

Stories from the Honour Boards

Stories of those who served and are remembered on the Honour Boards in the Merrington Anzac Memorial Peace Chapel at Saint Andrew's Uniting Church

Booklet Number 54

WILSON BROTHERS

George

1894 - 1981

John Turner

1897-1916



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Please see a Guide if you would like a copy.

Cover Illustration.

The battlefield at Pozières in France.

Private John Wilson lost his life in the fighting here.

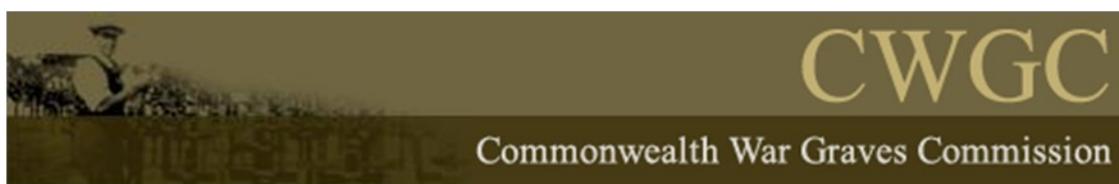
Private John Turner Wilson

William Alexander and Annie Wilson née Durward lived at Vernor near Lowood when two of their sons enlisted to serve in the Australian Imperial Force. The younger boy, John, a storehand, was the first son to join. He was born on 30 March 1897. He volunteered for service abroad on 26 July 1915 at the Brisbane recruiting station, taking with him a handwritten note saying, "*I William Alexander Wilson of Vernor in the State of Queensland do hereby give my consent to my son John T. Wilson enabling him to enlist in the Expeditionary Forces in whatever unit is allotted to him as he is not of age. Dated at Vernor this nineteenth day of July 1915.*"

The statement was signed by his father and mother. John was 18 years and 4 months old, 5 feet 9½ inches tall (176.5 cm) and weighed 152 lbs (68.9 kg). He noted on his Attestation Paper that he had served in Training Area 10B (Lowood) in the Senior Cadets.

Private John Turner Wilson was allotted to the 15th Infantry Battalion based at Enoggera Camp for a short period of training before embarking from Brisbane on 21 October 1915 on board His Majesty's Australian Transport, the ship *Seang Bee*. While participating in training exercises in Egypt in the early months of 1916, John Wilson spent periods of time in hospital with influenza in February and with heart trouble in April.

On 1 June he sailed with his unit from Alexandria for France and the Western Front. Australians were involved in heavy fighting around the village of Pozières in July and August. Bean described the intense German barrage and heavy bombardment on Pozières on 6 August when the shelling of enemy artillery surrounded Australian soldiers. “The cost of all this fighting to the Australian infantry had been tremendous.”¹ Private Wilson was reported missing on 8 August and following a court of inquiry at Ribemont on 1 May 1917 was reported “killed in action on 8 August 1916”.



**In Memory of
Private JOHN TURNER WILSON**

**3459, 15th Bn., Australian Infantry, A.I.F.
who died on 08 August 1916
Remembered with honour
VILLERS-BRETONNEUX MEMORIAL**



¹ Bean, *Anzac to Amiens*, page 257

Before John Wilson died, his parents moved to Lyndfield, Lytton Road, via Morningside. They wrote letters to military authorities expressing dissatisfaction over their son's rank in the Australian Imperial Force. Mrs Wilson wrote her letter on 31 July 1916:

"I wish to remind you that my son John had a commission as a Lieutenant at Lowood when he received a letter from Governor General signed by Senator Pearce. Telling my son to go and try for a higher rank. Then he said he thought his place was at the Front. Then he got disappointed when the military told him he was too young as he was just 18 years. Has my son's commission been stopped or has it gone astray as I have not heard nothing (sic) of it since September of last year? I have another son now at the Front George Wilson somewhere abroad. I am, yours sincerely, Mrs Annie Wilson"

The Officer in charge of Base Records replied saying there was no record of her son receiving a commission. But Mr Wilson was not convinced. His letter dated 21 August 1916, was written obviously before he knew of his son's death:

"I am rather surprised on receiving your note of the 15th instant with reference to my son 3459 Private J T Wilson that you have no record of him having received a commission. I hope that you are not thinking that it was in expeditionary force that he held the commission. It was in the Senior Cadets that he was Lieutenant and he received £3 per year. When he had to get Lieutenant uniform which cost £5/10/- he was to get a reduction in the price of his clothes which he never got. He was Lieutenant in Lowood ...By your misdoubting our application is the boy to be deprived of his commission because he joined the expeditionary forces? If that is so that is not much encouragement for boys going to the war.

Trusting that you will see to this as I have two of my boys at the Front. The other one is sergeant. Yours faithfully, WA Wilson."

Mr and Mrs Wilson would have been aware that experience in School Cadet Corps and the Senior Cadets scheme was taken into account for other young men who enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force. They rightly expressed their support for their son's achievements. There is no record of further correspondence about this matter.

Mr Wilson as next-of-kin acknowledged receipt of a small parcel containing John's pocket book, a letter and photos in October 1917. By then, more than a year since his son's death, Mr Wilson's sadness and hurt can be detected in another letter addressed to the Officer-in-charge, Department of Defence, Melbourne and dated 24 October 1917. He wrote, "*Would you kindly explain to me the reason why a returning soldier to Queensland has got the same number 3459 as my son that is reported killed in action 3459 Pte J T Wilson?*

I was never aware that two soldiers from the same State could have the same number.

The list of returning soldiers expected to arrive in Australia shortly was reported in the Telegraph on 22 October and this special soldier bearing this number is on the list. Explain kindly and oblige. Yours faithfully, WA Wilson"

The reply on 9th November 1917 suggested the soldier might have belonged to another unit as each unit has a separate sequence of numbers.

Private John Turner Wilson is remembered with honour at Villers-Bretonneux Memorial. He died on 8 August 1916, aged 19 years.



Courtesy Noel Adsett, 2015

Lance Corporal George Wilson

John's older brother George was born on 11 July 1894. A farmer, single, aged 22 years, he enlisted in Brisbane to serve overseas with the AIF on 25 January 1916. Private George Wilson, service number 5097, left Brisbane with 25th Infantry Battalion on HMAT *Seang Choon* on 4 May 1916. His unit sailed to France late in September. At Étaples in France George Wilson was attached to the Divisional Base Depot. For a short period in early October he was appointed Acting Sergeant then reverted to the rank of Private. On 15 October Private Wilson was taken on strength in the 31st Battalion which at that time was not engaged in any offensive role on the Western Front, though it still spent periods of time in the muddy trenches of the front line.

In November he was sick in hospital at Étaples and in December he was transported to Hurdcott in England, suffering from Trench Foot¹ and Influenza. Here he remained till March 1917 when he was discharged on furlough reporting periodically to Perham Down Depot on the Salisbury Plain. After rehabilitation at a Command Depot in Southern England he joined the 15th Battalion at Divisional Base Depot in France in June 1917.

From September to December 1917 Private George Wilson was ill again in the Boscombe Military Hospital in England with Trench Fever and Diarrhoea.

He had rejoined his battalion in France at the beginning of 1918 but he spent another long period in hospital in April and May. On 22 October he was appointed Lance Corporal.

¹ 'Trench Foot' was a fungal infection of the feet brought on by prolonged exposure to damp, cold conditions allied to poor environmental hygiene.

After the war he was granted extended leave in France and England but it was not till 12 May 1919 that he embarked for Australia on board *Port Napier*, arriving in Melbourne on 2 July. He was transhipped to HT *Nestor* for the voyage to Brisbane and was discharged there on 20 August 1919. He had served in three battalions and spent many long months on sick beds in France and England.

Nothing could be found of George's life after the war. He died in Brisbane on 18 March 1981 aged 86 years and is buried in the Mt Gravatt Cemetery.

Select Bibliography

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National Archives of Australia, World War 1 military records

First World War Embarkation Rolls

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Australian War memorial Roll of Honour

The Courier-Mail, Tuesday 18 August 1942, page 8

The Courier-Mail, Friday 28 August 1942, page 8

Queensland Register of Births, Deaths and Marriages

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Lest we forget

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Corner Ann and Creek Streets
Brisbane QLD 4000
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