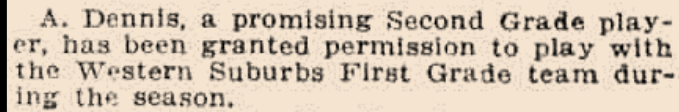


## Albert Dennis

..... played with Wests in 1912. The following article from The Sun newspaper refers to Albert Dennis joining Wests.



A. Dennis, a promising Second Grade player, has been granted permission to play with the Western Suburbs First Grade team during the season.

The Sun 3 May 1912

The article has some interesting underlying information. The reference to A. Dennis being a promising Second Grade player provides a very narrow range of options to identify the player. In fact there was only one person playing rugby league in 1911 with the surname of Dennis and that was the Newtown Second Grade player Albert Dennis.

The second piece of information is intriguing as it indicates that this player had been granted permission to play with Wests First Grade team during the 1912 season. If the player was residentially qualified, he would not require "permission." It is evident that the player was living outside the Western Suburbs catchment and therefore required permission to play outside his residential base.

At this time there was a permit system in place that enabled the top, talent rich clubs to "loan out" some of their non regular First Grade players to the struggling clubs in the competition. This had a twofold effect in that it gave some of the better players in the stronger clubs more opportunity to play First Grade football, while improving the competitiveness of the lower ranked clubs. No evidence has been found to confirm that Albert Dennis was a beneficiary of the permit system, but this is the most likely scenario.

Albert Dennis played for Wests in the preseason trial matches and in First Grade for the first two rounds of the 1912 season. Notwithstanding the article in The Sun newspaper which referred to A. Dennis, his name was recorded as both A. Dennis and S. Dennis while playing with Wests.

The Wests First Grade Heritage List refers to player #101 as S. Dennis and the Rugby League Project refers to this player and the player Dennis who played with Wests in 1916 as S. Dennis. The 1916 player is not Albert Dennis.

It is not known why Albert Dennis did not continue playing with Wests as he was a talented player and contributed during his short stint with the club. However by early 1913 his marriage dissolved and he may have moved around during this time. There is a record of a player by the name of Dennis playing for the Redfern Rugby League team in 1913, however it cannot be confirmed that this was Albert Dennis.

It is known that Albert Dennis was living at Newtown in September 1914 when he enlisted with the AIF. Albert was posted to the Australian Army Services Corp, initially as a Horse Driver and subsequently as a Motor Driver. His service record indicates that he was part of the Gallipoli campaign but there are no details.

In February 1916 he was part of the Western Frontier Force (WFF) sent to Libya to quell the uprising by the Senussi and Bedouins who aligned themselves with the Turks. Other Wests players such as Frank Lane (Wests #134) and Fred Grinsted (Wests #64) were with the WFF and during their down time were able to play football in the shadows of the pyramids.

Albert Dennis arrived in France in April 1916. The Australian Services Corp provided a support role to the Infantry Battalions. As a Motor Driver he would be carrying all forms of material between supply depots and storage facilities near the front. Albert survived his time in France unscathed. In November 1916, he took leave in England and was once again there in October 1917. Apart from these two periods of leave, Albert remained in France for the duration of the war.



**1<sup>st</sup> Motor Transport Company – Circa 1917, France**

Albert Dennis (3<sup>rd</sup> Row, sixth from left)

A couple of news articles have been found referring to a football player with the name of Dennis who was in the theatre of war during the period 1915 to 1918. The first of these was from the Referee newspaper on 3 January 1917. The article is somewhat vague as to dates and names. The article appears to refer to players who were in the 7th Light Horse Regiment football team. This Regiment remained in the Egypt sector throughout the war and Albert Dennis was not in this Regiment. Without further information it is not possible to confirm that this was Albert Dennis.

Lieut. Rupert R. Chapman has sent Mr. C. E. Morgan, the Rugby Union referee, a photo. of the 7th Light Horse Regiment football team, which has carried all before it in Egypt, having won the whole of the nine games played. Unfortunately, the print will not bear reproduction. The members of the combination are : Lieut. R. R. Chapman (hon. sec.), Major Barton, Troopers Dennis, Brighton, Pettit, Tuckey, Cavanagh, Concannon, Knox, Hulm, Q.M.S. Donald, Corporals Peed, Meehan, Tonkin, Lieuts. Williams and Johnson, and Sergt.-Major Walker. Lieut. Chapman played for many years in the Moss Vale district, and later in Sydney.

Referee 3 January 1917

The second news article appeared in the Referee newspaper on 6 June 1917 and is more definitive. The article reports on a letter written by E. J. Shaw from France in February 1917. Shaw refers to meeting a number of former footballers including "Curly" Dennis of Newtown rugby union team.

Albert Dennis played with the Newtown rugby union team in 1908 and 1909, before playing with the Newtown rugby league team in 1910 and 1911. A search of records indicated that there were no other players by the name of Dennis playing with either the Newtown Union or League teams during the relevant period. It is evident that "Curly" Dennis is Albert Dennis.

E. J. Shaw, writing from France (17/2/17) to Mr. C. Corbett : "Having a busy time here just now, getting ready for the Summer offensive. I met Joe Murray, the Newtown forward, and had two or three good nights' chats with him ; also Jimmy Clarken, of the Glebe, and Curly Dennis, of Newtown Rugby Union team. We occasionally come across the boys here, though, as everyone is in a different position from the others, it is only by chance that we meet. Joe Murray showed me some of his football photos. I shall be pleased to get back again. Kindly remember me to all League friends, players, and referees, and hoping you have a prosperous season."

Referee 6 June 1917

The article also has additional meaning when it is understood what the relationships were between these men. The first thing to note is that Edward James Shaw was a rugby league referee either side of the Great War and was refereeing well into the 1920's when Albert Dennis embarked on his new career. "Eddie" Shaw also played rugby union for the Newtown Club.

Albert Dennis and Joe Murray were both born in 1887 and played together with Newtown. Joe Murray prior to the war, represented Australasia and NSW in rugby league. He was also awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM) for bravery and devotion to duty during the war.

Albert Dennis became a rugby league referee and it appeared Joe Murray did likewise. There are records of J. Murray refereeing between 1921 and 1931 and becoming patron of the NSW Rugby League Referees Association and a life member in 1934, while Albert Dennis was the Association's President. The Rugby League Project contains a refereeing record for Joe Murray, which convincingly accords to the facts known about Joe Murray.

However, the following article from Rugby League News in 1927, disavows the notion that it was Joe Murray that became the graded referee, patron, and life member of the NSWRL Referees Association. The person that did fill these roles was John Murray, a lower grade player with the Balmain Club who came up through the ranks of the Balmain Referees Association.

Perhaps those "good night chats" with E. J. Shaw in France in 1917, had some influence on Albert Dennis taking up the whistle, and being a successful rugby league referee and administrator.

**The Other J. Murray** incorrectly in regard to the matter.  
J. Murray, referee, is not Joe Murray, ex-international forward and member of the Newtown and North Sydney teams. He is John Murray, more popularly known as "Denny," a graduate of Balmain juniors, who eventually played for Balmain reserves, but who did not win such distinction as a winger as he has won as a referee.

Frequently, lately, mistakes have been made regarding the identity of Mr. J. Murray, the first-grade referee.

Recently a Sydney daily (not the "Sun" or the "Daily Telegraph") answered a correspondent

RL News 4 June 1927

Albert Dennis remained in France until September 1918 and arrived back in Australia on 24 November 1918. The good news for Albert Dennis was that he appeared to have been reunited with his wife and his second child was born exactly one year after he returned from the war.

Albert Dennis was included on the Newtown Rugby League Roll of Honour in 1916. At that point twenty one members of the Newtown Club had enlisted and four of those had been killed in action. Also on the Honour Roll were future Wests players, Roy Farnsworth (Wests #192), Viv Farnsworth (Wests #194) and Tedda Brooks (Wests #209). Herbert Bolt, who was killed in action was the brother of Wests player Percy Bolt (Wests #56).

At the meeting of the Newtown R.L. Club an honor roll, presented by Mr. J. Solomon, was unveiled by Mr. J. Edwards (vice-president). Messrs. J. Chaseling (secretary), W. Ellis (treasurer), and P. McCue (captain) also spoke. The Blues have sent 21 men to the front, of whom four have been killed. It was also mentioned that the club had granted the widow of Corporal H. T. Bolt £10, in addition to a similar grant from the League, while a benefit would be arranged for her. The names on the honor roll are: Lieutenant F. B. Cheadle (killed), Corporal H. Bolt (killed), W. Farnsworth, R. Farnsworth, V. Farnsworth, J. Williams (killed), L. Mansfield (killed), D. Fitzgerald, Ed. Brooks, A. Clingan, F. J. Nelson, R. Shepherd, J. Lewin, E. Donovan, H. McDowell, R. Cleland, J. Main, J. B. Peters, D. Turner, T. Byron, A. Dennis.

Newtown Rugby League Club Honour Roll 1916

No record has been found of Albert Dennis playing rugby league on his return from the war. He would have been 32 years of age, and while fit and well, may have thought that his playing days were past him. However it is likely that soon after he returned from the war, he joined the refereeing ranks. Newspaper reports indicate that he was refereeing A Grade and other junior teams in the Newtown junior competition from at least 1922 up until the end of 1924.

In 1925, Albert Dennis was graded with the NSW Referees Association and worked his way through the ranks as a referee and touch judge from 1925 until 1934. Greg McCallum, interim CEO of the NSW Rugby League Referees Association has confirmed that Albert Dennis was graded referee #281.

By 1935, Albert Dennis had hung up his boots and whistle and moved onto the executive of the Referees Association. Newspaper reports and the NSW Rugby League Referees Association, Board of Directors Honour Roll indicates that Albert Dennis held the position of President from 1935 until 1942.

Until that point in time, Albert Dennis was the longest serving President of the Referees Association. In 1936 he was elected as a Life Member of the NSW Referees Association and in 1938 he was nominated for Life Membership of the NSW Rugby League.

In 1938, at the NSW Referees Association annual ball, held at the Nock and Kirby's ballroom, Albert Dennis announced the engagement of his daughter, Milba, in front of almost 400 guests. Albert Dennis and his wife were hosts of these prestigious events. It is evident that Albert Dennis had come a long way since he graced the pre-war football field and was clearly a prominent and confident person in the world of rugby league.



The Truth 28 August 1938

Albert Dennis moved from the Newtown District to the Sydney suburb of Croydon in the mid 1930's, about the same time as he became President of the NSW Rugby League Referees Association. He lived the remainder of his life at Croydon and died there in November 1956.