

**St. Bartholomew's Cemetery,
Exeter, Kent
War Grave**



Lest We Forget

World War 1



2464 CORPORAL

J. H. WILSON

20TH BN. AUSTRALIAN INF.

20TH SEPTEMBER, 1917 Age 26

John Harold WILSON

John Harold Wilson was born around end of 1892 at Exeter, Devon, England to parents Frank Donald and Laura Wilson (nee Reece). A birth for John Harold Wilson was registered in the March quarter 1893 in the district of Exeter.

The 1901 England Census recorded Harold J. Wilson as an 8 year old, living with his family at 12 Blackall Road, Exeter, Devon, England. His parents were listed as Frank D. Wilson (Timber Merchant (Employer), aged 43, born Exeter, Devon) & Laura Wilson (aged 42, born Bow, London). Harold J. Wilson was the youngest of three children listed on this Census – Frank T. Wilson (Timber Merchants Clerk, aged 15, born Exeter, Devon), Ernest L. Wilson (aged 13, born Exeter, Devon) then Harold. Also listed were Annie Parker (Cook, Domestic Servant, aged 20) & Rose Lamacroft (Parlourmaid, aged 16).

John Harold Wilson attended St. Bees College, Cumberland.

The 1911 England Census recorded Harold Wilson as an 18 year old, Farm Pupil boarding with The Gent Family at Wolfhall, Burbage, Marlborough, Wiltshire, England in an 8 roomed dwelling. The Gent family consisted of Frederick Gent (Farmer, aged 45, born Ash Priors, Somerset), his wife Ethel Gent (aged 41, born Beckingson, Somerset) & their 3 children – Hilda Gent (At School, aged 15, born Dyrham, Gloucestershire), Beatrice Gent (At School, aged 12, born Dyrham, Gloucestershire) & George Gent (At School, aged 7, born Chiseldon, Wiltshire).

John Harold Wilson came to Australia when he was 19 years old, according to information provided by his father, Frank Donald, Wilson, for the Roll of Honour.

John Harold Wilson was a 23 year old, single, Farmer from "Thornton" Kihilla Road, Auburn, NSW when he enlisted at Liverpool, NSW on 20th July, 1915 with the 20th Infantry Battalion, 5th Reinforcements of the Australian Imperial Force (A.I.F.). His service number was 2464 & his religion was Church of England. His next of kin was listed as his father – Mr F. D. Wilson, of Pleinmount, Heavitree Road, Exeter, Devonshire, England. John Harold Wilson state don his Attestation Papers that he had served 2 ½ years with Cadets in England.

Private John Harold Wilson was posted to Camp with 20th Battalion, 5th Reinforcements.

Private John Harold Wilson embarked from Sydney on HMAT *Ballarat* (A70) on 6th September, 1915.

Private John Harold Wilson was taken on strength with "D" Company of 20th Battalion from 5th Reinforcements at Tel-el-Kebir on 19th January, 1916.

Private John Harold Wilson embarked from Alexandria on H.M.T. *Ingoma* on 18th March, 1916 & disembarked at Marseilles, France on 25th March, 1916.

Private John Harold Wilson was written up for an Offence while in France on 30th April, 1916 – "Absent without leave & going from place of parade appointed by C.O. before being relieved." He was awarded 14 days Field Punishment No. 2.

Private John Harold Wilson was admitted to 5th Field Ambulance on 10th May, 1916 then transferred to 2nd A. D.R. Station for Dental on 11th May, 1916. He was discharged to his Unit on 19th May, 1916.

Private John Harold Wilson was wounded in action on 28th June, 1916. He was admitted to 7th Australian Field Ambulance with gunshot wounds to right buttock then transferred to 7th Casualty Clearing Station on 28th June, 1916. Pte Wilson was admitted to 2nd Canadian Stationary Hospital at Le Touquet on 28th June, 1916 & embarked for England from Boulogne on Hospital Ship *St Denis* on 30th June, 1916.

War Diary – 20th Battalion:

Bois Grenier – 28th June, 1916

In Billets. Day and night normal. 1 O/R wounded.

(War Diary information from the Australian War Memorial)

Private John Harold Wilson was admitted to 1st Northern General Hospital, Newcastle-on-Tyne, England on 1st July, 1916 with gunshot wounds to thigh (slight). Pte Wilson was transferred & admitted to No. 1 Australian Auxiliary Hospital, Harefield from 1st Northern General Hospital on 12th July, 1916 with gunshot wounds to right hip.

Private John Harold Wilson was discharged from No. 1 Australian Auxiliary Hospital to No. 1 Command Depot, Perham Downs, Wiltshire on 24th July, 1916. He was medically classified as Class A – Fit for Active Service.

Private John Harold Wilson proceeded overseas to France from 5th Training Battalion on 16th September, 1916. He was marched in from England on 17th September, 1916 to 2nd A.D.B.D. (Australian Divisional Base Depot) at Etaples, France.

Private John Harold Wilson rejoined his Battalion in the field in France from being wounded on 2nd October, 1916.

Private John Harold Wilson was promoted to Corporal on 3rd May, 1917 to complete establishment.

Corporal John Harold Wilson was sent to 5th Australian Field Ambulance in France on 13th August, 1917 – P.U.O. (Pyrexia (fever) of Unknown Origin). He rejoined his Battalion in the field on 16th August, 1917.

Corporal John Harold Wilson was killed in action on 20th September, 1917 in Belgium. According to information provided by his father, Frank Donald, Wilson, for the Roll of Honour, his son; Corporal John Harold Wilson was *“killed in action leading his company. By Machine Gun bullets - ____ a German Shell Hole. Buried next day by his Chaplain – on the edge of Polygon Wood – Grave __ destroyed.”*

War Diary – 20th Battalion:

Westhoek Ridge – 20th September, 1917

The battalion attacked and took its objective. Repelled a counter attack.

(War Diary information from the Australian War Memorial)

20th Battalion

The 20th Battalion was raised at Liverpool in New South Wales in March 1915 as part of the 5th Brigade.

After further training in Egypt, the 20th Battalion proceeded to France. It entered the trenches of the Western Front for the first time in April 1916 and in the following month had the dubious honour of being the first Australian battalion to be raided by the Germans. The 20th took part in its first major offensive around Pozieres between late July and the end of August 1916. After a spell in a quieter sector of the front in Belgium, the 2nd Division, which included the 5th Brigade, came south again in October. The 20th Battalion provided reinforcements for the attack near Flers between 14 and 16 November, launched in conditions that Charles Bean described as the worst ever encountered by the A.I.F.

In 1917, the 20th was involved in the follow-up of German forces after their retreat to the Hindenburg Line, and was one of four battalions to defeat a counter-stroke by a German force, almost five times as strong, at Lagnicourt. The Battalion took part in three major battles before the year was out, second Bullecourt (3-4 May) in France, and Menin Road (20-22 September) and Poelcappelle (9-10 October) in Belgium.

(Battalion information from the Australian War Memorial)

Corporal John Harold Wilson was remembered on the Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial, Belgium – Bay 23 as he has no known grave. His death is still acknowledged by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

The Red Cross Wounded & Missing file for Corporal John Harold Wilson contains a request from the Red Cross on behalf his father, Mr Frank D. Wilson, Exeter, England to obtain the details regarding his son's death. Several replies were received by the Red Cross.

- *"Wilson was in D. Coy. and was killed by machine gun bullet at Ypres, Menin Road I was close by about 20 yards away and saw his body after he was killed, but cannot say anything as to burial. I was knocked myself that day".* Informant – F.R. Randell 6408, 20th Battn. C. Coy. Westham.
- *"I saw him killed by a bullet up in the front lines at West Hoek Ridge. he was buried by a party from the company where he fell, I only knew him in the company, and he came over with the 4th Reinforcements from N.S.Wales."* Witness Elliott, W. M. Pte. No. 6091 "D" Coy. 20th Battalion.
- *"Wilson was a full Cpl in D. Coy. On the night of Sept. 20th while on patrol in front of Ypres he attempted to rush a machine gun emplacement single-handed with his bayonet. I was with another party about 40 yards away. He got right up to the gun before he fell absolutely riddled with bullets, I saw his body the next morning when we occupied the ground. We were relieved that day by the 19th A.I.F. who would have buried all the bodies."* Informant – Pte P. M. Sullivan, 4522 20th A.I.F. C. Coy.
- *"Wilson was a Cpl in my platoon (D. XIII) and was killed at Polygon Wood on Sept. 20th. We were going through the wood and were held up by a machine gun in a pill box. Wilson said he'd go and fix it up and went off to do it, and I saw no more of him, but when I asked Mr Cameron the platoon officer about him afterwards he told me he had seen him dead, riddled with M.G. bullets. Wilson's people live in England somewhere I believe."* Informant – Pte W. F. Moore, 1523 D. XIII, 14 Stat. Hosp. Boulogne.
- *"I saw Wilson killed outright, being riddled with M.G. bullets, at the wood in front of Anzac House, but I can't say if he was buried or not, as I was wounded by the same gun just afterwards and was evacuated. He was a mate of mine and in the same Coy."* Informant – Cpl R. Bonner, 5617, 20th Battn. D. Coy. Hut 47, Westham.
- *"I knew Wilson well; he was in "D" Company, XIII Platoon with me. He was called "Jess" and was the only Corporal of that name in "D" Company. He was in charge of the Bombers and was a 5th Reinforcement. He was killed on the 20.9.1917 at Menin Road, the same day as I was wounded. I did not see it happen but was told about it by Sergeant F. Carson of "D" Coy. XVI Platoon, who told me he saw Wilson killed outright by machine gun fire in the Menin Road battle. Sergeant Carson was here lately but lives in Melbourne. Carson told me this when on "Kanowna" on our way back to Australia. Carson knew Wilson well and was certain of what he told me."* Informant – Private T. Ledden, 4178, 20th Battalion "D" Company, XIII Platoon. No. 4 Australian General Hospital, Randwick.

John Harold Wilson requested in his Will, dated 27th July, 1917, that all his real & personal estate he bequeathed to his father – Mr Frank Donald Wilson, of "Pleinmont", Heavitree Rd., Exeter, England. A previous Will dated 1st February, 1917 had stated that the whole of his property & effects be left to Mr F. D. Wilson, of "Pleinmont", Heavitree Rd., Exeter, Devonshire & also in the event of his death "I leave £20 & my deferred pay to Miss Margaret Gilholme of "Thornton" Kilhilla Rd, Auburn, NSW, Australia." Miss Maggie Gilholme wrote to Base Records on 9th December, 1917 enquiring about a Will left by the late Cpl. J. H. Wilson. Base Records, at the time of replying, had no notification of a Will but stated if it was in his Pay Book it would be despatched to them from the Authorities at the Front.

Corporal John Harold Wilson was entitled to 1914/15 Star, British War Medal & the Victory Medal. A Memorial Scroll & Memorial Plaque were also sent to Cpl. Wilson's father in England – Mr F. D. Wilson, as the closest next-of-kin. (Scroll & Plaque sent September, 1922).

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission lists Corporal John Harold Wilson – service number 2464, aged 26, of 20th Battalion Australian Infantry. He was the son of Frank Donald and Laura Wilson, of "Pleinmont", Heavitree Rd., Exeter, England. Native of Exeter.

Corporal J. H. Wilson is commemorated on the Roll of Honour, located in the Hall of Memory Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Australia on Panel 92.



Roll Of Honour WW1 Australian War Memorial Canberra, Australia

(37 pages of Corporal John Harold Wilson's Service records are available for On Line viewing at National Archives of Australia website).

Information obtained from the CWGC, Australian War Memorial (Roll of Honour, First World War Embarkation Roll, Red Cross Wounded & Missing) & National Archives



Newspaper Notices

Mr F. Donald Wilson, of Heavitree-road, Exeter, has received a very kind letter from Captain Donald, officer commanding the Company in which his son, Corporal Harold Wilson, was serving when he met his death on the field. Captain Donald says: "Corpl. Wilson was killed while attacking an enemy strong point. Death was instantaneous by machine-gun fire. He was buried by the Battalion Chaplain. He was a gallant soldier, and inspired all those who came in contact with him, and his loss will be felt by us all, His name is added to a long list of gallant fellows who have made the supreme sacrifice that those whom they love may live."

(Exeter and Plymouth Gazette, Exeter, Devon, England – 5 October, 1917)

Death of Corpl. J. Harold Wilson of Exeter

Official information has been received by Mr F. Donald Wilson, of Pleimont, Heavitree-road, Exeter, of the death in action in France last month, of his youngest son, Corporal J. Harold Wilson, of the Australian Expeditionary Force. Six years ago, at the age of 19, young Wilson left Exeter and proceeded to New South Wales, where he went in for farming. On the outbreak of war he immediately joined the Australian Expeditionary Force. Fifteen months ago his father met him for the first time after his first leaving home, and he was then called to his son's sick bed in a Newcastle hospital, where he was lying severely wounded. Returning to the front after recovery, his last duty was to

take part in the British advance on September 20th last, and he was killed by machine-gun fire while taking an enemy strong point on September 20th. "Death was," his commanding officer writes, "instantaneous. He was a gallant soldier, and inspired all those who came in contact with him, and his loss will be felt by us all, His name is to be added to a long list of gallant fellows who have made the supreme sacrifice that those whom they love may live." Mr Wilson has also received a very touching note from a comrade of his son, one who was wounded a few hours after Corporal Wilson was killed. The writer is a lance-corporal, His letter runs: "I am writing this note at a venture. I am not sure of your address, nor am I sure that my conclusions are correct. Do you recognise the following address as being that of your son: Corporal Wilson – Batt., Australian ---- Brigade, B.E.F. ? I regret to say that he has been killed in action and I thought I would let you know, as I was at his burial. He was buried on the 22nd September and I got wounded about six hours later. It is not a serious wound, by any means."

(*Western Times*, Exeter, Devon, England – 8 October, 1917)

AUSTRALIAN CASUALTIES

345th LIST

NEW SOUTH WALES

KILLED

Cpl. JOHN HAROLD WILSON, England 20/9/17

(*The Sydney Morning Herald*, NSW – 25 October, 1917)

Corporal John Harold Wilson is also named on his parents' headstone in St. Bartholomew's Cemetery, Exeter, Devon, England.



St. Bartholomew's Cemetery, Exeter (Photo by julia&keld)



(Photo courtesy of Alan Taylor)

Corporal J. Harold Wilson (A.F.)

Son Of F. Donald Wilson And Of The Above

Killed In Action In France Sepr 20th 1917

Corporal John Harold Wilson is remembered on the Menin Gate Memorial, Ypres, Belgium – Bay 23 as he has no known grave.

Menin Gate Memorial, Ypres, Belgium

The Menin Gate is one of four memorials to the missing in Belgian Flanders which cover the area known as the Ypres Salient. Broadly speaking, the Salient stretched from Langemarck in the north to the northern edge in Ploegsteert Wood in the south, but it varied in area and shape throughout the war.

The Salient was formed during the First Battle of Ypres in October and November 1914, when a small British Expeditionary Force succeeded in securing the town before the onset of winter, pushing the German forces back to the Passchendaele Ridge. The Second Battle of Ypres began in April 1915 when the Germans released poison gas into the Allied lines north of Ypres. This was the first time gas had been used by either side and the violence of the attack forced an Allied withdrawal and a shortening of the line of defence.

There was little more significant activity on this front until 1917, when in the Third Battle of Ypres an offensive was mounted by Commonwealth forces to divert German attention from a weakened French front further south. The initial attempt in June to dislodge the Germans from the Messines Ridge was a complete success, but the main assault north-eastward, which began at the end of July, quickly became a dogged struggle against determined opposition and the rapidly deteriorating weather. The campaign finally came to a close in November with the capture of Passchendaele.

The German offensive of March 1918 met with some initial success, but was eventually checked and repulsed in a combined effort by the Allies in September.

The battles of the Ypres Salient claimed many lives on both sides and it quickly became clear that the commemoration of members of the Commonwealth forces with no known grave would have to be divided between several different sites.

The site of the Menin Gate was chosen because of the hundreds of thousands of men who passed through it on their way to the battlefields. It commemorates casualties from the forces of Australia, Canada, India, South Africa and United Kingdom who died in the Salient. In the case of United Kingdom casualties, only those prior 16 August 1917 (with some exceptions). United Kingdom and New Zealand servicemen who died after that date are named on the memorial at Tyne Cot, a site which marks the furthest point reached by Commonwealth forces in Belgium until nearly the end of the war. New Zealand casualties that died prior to 16 August 1917 are commemorated on memorials at Buttes New British Cemetery and Messines Ridge British Cemetery.

The Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial now bears the names of more than 54,000 officers and men whose graves are not known. Panel Numbers quoted at the end of each entry relate to the panels dedicated to the Regiment with which the casualty served. In some instances, where a casualty is recorded as attached to another Regiment, his name may appear within their Regimental Panels.

(Information & Photos from CWGC)



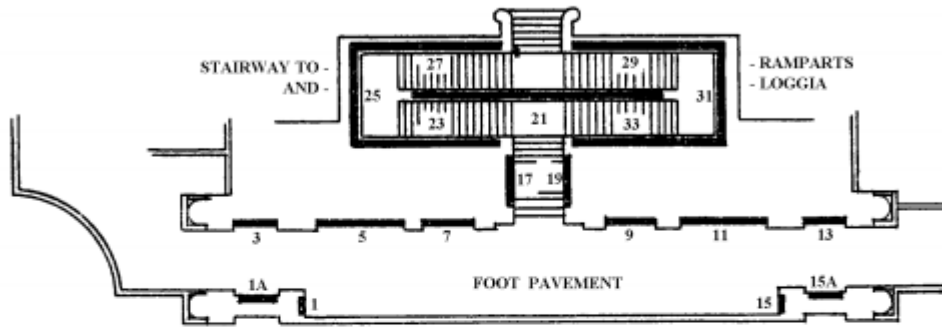
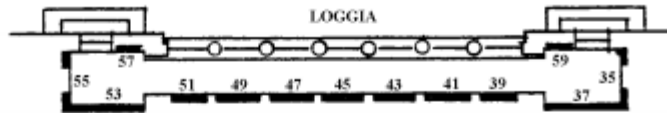


Menin Gate Memorial (above – At Night; below - the names on the Panels)





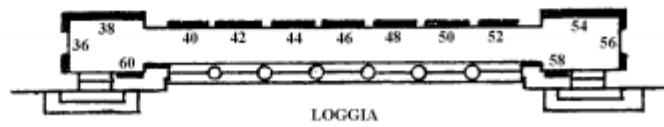
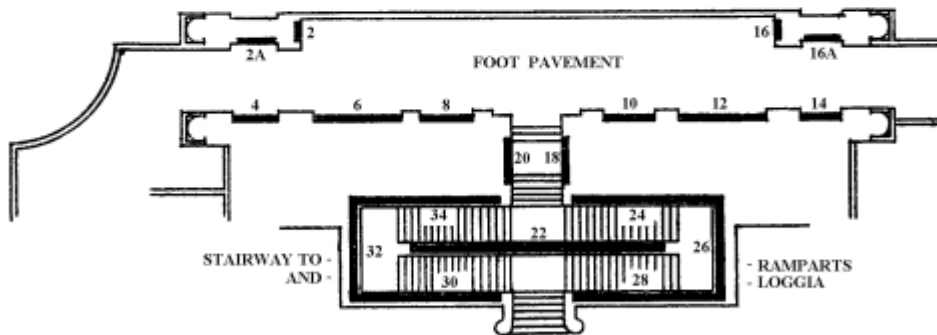
RAMPARTS



YPRES (IEPER)

ROADWAY THROUGH
MAIN HALL

MENIN



RAMPARTS

LAYOUT OF THE YPRES (MENIN GATE) MEMORIAL PANELS