

WILDMAN STREET

(Research by the Coolamon & District History Group)



Reginald Wildman was born in Kiama NSW in July 1886, the son of Auriol Agnes Bradney and an unknown father. Reginald's early years were spent with his mother's relatives, the Wildman family of Kiama district and he took their name. Later he was living with his Uncle John Bradney at the family farm, Hevington, near Coolamon, NSW. When he joined the Army Cadets, he was advised to enlist under the name he was known by (Wildman). Therefore, when he attested for the Rein 2nd Battalion on 30th December 1914 he did so as Reginald Raymond Wildman and was enlisted as Private No. 1888 in the 2nd Battalion AIF on 2nd January 1915 and took part in the Gallipoli landing on 25th April 1915. He was transferred to the 54th Battalion on 14th February 1916 and was sent to Egypt, about May 1916,

according to his mother's information. Reginald signed his enlistment paper as 'R. Wildman' and his attestation paper as '*Regenald Ramon Wildman*'. He named his uncle John Bradney as his next-of-kin. John Bradney enlisted on 9th April 1916 and was also killed in action in France in 1917. His death was registered as Reginald Raymond Wildman. He was killed in action near Pozieres, in what the British called the Battle of Fleurbaix, on the morning of 20th July 1916. His name is amongst those on the Memorial at VC Corner Australian Cemetery Memorial, Fromelles, Nord Grave/Panel No. 11. Reginald's remains were not located following his death and until recently was recorded as having no known grave.

There appears to have been contact between Reginald and his birth mother, Auriol Agnes Bradney, over the years as part of his schooling was done at Kittagora Public School, near Coolamon. He lived for some time at Coolamon and was working there at the time of his enlistment. He wrote to her whilst on active service and she received the notification when he was killed in action. Reginald's uncle, Wentworth Edward Bradney (b. 1883), transferred from the 55th Battalion to the 54th Battalion on 16th June 1916 and appears to have been in Egypt when Reginald was lost, but he himself was killed in Belgium.

His grandmother, Catherine Bradney saw three sons and her grandson enlist with the Army and only one son, Donald Walter Bradney returned home, gassed and lamed but

he did return. During that time, she also lost her husband, John Bradney Snr. who died on 1st February, 1916 at the age of 71.

Reginald Wildman landed a Gallipoli on 25th April 1915. In June 1916 he was admitted to a convalescent camp at Cairo suffering from influenza. Reginald returned to the Gallipoli peninsula but was again admitted to hospital suffering from diarrhoea on 19th July 1915.

On 18th October 1915 Reginald was again admitted to No 3 Australian General Hospital suffering from an abscess on his neck, he rejoined his battalion at Tel el Kebir on 12th January 1916. Apart from his periods of hospitalisation, Reginald Wildman fought throughout the Gallipoli campaign.

After the evacuation from the Gallipoli peninsula, Reginald Wildman was transferred to the Brigade Police, possibly serving as a Military Policeman for a short period of time. In April 1916 Reginald was again admitted to hospital suffering from pneumonia and later gastritis. He rejoined his battalion on 18th April 1916 and sailed for France. The battalion departed Alexandria and disembarked at Marseilles, France, on 29 June 1916.

Between 19th and 20th July 1916 Private Reginald Wildman was reported missing in action following the heavy fighting during the battle for Fleurbaix. The fighting in this sector was so heavy that the bodies of many of the casualties could not be recovered.

On the 4th August 1917 a Court of Enquiry, held in the field pronounced Reginald's fate as being 'Killed in action', 19-20 July 1916'. Extracts from the Court of Enquiry provide an insight into the confusion which surrounded the action which led to his death:

Red Cross File No 2940705 has statement from 4226 Pte L. HANNA, B Company, 54th Battalion (former prisoner of war), 30 December 1918: *'On morning of 20th July 1916 at Fleurbaix I was alongside him when he was shot dead by sniper. Hit in Head (eye). We were then in Enemy's second line trench. They got in behind us into their 1st line and we were cut off. I was hit through helmet by same man immediately after but not hurt. We were taken Prisoners of War about 1 hour later. His body would be left in trench. I did not know his Christian name.'*

Second statement: 3511A W.D. CARR, 54th Battalion, 24 December 1918: *'In the morning between 8 and 9 o'clock I saw him assisting 1909 H.W. Bilbow with a machine gun - when he was shot through the right eye either by sniper or machine gun bullet - not shrapnel, as he was killed instantly. It was in a quickly dug trench. We were captured shortly afterwards, so I know nothing as to his burial.'*

Third statement, 1909 Lance Corporal W.H. BILLOW (sic), 13 January 1919: *'He was not killed going over the trenches but after he got over in the Germans' second line on the morning of the 20th. I was standing shoulder to shoulder with him up to the moment he was killed. He was shot by a sniper from behind, the bullet passing through his head. He had been working all night with me, trying to build up the trenches. It happened at*

Fleurbaix ... I took his pay book and his identification disc and was forced to give them up to the Germans with my own pay book.'

Fourth statement, 1841 S. TONKINS, 54th Battalion, 28 August 1917: *'Pte Wildman was killed by shrapnel, I saw him lying dead on the ground in the German trenches, on July 20th at Armentieres.*

At the end of the Great War, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission was tasked with locating and interring the identifiable remains of Australian killed during the war. It is apparent from his service records, that considerable confusion existed as to who was the Late Private Wildman's next of kin. In a letter, Mrs. Auriol Jones (nee Bradney), mother, of Polding Street, Yass to the Officer in Charge Base Records, on the 8th May 1920 wrote:

"He had no nearer relatives than myself. He was my son, illegitimate unfortunately, so that his father's name would not be necessary. Wildman was not my son's name, it was Reginald Raymond Bradney, but as he lived with people of that name for a time he was mostly called Reg Wildman, and when he was registered for Cadets some years [ago] was advised to register under the name he was known by. The next nearest relatives would be my brothers, [2376] Private John Bradney, 56th Battalion Killed in action, Pte W.E. Bradney, 54th Batt. Killed in action, Driver Donald W. Bradney, 14th Howitzer Battery returned to Wagga, and Pte D. Bradney of Coolamon and my four sisters.'

Of all the missing Australian soldiers from the tragic Fromelles battle, 19th-20th July 1916, approximately 191 of these are thought to have had their bodies collected and buried by the Germans immediately after the battle. These were the men who had amazingly made it into the German trenches and then bravely gave their lives trying to hold them.

Over the last few years, more and more evidence came to light that identified the location of the mass grave as being at Pheasant Wood on the outskirts of Fromelles. Australia and the United Kingdom subsequently agreed to exhume the soldiers interred in the group burial site at Pheasant Wood, Fromelles and re-inter them in individual graves with full military honours.

The decision was made following the limited excavation conducted in 2008. This confirmed the existence of remains of up to 400 Australian and British soldiers buried by German troops in 1916. The Fromelles project has also undertaken to identify the remains of the soldiers found in the grave and to date almost half of those buried in the mass grave have been identified. One of those soldiers identified was Reginald Raymond Wildman.