10.17		
18553	Gnr	DEER	John Llewellyn	7th Fld Art Bde	27.9.18	R.T.A.	19.5.19		
5108	Pte	DEER	William	32nd Battalion	29.4.16	R.T.A.	8.1.19		
2627	Pte	DEER	William Eymon	21st Battalion	17.5.15	K.I.A.	26.8.16		
3055	Pte	DEER	William James	43rd Battalion	30.4.17				
	Str	DEERE	Frances Mary	A.A.N.S.	21.11.14	R.T.A.	19.12.18		
16531	L/Cpl	DEERE	John Albert	1st Fld Coy Engrs	23.9.15	R.T.A.	20.12.15		

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Michael also obtained the role as a Shoeing smith maintaining the condition of the horse's shoes and hooves as long hours of hauling carriages wore them down quickly. Michael

⁸ The Australian War Memorial, War Diaries: 8th Field Artillery Brigade, <https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/awm-media/collection/RCDIG1017023/bundled/RCDIG1017023.pdf>, 1916.

⁹ The National Archives of Australia, Record Search: Michael Deegan, <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRRetrieve/Interface/DetailsReports/ItemDetail.aspx?Barcode=3496930&isAv=N>, 1914-1920.

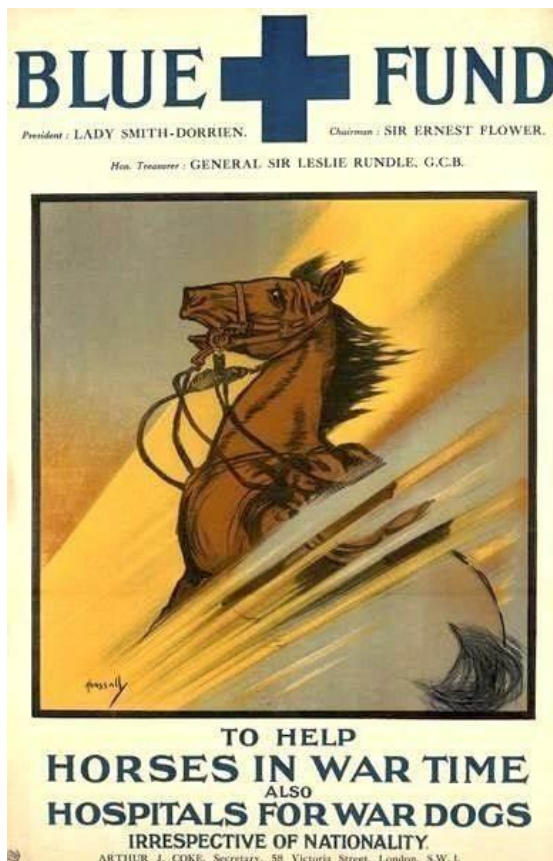
¹⁰ Lives of the first World War, Rank of Driver (DVR), Imperial War Museum, <https://livesofthefirstworldwar.iwm.org.uk/story/3746>, accessed April 6 2024.

remained in this role for most of his service -- his Blacksmith abilities made him fit for the role. Michael's final rank was a Corporal in the 4th Divisional ammunition column.¹¹

During the First World War eight million horses died and another two and a half million were injured. Australia sent 136,000 horses abroad and only one of those made it home to Australia at the conclusion of the war. Life for the horses was harsh. Food was scarce, leading many animals to die of starvation, stables were troubled with disease inflicted rats, ticks and lice and journeys to the war were in dirty, overcrowded ships.¹² Despite such conditions soldiers and horses created strong attachments. An article 'The Drivers' gives great insight into the relationship of servicemen and their horses:

"...even the animals came to know when a shell was coming close; and if, when halted, the horses heard the whine of an approaching salvo, they would tremble and sidle closer to their drivers, burying their muzzles in the men's chests."

- Charles Bean, excerpt from "The Drivers" – Australia War Memorial.



¹¹ The National Archives of Australia, Record Search: Michael Deegan, <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/DetailsReports/ItemDetail.aspx?Barcode=3496930&isAv=N>, 1914-1920.

¹² Rob Lloyd Jones and Isabel George, Animals at War (EDC Publishing, 2007), p.g 14-21.

Many posters were created during the First World War to create funds to help animals injured due to the war raising money for horses, dogs, and other war animals.¹³

Michael had received the British War Medal and the Victory Medal at the conclusion of his service.¹⁴ Michael returned home from the First World War on the 12th of May 1919, from England via Port Napier.¹⁵

Michaels records were left untouched from the 6th of October 1916 until the 18th of January 1918. Nothing was recorded of Michael service throughout this time frame.

When returning home from the war Michael did not travel to Queenstown for the celebration; he disembarked the train in Lynchford to join his family and friends.¹⁶

Michael's return home was not much cause for celebration as his mother, father and brother had all passed away during his time of service; His mother of cancer, his father of the flu and his brother Jack was involved in a family quarrel.¹⁷

Jack and his mother, Mary, did not get along very well. In 1918 an argument between them escalated at a rapid rate. Jack hit his mother and she reciprocated. As Charlie walked in, he witnessed Jack throwing an axe at their mother's feet. Neither the brothers nor their fury could be stopped so they decided to settle it outside. Both picked up firearms, and Jack took the rifle the family used to shoot steers, "Charlie went back to the house for a gun and Mary appeared on the verandah with a revolver." Charlie eventually left, but Jack was still furious with his mother, threatening to 'drop her' if she went outside, provoking Charlie to get him to interfere. Charlie picked up his gun and simultaneously they fired at each other, Jack's bullet passing into the wall and Charlie's hitting Jack. A trial in Hobart later in the year proved to work in Charlie's favor as he returned home a free man.¹⁸

¹³ Lloyd Jones and George, *Animals at War*, 14-21.

¹⁴ The National Archives of Australia, Record Search: Michael Deegan, ¹⁴ Stubbs, *The Deegan: An Irish Medley*, 44. <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/DetailsReports/ItemDetail.aspx?Barcode=3496930&isAv=N>, 1914-1920.

¹⁵ The National Archives of Australia, Record Search: Michael Deegan, <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/DetailsReports/ItemDetail.aspx?Barcode=3496930&isAv=N>, 1914-1920.

¹⁶ Stubbs, *The Deegan: An Irish Medley*, 44.

¹⁸ Stubbs, *The Deegan: An Irish Medley*, 44.

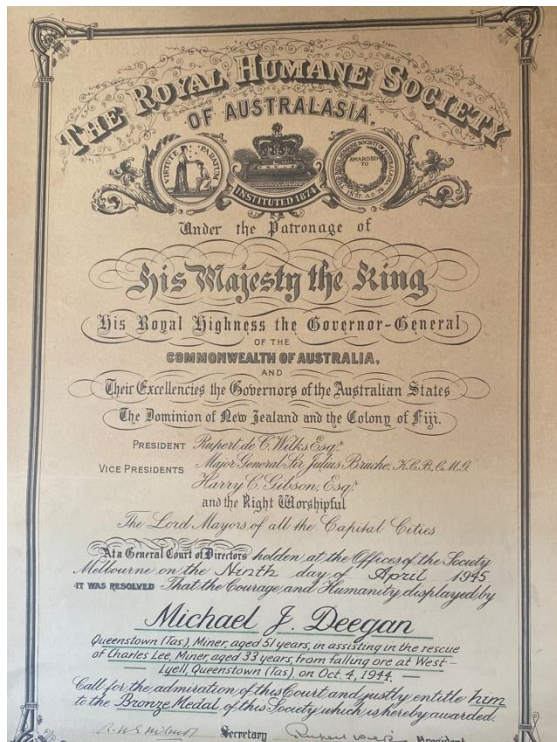


Figure 3 Michael's children. Left to right: Leo Deegan, Marry Lorraine Deegan and Ambrose Deegan

Once Michael returned from the war, he married Mary Maud Leahy and later they had three children Leo, Ambrose, and Marry Lorraine.¹⁹ At 22 in 1944 Leo, the eldest son, went on to enlist in the AIF in the Second World War. Leo served in New Guinea as an engineer in the 12th Field Company. Leo returned home from the war in 1947.²⁰ Ambrose attempted to enlist but his job made him of high priority in Tasmania. Ambrose was a pattern maker in the Mount Lyell mine machine shop, creating wooden casts for machinery parts that metal copies could be cast from. This was of great significance to create ammunition.

¹⁹ Stubbs, *The Deegan: An Irish Medley*, 44.

²⁰ The National Archives of Australia, Record Search: Leo Deegan, <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/DetailsReports/ItemDetail.aspx?Barcode=6380631&isAv=N>, 1939-1948.



Michael went into the mining industry. On the 9th of April 1945 Michael was awarded the bronze medal by the *Royal Humane Society of Australasia* at age 51 for “assisting in the rescue of Charles Lee, aged 33 from falling ore at West-Lyell Queenstown on October 4th, 1944.”

An article posted, March 18th, 1945, in the *Advocate* – a north- western newspaper -- explains that “Michael Deegan and William Kelly pleaded not guilty” as between the months of June and August 1944 they had stolen six rabbit traps “the property of Cecil Frerk.” Frerk stated that “last season [Cecil] was trapping,” in the area of Strahan. “He was using about 36 traps, and six were stolen.” Detective E. G. Cole visited William Kelly’s house and “in a shed found a number of rabbit traps.” Kelly explained that the traps were not his.

“...Deegan detailed his purchases of traps, and said he borrowed six from a man named Tatnell. Kelly was not concerned in the matter, as all he did was to give the defendant a ride in his motor car. The traps were brought into Queenstown in Kelly's car and left at his house for collection. Tatnell had taken his traps from those at the house. The P.M said he would dismiss the charge against Kelly, but he was not satisfied with Deegan's explanation.”

Michael was fined £2 and was ordered to return the traps.²¹

Michael was also involved in various sporting activities after the war. Becoming a part of the Yolla Football Giants — the premiers in 1921. Michael also had a reputation for remarkable success in boxing with challenges statewide.

“The boxing match held at the Metropole Hotel on Friday night between Mick Deegan and Harry Fry resulted in a win for the former at the end of the sixth round. Both men fought hard, but the winner showed more judgement than his opponent. (There was a good attendance of supporters of both men.”

Michael also “tried his hand as a rifleman,” and in the 1930’s Michael began a hobby of breeding racing pigeons.

Later in the 1940’s Michael coached a team of Lyell West smelters in the art of tug-of-war.



Figure 4 Marry Lorraine's wedding. Michael Deegan is third from right.

“Mick Deegan took the digger boys and vowed to do his best. To train those wiry, battling lads that hail from Lyell West. The miners round the 'open cut' trained with Mick's team each day. While Mick gazed on with studied look and scratched his head of grey.”²²

I also had the opportunity to speak to Michael's daughter, Lorraine. She did not remember any stories of her father. Although, when we asked Lorraine if Michael was a good father

²¹ “Queenstown Police Court”, Trove, 1945, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/68916427?searchTerm=michael%20joseph%20deegan>.

²² Stubbs, The Deegan: An Irish Medley, 44.

her whole demeanor changed, and her face lit up. She said he was a good father “he was always calm; he never raised his voice and he never hit me.”

Michael passed away on the 12th of July 1957.

Throughout my time of research, I have learnt to recognize not only the positive contribution but also the mistakes that servicemen had made within their lives and use this as a reminder that they too were humans.

My time within the prize has given me great insight into the conditions, impact and nature of World War One. It has showed me the immense importance of continuing this legacy to ensure that we never forget the soldiers who made the ultimate sacrifice and those who returned home baring the physical and mental scars of war. The prize has allowed me to grow as a person to become more aware of the shaping of our nation and the importance of why Australia is the country it is in modern times. The memories I have made will inevitably stay with me forever.



Figure 5 Macy Deegan, Devonport High School