

# War History of 3646 Sergeant Walter Edgar (WE) Wilson and 57<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 15<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 5<sup>th</sup> Division AIF

- December 1891** WE Wilson born at Lilydale
- 24 July 1915** WE Wilson signs up with the 1<sup>st</sup> AIF (Aged 24 Years, 8 Months) Rank - Private. Height - 5 ft 9 ½ inches (176 cm) , Weight - 11 stone (69 kg).
- 9 Dec 1915** WE Wilson taken onto the strength of 8 Reinforcements, 24 Battalion.
- 8 Jan 1916** WE Wilson embarks for Egypt on HMAT Afric A19 from Melbourne as a member of 8<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements, 24 Battalion (Pay Rate - 5 shillings per day). Rank of Acting Sergeant.

**Egypt** *The 57th Battalion was raised in Egypt on 18 February 1916 as part of the "doubling" of the AIF. Half of its recruits were Gallipoli veterans from the 5th Battalion, and the other half, fresh reinforcements from Australia. Reflecting the composition of the 5th, the 57th was predominantly composed of men from the suburbs of Melbourne. The battalion became part of the 15th Brigade of the 5th Australian Division.*

- 23 Feb 1916** WE Wilson accepted into 57 Battalion
- 14 March** WE Wilson admitted to hospital - Influenza
- 17 March** WE Wilson rejoined Unit
- 27 March** WE Wilson Promoted to Sergeant

**France - Western Front** *The "Western Front" was the principal theatre of operations for British and Dominion forces for the duration of the First World War. Though called the "Western Front" by the Allies it was in fact the German western front - their eastern front was in Russia. The narrow war zone of the Western Front ran continuously from the English Channel near Ostend to Belfort on the Swiss border, a distance of 760 kilometres.*

- 17 June 1916** The 57<sup>th</sup> Battalion Arrived in Marseille after seeing some action and training in Egypt. **WE Wilson Arrives in Marseilles**
- 27 June** First billet (10 days) was at village of Steenbecque, a march from the nearest rail station at Thiennes.
- 8 July** Marched to Estaires
- 11 July** First 57th casualties as 57th took over from 51st Battalion near Sailly - 5 killed, 5 wounded.

**Fromelles** *Fromelles was the first major battle fought by Australian troops on the Western Front. Directed against a strong German position known as the Sugar Loaf salient, the attack was intended primarily as a feint to draw German troops away from the Somme offensive then being pursued further to the south. A seven-hour preparatory bombardment deprived the attack of any hope of surprise, and*

*ultimately proved ineffective in subduing the well-entrenched defenders. When the troops of the 5th Australian and 61st British Divisions attacked at 6 pm on 19 July 1916, they suffered heavily at the hands of German machine-gunners. Small parts of the German trenches were captured by the 8th and 14th Australian Brigades, but, devoid of flanking support and subjected to fierce counter-attacks, they were forced to withdraw. By 8am on 20 July 1916, the battle was over. The 5th Australian Division suffered 5,533 casualties, rendering it incapable of offensive action for many months; the 61st British Division suffered 1,547. The German casualties were little more than 1,000. The attack was a complete failure as the Germans realised within a few hours it was merely a feint. It therefore had no impact whatsoever upon the progress of the Somme offensive.*

- 16 July 1916** 57<sup>th</sup> Battalion spent the day preparing for the attack Our guns shelled continuously. Little enemy fire in return.
- 17 July** Attack was initially planned for 17<sup>th</sup> but postponed until the 19<sup>th</sup> due to rain and misty weather and fatigue. Prior two and a half days were spent in breast working on trenches, bringing up ammunition, duckboards, water, food and medical supplies. Worked all through the nights of July 14/15/16. The enemy certainly knew of the impending attack. The landscape of the area was already barren prior to battle. No mans land between the trenches was flat and exposed. The most significant feature was 'The Sugarloaf' 30 degrees forward right of 57th position - possibly a large building on a high mound and protected with concrete and used as a machine gun post by Germans. The enemy was well dug in behind much wire and with sound supply lines to the rear.
- July 17 saw tremendous congestion of troops in rear of 57<sup>th</sup> lines with the bringing up of large quantities of ammunition and stores at various places behind the firing line.
- 18 July** After German air raid on 58th Battalion, positions changed - 59th & 60th to front line, 57th took over the attack front from 58<sup>th</sup> Battalion, both acting as general reserve units.
- 19 July** Attack began at 1745. 59th and 60th went over the top. Artillery was firing all day. 60<sup>th</sup> were virtually wiped out. They could only get half way across to the German lines. The dead and dying were so thick on the ground that there was no one really capable of digging in, going forward or returning. 57th acted as general reserves. 59th & 58th were also severely depleted.
- 20 - 24 July** 57th were brought to front to take charge, resuming original positions in the line. Artillery, guns and snipers on both sides were very quiet. Wounded men crawled in throughout the day. As soon as it became dark, several parties went out to bring in wounded - 57<sup>th</sup> collected 300 - 400 men along with rifles and machine guns. (The 'Cobbers Statue' commemorates this)
- July / August / September** 57<sup>th</sup> & 58<sup>th</sup> held the front line for a further 59 days. 16 wounded, 19 killed. On the 19th August 57<sup>th</sup> conducted its first raid on German trenches (near Sugarloaf) since the battle. In position at 2228. Artillery barrage at 2230, enemy retaliation at 2231. Barrage stopped at 2240 and 57<sup>th</sup> rushed German trenches. At 0100 all fire ceased.
- Somme** *The Somme offensive, also known as the battle of the Somme, is the term given to series of battles fought between 1 July and 13 November 1916 along the Somme*

**Valley in France. It was the main Anglo-French offensive of 1916 and was originally planned as part of a wider strategy of attacking Germany simultaneously on the Western and Eastern Fronts, with the aim of destroying Germany's reserves of manpower. The massive German attack launched on the French fortress of Verdun on 21 February 1916 significantly reduced the French contribution, and the Somme offensive was partly intended to divert the German forces from Verdun.**

**The initial day of the offensive, 1 July 1916, remains the most costly day in the history of the British army. It suffered almost 60,000 casualties, a third of whom were killed, and the name "Somme" has become synonymous with slaughter. The attack on 1 July, and the operations that followed, were undermined by a failure to appreciate the strength of the German defences, and the relative ineffectiveness of the British artillery against them, and a lack of confidence in the abilities of Britain's volunteer army, which meant there was a distinct lack of imagination or innovation in the tactics employed.**

**When exhaustion, and the cloying mud of a particularly wet autumn, caused the offensive to be abandoned in November, the allied forces had managed to advance only 12 kilometres. The strategy of attrition upon which the offensive was founded proved a double-edged sword. It had resulted in around 500,000 German casualties, and the German army never recovered from its losses of experienced junior officers and NCOs on the Somme; however, this had come at a cost of 420,000 British and Dominion, and 200,000 French casualties. The offensive destroyed Britain's mass volunteer army, and for the rest of the war it would be reliant upon conscription for reinforcements**

**The major contribution of Australian troops to the Somme offensive was in the fighting around Pozieres and Mouquet Farm between 23 July and 3 September. Australian troops also launched several ill-conceived and ultimately futile attacks around Flers in November. Like their British allies, participation on the Somme put the first strain on Australia's voluntary recruitment system, and led to the first unsuccessful referendum to introduce conscription.**

<b>14 October 1916</b>	<b>At 0825, 57th Battalion moved in column on the road to Estaires, arriving at 1115. Moved (by train?) to Dernancourt.</b>
<b>28 October</b>	<b>57th took over the front. Significant epidemic of 'Trench Feet'</b>
<b>First week in Nov</b>	<b>Action near Butte de Warlancourt. March out of the line took six hours over a distance of 2 ½ miles.</b>
<b>17 November</b>	<b>57th moved back to Dernancourt in London Double Decker buses and thence to Montauban Camp. All men under cover in crowded huts.</b>
<b>28 November</b>	<b>At Switch Trench</b>
<b>1 December</b>	<b>WE Wilson Admitted to hospital at Etaples with skin disease (Exzema)</b>
<b>Early December</b>	<b>Because of casualties the 5th Division (57, 58, 59, 60 Battalions) was not scheduled for front line duty until mid-January. 15th Brigade had been working on Nicholson's Tunnel from near Deville Wood. 57th were working on Railway at Decauville. Organized a drying shed for Battallion's socks. This was one of the harshest winters in living memory.</b>

**29 December** **WE Wilson Discharged from hospital to Base Depot at Hardelot-Plage**

**4 January** **WE Wilson transferred to No 1 Training Camp at Etaples as Instructor**

### **Bullecourt**

*As part of the final throes of the British Army's Arras offensive, a renewed attempt was made to secure the fortified village of Bullecourt in the period 3-17 May. The Australian 2nd Division (5th and 6th Brigades) and the British 62nd Division attacked at 3.45 am on 3 May 1917. The Australians penetrated the German line but met determined opposition that frustrated the envelopment plan. Drawing more and more forces in, renewed efforts on 7 May succeeded in linking British and Australian forces, but inspired a series of ferocious and costly German counter-attacks over the next week and a half. Following the repulse of the counter-attack of 15 May, the Germans withdrew from the remnants of the village. Although the locality was of little or no strategic importance, the actions were nevertheless extremely costly: AIF casualties totaled 7,482 from three Australian Divisions*

14 March Positioned in Possum Trench near Le Barque

23 March Moving to Beaumetz (now deserted by Germans). Farm captured by 57th on 23rd, lost the next day and retaken later on 26th. - last house beyond Beaumetz and last refuge of Germans -60 killed.

28 March In Fremicourt billeted in ruined house.

29 March In Villers-au-Flos

14 April 57th standing ready to act in defense of newly taken Lagnicourt but was not needed.

20 April 57th moved back to Mametz. Found it in very dirty condition. All companies engaged in camp cleaning.

3 May Second battle of Bullecourt begun (First battle was over 10 / 11 April - 4th & 12th Brigades suffered heavy losses and 1200 taken prisoner).

8th May 15th Brigade entrained for Beunatre, 2 miles north of Bapaume. Joined by other Brigades, the whole Division moved north to a front of some 6000 yards. 15th Brigade taking left sector nearest Bullecourt Village. Highly effective German artillery using high explosive, shrapnel and gas.

11 - 12 May 57th underwent a severe bombardment. 7 killed, 34 wounded. 57th and 60th not involved in final assault on Bullecourt. By May 20, the British front was beyond the village and on May 26, 5th Division handed over to British Army. The two battles of Bullecourt cost the Australians a total of 10,000 men.

26 May 57th moved back to Beugny for rest. Later to La Belle Hotesse

**2 June** **WE Wilson transferred to Base Depot**

**31 July** **WE Wilson rejoined 57 Battalion**

**20 August** **WE Wilson sent to England on leave**

**2 September** **WE Wilson returns to 57 Battalion**

### **Polygon Wood**

*The battle of Polygon Wood was the ANZAC component of a larger British and dominion operation staged as part of the third battle of Ypres. This operation was the second of the "Plummer battles", a series of well planned, limited advances*

**supported by large volumes of artillery, masterminded by the British general Herbert Plummer. The name "Polygon Wood" derived from a young plantation forest that lay along ANZAC's axis of advance.**

**Scheduled to begin on 26 September 1917, the attack was almost derailed by a German attack on the British X Corps to the south of ANZAC. A day earlier, Australian troops of the 15th Brigade, preparing for their attack, took part in fending off the Germans; however, their advance the next day began with continuing uncertainty as to the security of their flank.**

**The British and dominion advance began on schedule at 5.50 am on the 26th, with the 4th and 5th Divisions, on the left and right respectively, taking the lead in the ANZAC sector. The infantry advanced behind a heavy artillery barrage - the noise of this was compared to a roaring bushfire - and they secured most of their objectives without difficulty. To the south, the 15th Brigade, which after its efforts the previous day had been reinforced by two battalions from the 8th, secured not only its own objectives but those allocated to the neighbouring 98th British Brigade. The Germans launched several counter-attacks but these were thwarted by the heavy defensive artillery barrages used to protect the infantry consolidating on their objectives; this was a feature of the Plummer battles. The battle cost 5,770 Australian casualties.**

<b>1<sup>st</sup> week in September</b>	<b>57<sup>th</sup> Battalion was positioned at La Belle Hotesse. Training activities included 15 minute gas drills working with box respirators. Exercises without troops by officers undertaken to plan how to deal with an enemy occupying a series of strong points rather than fixed lines. Battalion concert on September 4<sup>th</sup>. Practice exercises using different Battalions as enemy and others as attackers.</b>
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Week in September</b>	<b>Church parade on Sept 9, Inspection of Billets. Battalion strength = 1036. Enemy aircraft dropped four bombs killing four transport horses and 2 mules. 14 mile route march on Sept 10<sup>th</sup>. More training and exercises. Generally fine weather</b>
<b>13 September</b>	<b>Attack exercise carried out on a frontage of 1000 yards. Battalion arrived at assembly trenches at 0930 with companies moving forward to jumping off positions 150 yards apart. Up to the woods the advance was good, but hard to follow the barrage after the second objective. At the final objective the enemy counter attacked. Exercise stopped at 1315 and companies marched back to their billets. Battalion strength = 1027 (41 Officers, 1027 ORs).</b>
<b>Mid September</b>	<b>Kit inspections Two companies moved up north by bus to be attached to 2 Division for burying cable in the front line. Church Parades - C of E &amp; OP at 0930 with Battalion Band attending. RC's at 11.30 in Parish Church at Steenbecque. Medical Officer gave a lecture on foot care.</b>
<b>17 September</b>	<b>Battalion moved out of billets on Route March to Steenvorde Area. Arrived at 1200 and proceed to billeting area. Moved further to Belgium on 18<sup>th</sup>, arriving at Dominon Camp (near Rottingheist) at 1300.</b>
<b>20 September</b>	<b>C &amp; D Companies returned from work with 2 Division (2 ORs Killed, 15 wounded).</b>
<b>21 / 22 September</b>	<b>Planning conferences and training activities. Attack exercises conducted. Battalion moved to Chateau Segard area by route march.</b>
<b>23 September</b>	<b>Equipment checks. Voluntary church parades and preparations for moving forward. Moved by route march to Zouave Wood area.</b>
<b>24 / 25</b>	<b>Allied front line positioned at western edge of Polygon Wood. 58th Battalion</b>

- September** holding the front, 60th in shelters on road between Hooze and Clapham Junction and 57th in reserve back at Zouave Wood.
- 25 September** Before they could attack at the planned time, a significant German artillery barrage fell across 5th Division lines. 58th & British 33rd Battalions were attacked by best of Prussian Divisions. 58th held but 33rd fell back. 60th moved in support and 57th tried to move into 60th positions for support. Very accurate artillery fire caught the 57<sup>th</sup> as they moved through Glencourse Wood. 15 killed, 42 wounded - remainder made it to 60th position by following white tapes. Many men buried in shellfire - dead and alive. (Killed = 3 officers, ORs 12, Wounded 42, Shell Shock 6, Missing 10).
- 26 September** Main attack began at 0550. British army failed to hold their line and 57th were pushed back and forth in the battle. Carrying parties took ammunition to front to support 59<sup>th</sup> Battalion who had captured their objective. At 1830 an enemy barrage counter attack put fire down across the whole area. At 2300 57<sup>th</sup> ordered to reorganize and occupy the old front lines. Still necessary to ensure that parties carried supplies forward. (Killed 35, Wounded 42, Missing 6, Shell Shock 28).
- 26 September** **WE Wilson wounded in action - shell & shrapnel wounds to back and face**
- 27 September** Eventually 57th moved to Chateau Segard area without relief so all rations, water and ammunition that could be found were taken forward to two nearby 8<sup>h</sup> Brigade Battalions..
- 28 September** Clean up and recovery 5th Division Losses - 379 killed, 1512 wounded. (300 horses died). A party went back to Glencourt Wood and brought back the bodies of four officers killed on 25<sup>th</sup>. Men went through Divisional Baths and issued with a clean change of clothing, Weather was fine and warm.
- 30 September** **WE Wilson transferred to No 7 Casualty Depot at Buchy**
- Poelcappelle** *This battle was a broad-front assault, in the most difficult of waterlogged conditions, on the Passchendaele Ridge, centering on Poelcappelle village. An exhausting and only partly successful operation for British and Dominion forces.*
- October 8** On 8 October, 57<sup>th</sup> Battalion preparing to move up to the line. Left Dominion Camp at 1130 by bus arriving at billets in underground dugout at 1600 near Ypres. Hot meal served at 1730. Moved on 9 October to Halfway house. Accommodation was very bad here.
- Ypres - Passchendaele** *As a part of the continuing Third Battle of Ypres on the Western Front, Australian, New Zealand and British troops were involved in an unsuccessful attempt to seize the Passchendaele Ridge from the defending Germans on 12 October 1917. The vicious fighting took place in the most appalling of waterlogged conditions, which helped render the name Passchendaele a synonym for slaughter. The 3rd Australian Division's attempts to struggle forward to their objective with little artillery protection represented the last major Australian participation in the Third Battle of Ypres*
- 10 / 11 October** Work parties were tasked to lay duckboards and carry for the engineers (4 Officers, 250 ORs ) Other men spent time in improving sanitation at Halfway House. Some officers were involved in reconnoitering tracks in 4<sup>th</sup> Division areas.

- 12 October Battle of Passchendaele. 57<sup>th</sup> were involved in much the same duties as previous days. Received word at 1100 that 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Divisions had captured the Red Line objective.
- 13 October Left at 0800 to move up to support lines and take over from 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion. Hot meal at 1130. Picked up guides from 31 Battalion at rendezvous on Helles track at 1315. In place by 1530 with companies on the support ridge and Battalion HQ in a pillbox in Ronius Wood. Enemy shelling in the afternoon.
- 14 October Supplied carrying parties, completed duckboard works and worked on improving trenches in the support line.
- Late October 1918 Enemy shelled support trenches on 16 October - 4 casualties. 57<sup>th</sup> moved back to Anzac Ridge. For the next weeks, the Brigades changed roles every 5 days to defend various parts of the area - Anzac Ridge, Halfway House. They were under continuous bombardment and continually patrolled the front line.
- Mid November 1918 5th Division now 7 miles from Fromelles at Messines. This winter less severe than the last one at Fromelles. Never ending artillery barrages, Long periods at the front interspersed with rests back at camp
- January 1918 Mainly training activities. No training on Jan 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> because they were holidays. Weather was fine but cold. Snow fell on 3<sup>rd</sup>. General platoon training activities in musketry, PT and bayonet fighting. Route marches of up to 8 miles with the band accompanying.
- February 1918 57th moved to Neuve Eglise. Most men were in new camps by February 3rd.
- 2/2/18 WE Wilson Transferred from hospital to Base Depot at Le Havre**
- 6/2/18 WE Wilson rejoined 57 Battalion at Ancre**
- Early March 1918 57<sup>th</sup> Battalion was In front line east of Messines. Mostly patrolling & conducting raids on German trenches.
- 21 March By mid-July Germany had retaken large sections of France and Flanders - all the regions where the 15th Brigade had previously fought.
- 27 March 5th Division moved to Corbie to help deal with German advance. (Train from Caestre to Doullens then march to Corbie).
- Ancre** *57<sup>th</sup> Battalion took part in this defensive operation mounted in the face of the first of the German "Spring Offensives", in the Picardie sector as part of their involvement in the confused fighting along the line of the River Ancre, which helped slow the German advance on Amiens on 5<sup>th</sup> April 1918*
- 5 April Had been in position in the trenches for some days and were located on the outskirts of the villages of Fouilly and Hamelet. German bombardment killed 8, 6 missing, 26 wounded.
- Villers Bretonneux** *After the March offensive was launched, German forces continued to push on to Villers-Bretonneux. Instructed to halt this advance, and to replace the badly divided and depleted British forces, Australian troops were commanded to take position and to protect the vital areas of Dernancourt and Villers-Bretonneux from German capture.*
- 7 April Fine, but dull weather. A prisoner was caught in front line during a patrol and sent

back to Brigade HQ. He was 20 years of age and looked well. He had been in the line for 8 days and as due to be relieved in three days time. Normal amount of enemy shelling prevailed.

- 8 April** Active shelling in the morning. 57<sup>th</sup> Battalion moved out to billets in Corbie. Every man had a bath and good rest
- 11 April** CO presided over a court-martial at Brigade Headquarters. Five men were tried from 57<sup>th</sup> Battalion. Relieved by 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion and moved to La Neuville and occupied the reserve line.
- 14 April** Battalion stood to at 0445 in anticipation of German attack. Artillery provided a very heavy bombardment of expected points of enemy assembly. No attack eventuated. Spent the next few days working on trenches to complete strong points. Active enemy shelling including a lot of gas shells on 17 April.
- 18 April** Raining. Working on a new right flank trench to cover Bois D'Abbe.
- 20 April** Fine and Warm. Heavily shelled with gas shells. Five casualties. Aircraft active on both sides.
- 21 April** Constant shelling and harassing fire. Attack expected and stood to at 0500. Stood down at 0535.
- 23 April** Indications from Prisoner that Villers Brettoneux is to be attacked.
- 24 April** Battallion Stood to at 0400. Enemy shelling during the night. Received word at 0730 that enemy was attacking Villers Brettoneux. Orders received for the recapture of Villers Brettoneux with zero hour at 2200. 57th moved along the Folly - Cachy Road to Abbe Wood in single file at 2200. Moved into position up the slopes of Hill 104.
- 25 April** The town was surrounded by 0300, mostly before the enemy knew it. 57th pushed to western extremities of the town fighting with great 'dash and spirit'. As daylight appeared the northern end of town was secure and 57th then moved to the eastern end. 600 prisoners taken by the Brigade. (57<sup>th</sup> had 8 killed, 63 wounded).
- 26 April** Active patrolling during the night. Many war trophies were collected. Battalion was relieved from positions on Villers Brettoneux - Warfusse Evancourt Road by 13<sup>th</sup> Brigade. Relief completed by 0200 and 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion moved back with 59<sup>th</sup> Battalion north west of Villers Brettoneux.
- 27 April** Holding the line between 59th and 60th positions. Two enemy artillery barrages were put down during the day and active enemy machine gunning occurred at night
- 29 April** Battalion used the baths at Daours. No work was carried out during the day. Clean underclothing issued. Recommendations for honours and awards were submitted to the Brigade HQ
- May** The 57<sup>th</sup> Battalion were In reserve at Aubigny
- June** During the first two weeks of June 57<sup>th</sup> Battalion were spent at rest in Cardonette area.
- 4 July** Battle of Hamel - Ville-su-Ancre . Billets in St Gratien
- Amiens** *The Battle of Amiens was the crucial Allied breakthrough counter-offensive,*



*launched on the Western Front around Amiens, in the Somme sector. An "all arms battle", the Allies made effective use of infantry, artillery tanks and aircraft, which led to an unprecedented advance (about 12 kilometres by early afternoon of the first day) and vast numbers of German prisoners*

- 1 August** Training and planning for operation with French and Canadians on a wide front of 11 miles. The first time that tanks, signals artillery and infantry were successfully combined in operations.
- 2 August** Moved to near Villers Brettoneux. Exercises in working with tanks. Enemy shelled Amiens and its surrounds with large calibre naval guns. No damage in 57<sup>th</sup> area. Boot inspection with Battalion boot maker repairing defects.
- 3 August** Planning for the attack on Amiens. CO held a conference issuing instructions and details of the Battalion's plans for the attack.
- 4 August** 57<sup>th</sup> moved to new billets at the Rivery Hospice. Men reported to be quite comfortable there.
- 5 August** CO briefed the men and told them that this would be one of the most interesting battles in the entire war with the first ever combined use of tanks, aircraft, infantry and artillery. He hoped that the Battalion would be positioned well. He warned anyone going AWOL that they would be paraded and asked to explain and that he hoped that no one would desert their comrades at such a time. The Battalion left their billets at 1900, encountering much traffic on the Amiens - Villers Brettoneux Road which caused many delays.
- 6 August** The 57<sup>th</sup> reached their destination at the Amiens railway embankment at 0055. Weather was dull but fine. No shelters were available and men made do with waterproof sheets. Blankets were issued to men from supply wagons that had traveled in advance of the Battalion. Cookers came up at 0300 and a hot meal was served at 0330. Rain showers during the day made things uncomfortable. Enemy shelled positions and caused a few casualties.
- 7 August** Fine and warm weather. Men were issued with iron rations, extra water bottles, signal lights and tools. The men slept and rested during the day in their assembly positions. A special hot meal was provided at 1800.
- 8 August** At 0200 57<sup>th</sup> Battalion moved to taped positions for assembly. Battalion strength was 27 officers and 617 Other Ranks.
- A mass of assembled Allied forces were planned to launch this offensive to push through the German front lines to victory. It also involved the 1st French and 4th British armies, but was led by combined Australian and Canadian forces. There was a mist, which helped the element of surprise, and through it moved the joint forces of a line of tanks and infantry. The crucial work of the heavy artillery held off fire from German guns, so that troops could get across the land. By 0330 there was brisk fighting. Enemy maintained harassing fire until 1400.
- Setting out from the positions of Villers-Brettonneux and Hamel, the Australian troops in two hours had accomplished all their objectives, and the Canadian troops that had begun the attack alongside them had advanced several kilometres. In just over 3 hours, the enemy's front line had been overrun.
- The 15<sup>th</sup> Brigade pushed hard - quickly past Bayonvillers and were relieved of duties after 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Division advanced though 57<sup>th</sup> Battalions lines at 1320.

**8 August** **WE Wilson wounded in Action - Gunshot wound to right buttock. Admitted to 83 Ambulance at Boulogne**

**9 August** From 9 - 11 August, although the Allies continued to advance with Australians maintaining the lead, there were heavier losses for fewer gains in ground, there were fewer tanks to use as protection, and German forces regrouped and began to advance into other areas. 57<sup>th</sup> probed Amien defenses. With hand to hand fighting.

**10 August** 5th Division retires to Vecquemont for a few days out of the line. (57<sup>th</sup> had 28 killed, 104 wounded = ¼ of Battalion strength.).

**13 August** **WE Wilson transferred to hospital - Canterbury, England**

**Peronne & Mont St Quentin** *As part of the Allied counter offensives on the Western Front in the late summer of 1918, Australian troops in the stormed, seized and held the key height of Mont St Quentin (overlooking Peronne), a pivotal German defensive position on the line of the Somme.*

**28 August 1918** 15th Brigade back at Vaire-sous-Corbie on the Somme, expecting the next action. The 57<sup>th</sup> Battalion proceeded to Fourancourt and reached Estress at 2130. Located in old trenches they were bombed by their own planes.

**29 August** Advanced after retreating enemy. Attack on Brie cancelled.

**30 August** Moved North, crossing Somme between Peronne and Eterpigny. Enemy held ground protected by swamps

**31 August.** Appear to be stopped in current position - progress held up by marshy / swamp ground.

**1 September** Still trying to get over marshes. Town of Peronne taken by other units.

**2 September** 57th holding by afternoon) two fronts - eastern and southern ramparts of Peronne. Tired from long marching, gas attacks and lack of sleep.

**27 September** 57th marched to Bouchy and then to Roisel and Templeux. This places 15th Brigade on Hindenberg line where retreating German army was taking refuge.

**29 September** At Bellicourt

**1 October** Attack across wide open country with objective of capturing village of Estrees.

**Hindenberg Line** *Originally built to connect the Somme and Scheldt Rivers, the Germans utilised the St Quentin Canal as an additional defensive barrier forward of the Hindenberg Line. East of Peronne the canal ran through a tunnel for approximately six kilometres between Bellicourt and Venhuille. As this "bridge" over the canal formed an obvious point at which to attack the Hindenburg Line it was heavily defended.*

*Fearing an attack across the canal would be costly, Lieutenant General Monash decided to assault over the top of the tunnel. With the Australian Corps exhausted from almost continuous operations since 8 August, Monash had only two divisions in a reasonable state for combat - the 3rd and 5th - and was thus reinforced with the 27th and 30th United States Divisions. The plan was for the numerically superior Americans to breach the Hindenburg Line above the tunnel, and another defensive line a kilometre to the rear. The Australians would then pass through and assault the Beaufort Line, another four kilometres back. The attack would be supported by 90 tanks and heavy artillery concentrations.*

***The inexperience of the Americans was telling. An operation launched to secure the start line on 27 September 1918 was unsuccessful due to their failure to properly clear dugouts and trenches. The same mistakes were repeated by the 27th Division when the actual attack was launched two days later. The 3rd Australian Division, trying to advance to its own start line, became embroiled in the fight for the Americans' first objective. With all of the tanks destroyed or disabled, and the uncertain position of the forward troops preventing the use of artillery, the battle degenerated into a struggle for individual strong points, fought with bombs, bayonets and Lewis guns, that lasted for another three days. The 30th American Division, attacking further to the south, was more successful, enabling the 5th Australian Division to pass through and capture the heavily fortified village of Bellicourt. Their progress, however, was hampered by the lack of it in the north.***

***Even further south the British 9th Corps had managed to cross the canal, breach the Hindenburg Line, and begin advancing upon the Bearevoir Line. This action threatened to outflank the positions along the tunnel, resulting in a gradual German withdrawal that began on the night of 30 September. By 2 October a gap of approximately 17 kilometres had been opened in the Hindenburg Line. The operation had cost the 3rd and 5th Australian Divisions 2,577 casualties.***

***The battalion withdrew to rest on 2 October 1918 and was still doing so when the war ended. The battalion disbanded in March 1919.***

- 21 October**      **WE Wilson discharged from Hospital - England**
- 28 October**      **WE Wilson admitted to hospital - Influenza - England**
- 2 March 1919**    **WE Wilson returned to Australia**
- 2 July 1919**     **WE Wilson discharged from Army - Australia**
- 1920**            **WE Wilson marries Rhesa Annie Pitt (born 1897)**
- 19 September**   **WE Wilson died - buried at Box Hill Cemetery**
- 1956**