

A SOLDIER'S STORY



Service No.: 1950
Name: William Henry LE BRUN
Nickname: Bill



Medals and Decorations

British War Medal
Victory Medal

Rank: Private
Service: Army
Enlisted: 3 Mar 1916
KIA: 11 Apr 1917

Bill was born at Port Lincoln (SA) on 8 Jan 1897 to Joseph Frederick Le Brun and Mary Le Brun (nee Murray). There were 7 children in the family, 6 boys and a girl, of which he was the fourth eldest. His father was a farm worker at Tallala Station near Louth Bay.

It is thought that he undertook his schooling at the Whites River School, near Louth Bay. On the completion of schooling he worked as a farm labourer, also on Tallala Station, until his enlistment in the Army in 1916.

On enlistment he was posted to 2nd Depot Battalion (Bn) at Mitcham for a period of 12 weeks to complete basic training, in the middle of which he contracted measles and was hospitalised for two weeks. On release from hospital he was transferred to 3rd Reinforcements/48th Battalion (Bn) and on 12 Aug 1916 embarked at Adelaide aboard HMAT "*Ballarat*" bound for Plymouth (UK), arriving on 30 Sep 1916. After a further period of training in the UK he embarked aboard the "*Princess Victoria*" on 20 Nov 1916, bound for Etaples (France) and was taken on strength by his unit.

Bill was reported missing in action (MIA) on 11 Apr 1917. A Court of Enquiry finding handed down on 29 Dec 1917 determined that he had actually been killed in action (KIA) on the date he had been listed as MIA. This finding was based to a large degree on evidence given by one of his trench mates.

A summary of the action in which Bill was killed is as follows: "The Australian attack was to be made east of Bullecourt, through barbed wire entanglements and into the trenches of the Hindenburg Line. The wire would be broken by a new weapon (tanks) rather than the conventional artillery wire-cutting bombardment which usually alerted the enemy to the fact that an attack was imminent. The attack was initially scheduled for dawn on 10 April but the tanks, because of a blizzard, failed to appear.

The next day (11 Apr) the attack battalions – the 48th Bn and the 46th Bn – reassembled in the fields. Once again, the tanks failed to appear, and when one finally did, the Australians had already commenced their advance towards the wire of the Hindenburg Line unaided by anything but their own determination to get through. By 0530 the 46th Bn, despite heavy casualties, had broken through the wire and was in the first line of German trenches known as OG1. Coming behind the 46th, the 48th fought its way into the next line – OG2.

For the next few hours battle raged in this area as the two Australian battalions tried to hold their positions. Because higher command believed that the attack was proceeding well and had reached its final objectives well beyond OG2, the British artillery failed to fire near these positions. Consequently the Germans were able to mount strong counter attacks unhindered by shelling. By mid-morning the 46th Bn had been forced out of its position, many being captured and dozens killed and wounded. Effectively this left the 48th Bn cut off in OG2 and there was no choice but to fight their way back to the Australian lines.

Bill got hit beyond the first line of German trenches. He was carried into OG2. His trench mate spoke to him there a few minutes before the Bn withdrew. Bill was wounded in the face and said he was also hurt in the back. The Bn evacuated the trench about midday.

The confusion of the time is indicated in the following letter, dated 13 Sep 1921, to his next of kin: “The Imperial War Graves Commission has sanctioned a continuance of their search in an effort to locate the final resting place of the late soldier. In the event of a more favourable report you will be advised”. There was never any follow up advice! The same letter also states; “it is regretted that the late soldier’s identity disc has not yet been recovered”. Bill's resting place is unknown.

All in all, 11 April 1917 was a terrible day for the 48th Bn, the official history listing their casualties as 436 killed or wounded, and the Australian War Memorial’s Roll of Honour lists 96 men of the battalion as having died on that day.



British War Medal Victory Medal



Memorial at Villers-Bretonneux Military Cemetery, France