

## Thomas Alexander Wells

Enlisted at Show Ground Camp in Sydney on 17 February 1917 in the Field Artillery, listing his occupation as a law court reporter, aged 30 years.

He embarked on 5 November 1917 aboard *Port Sydney* with the 29<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements of the Field Artillery and stayed in Egypt until sailing to England in January 1918. He served in the Heavy Trench Mortar Battery and was wounded in action, gassed, 23 July 1918. He recuperated in Le Havre then was later transferred to education duties before returning to Australia in May 1919.

On return Wells continued working as a reporter and studied law part time. He was admitted to the bar on 31 July 1924. He was appointed Crown prosecutor at Cootamundra Quarter Sessions on 31 October 1928. He was appointed as a judge in the Northern Territory in August 1933 and a conciliation commissioner in 1942. Wells presided in the Northern Territory until 1952, where he gained a reputation for being compassionate and tempering 'justice with mercy'. After the first Japanese attack on Darwin in the Second World War he ordered that the gates of Fanny Bay Gaol be opened so that any prisoners inside could escape if the gaol was hit in a raid. He conducted the civil administration of Darwin during the Second World War and looked after the few remaining residents and the property of those who were evacuated. As both magistrate and judge he would commit a person to trial, then try him/her. He was a well known and popular character in the Northern Territory and his death was widely reported and widely mourned.