

NORMAN ALFERED ROBERT WILSON
4517 – 3rd Tunnelling Company

Norman Wilson, aged 15 years 9 months, attested to enlist for service abroad on 22nd February 1916 at Perth, Western Australia. Born in Perth, he listed his trade as 'student'. The document was marked 'Bugler'. A hand written note attached to his file, and signed by the Lieutenant Colonel Camp Commandant, advises:

"The Recruiting Officers

Kindly recruit the Bearer Pte Norman A R Wilson as a bugler."

An urgent telegram from Hobart on 19th February to Frank Wilson, Viking House, Perth, read: 'I consent to my son Norman Wilson joining the Australian Imperial Force – Annie Wilson'

Norman listed his father, Frank Wilson, of Claremont, Western Australia, as his Next-of-Kin.

As previous service he listed '2 years – 88th – still serving'. This is believed to be the 88th Infantry, a Western Australia School Cadet unit in which he held the rank of Sergeant.

At 5ft 9in and 155lbs with a 34-38 chest measurement, his size would not have stood out amongst the other men of the Mining Corps.

Norman was appointed to the No 6th Tunnelling Company in March 1916 by Captain Lawson, OIC of that unit.

He embarked on HMAT A69 'Warilda' at Fremantle 1st June 1916, disembarking at Plymouth on 8th July 1916. The Embarkation Roll for the voyage records his age as '15', and his Trade as 'Student'.

28th August 1916 proceeded O/seas France

30th August 1916 marched-in to ADBD ex England

25th September 1916 marched-out to 3rd Tunn Coy

17th December 1916 letter from Headquarters, 1st Anzac Corps, to A.I.F Administrative Headquarters, Horseferry Road, London re 4512 (sic) Sapper Wilson. 6th Field Co.

'The Lieutenant-General Commanding has approved of the return of the above named soldier to Australia for discharge on the ground that he is

under 17 years of age, and I am to ask that arrangements be made for his passage at an early date.

Headquarters, 2nd Australian Division, have been asked to send Wilson to report to you as soon as possible, and you will be advised by wire of the date on which he leaves.'

28th August 1916 Proceeding O/seas

25th December 1916 – Cablegram from 1st Anzac, B.E.F. France to Administrative Headquarters A.I.F. London – Sapper Wilson No.6 Coy. 2nd Divisional Engineers left yesterday to report himself to you for return to Australia to be discharged.

8th Feb 1917 Detached for duty to Headquarters A.I.F. Depots in U.K. from No. 2 Aust Com Depot, Weymouth.

7th March 1917 Marched-in to No. 2 Com. Depot, Weymouth from Tidworth.

29th April 1917: from Headquarters, Australian Imperial Force, Depots in United Kingdom, Bhurtpore Barracks, Tidworth, Salisbury Plain to Administrative Headquarters, Australian Imperial Force, London, S.W.1.

' Re No. 4517 Sapper N.A.R. Wilson, 6th Field Company Engineers

The above-named soldier is at present doing duty as Orderly at this Headquarters, and has performed his duties in a perfectly satisfactory manner.

As he is not yet 17 years of age and could not go overseas for over two years, it is recommended that he be discharged in England in order that he may be apprenticed to the Engineering. This is in accordance with the wishes of his father – the Honourable Frank Wilson, Premier of Western Australia.'

9th May 1917 - Ministry of Munitions of War, from their National Cartridge and Box repair Factory at Alexandra Docks, Newport confirmed Wilsons' placement should his discharge be granted.

Discharged in England in consequence of taking up employment under the Ministry of Munitions being under age, with effect 11th May 1917. He had completed 1 year 79 days service in the A.I.F.

His address on discharge was given as c/o Samual Wilson, Timber Merchant, Newcastle Road, Sunderland.

He was awarded the British War Medal (received 14th November 1921) and the Victory Medal (received 10th March 1922), both being forwarded to the address provided by his father; 'Wireless Operator, ss 'Chignecto', Royal Mail Packet Company, Barrington Road, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Norman returned to Australia 19th April 1919

We believe that at age 15, Norman may be the youngest to appear on an Embarkation Roll. Given that it would be another four years before he should be able to serve on the front-line, it is hard to imagine that his fathers' political position did not have something to do with the Military authorities allowing Norman to embark.