

The Short March: The Wartime Life of Wilfred Ernest Rokahr



Image 1 - AWM photograph of Wilfred Ernest "Ernie" Rokahr in uniform after enlistment

Chapter 1: From Victoria to the Uniform



Image 2 - Dunolly War Memorial in front of Post Office

Wilfred Ernest Rokahr was born on January 27, 1895, in rural Victoria, the eldest son in a family rooted in the old goldfields district of Dunolly.¹ He grew up in a world shaped by the land - its cycles, its hardships, and its demands. Like many young Australians of his generation, Wilfred was raised with the values of physical labour, endurance, and quiet perseverance, all under the lingering influence of Britain, which still loomed large in the national imagination.

By the time war broke out, Wilfred had already left the family home and was likely working in the Mildura region, earning a living as a farmer's labourer.² He was used to isolation, to the heat and dust, and to fending for himself. His life, though unremarkable on paper, had already forged in him a quiet resilience. The enlistment records offer only sparse details: occupation - labourer; marital status - single. Nothing to suggest the story that was about to unfold, or the world-altering events he would soon be swept into.³

Wilfred may not have planned to enlist. But everything changed when he received a letter from home. His younger brother Walter - slight in build and never expected to pass the medical - had



Image 3 - Formal family portrait of Wilfred and Walter in uniform, before deployment

¹ Victorian Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages. 2025. "Birth Certificate Entry for Wilfred Ernest Rokahr – 2931/1895." Victorian Register of Birth, Deaths and Marriages [Website] - Record Search Page <https://my.rio.bdm.vic.gov.au/efamily-history/6882fd7a8ea0757df67f75de/record/5c653def4aba80ac319b5572?q=efamily&givenName=Wilfred%20Ernest&familyName=ROKAHR>

² Ministry of Defence - Australia. 2025. "War Service Record of Wilfred Ernest Rokahr." National Archives of Australia. Australian Government, <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=8036530>, accessed 7 June 2025

³ War Service Record of Wilfred Ernest Rokahr.", p 8

been accepted into the army.⁴ It is likely that their father, deeply worried, reached out to Wilfred with a plea: go too. Not out of patriotic fervour, but out of brotherly duty. He hoped Wilfred would stand by Walter, to protect him in whatever lay ahead.

D 32749
 AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE
 Attestation Paper of Persons Enlisted for Service Abroad.
 No. 6535 Name (Surname) **ROKAHR**
 in full / Christian Name **Wilfred Ernest**
 Unit **216 Depot**
 Joined on
 Questions to be put to the Person Enlisting before Attestation.
 1. What is your Name? **ROKAHR Wilfred Ernest**
 2. In the Parish of **Dunolly** in or near the Town of **Victoria**
 3. Are you a native born subject of the King? **Yes**
 4. What is your age? **24 years 4 months**
 5. What is your occupation? **Labourer**
 6. Are you married? **No**
 7. What is your next of kin? (Address and relationship to be stated) **Father George Rokahr Dunolly VICTORIA**
 8. What is your permanent address in Australia? **DUNOLLY VICTORIA**

Image 4 - Enlistment papers of Wilfred Ernest Rokahr - p1

On 2 May 1916, Wilfred underwent a preliminary medical examination in Mildura, confirming his physical fitness for overseas service.⁵ Less than two weeks later, on 15 May, he formally enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF). A final medical in Bendigo on 17 May recorded his height at 5 feet 6 inches - an unremarkable measurement, yet one that gave no hint of the strength and stamina he would soon be called upon to summon.⁶

Wilfred's military training began almost immediately. On 16 May, he was posted to "Z" Company of the 60th Depot Battalion, based in Heidelberg.⁷ This first assignment was brief, lasting just a month, before he was transferred to the Domain Camp in Melbourne on 15 June.⁸ The Domain Camp was situated in the then grounds of Government House, now known as Kings Domain.⁹ This location was basically adjacent (across the other side of St Kilda Road), from Victoria Barracks, which served as the key administrative center for the Australian Army, and with the coordination required for the war effort.¹⁰ There, through the long winter of 1916, Wilfred joined thousands of other recruits preparing for the front. The days were structured and relentless - drill, kit inspections, route marches and vaccinations. Gradually, the familiar patterns of rural life gave way to the strict regimentation of the army, and the bonds of soldierly camaraderie began to form.

⁴ Ministry of Defence - Australia. 2025. "War Service Record of Walter George Rokahr." National Archives of Australia. Australian Government, <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=8036529>, accessed 17 My 2025

⁵ War Service Record of Wilfred Ernest Rokahr.", p 30

⁶ War Service Record of Wilfred Ernest Rokahr.", p 8

⁷ War Service Record of Wilfred Ernest Rokahr.", p 9

⁸ War Service Record of Wilfred Ernest Rokahr.", p 9

⁹ Chris White. "Where Was WW1 Domain Camp Located in Melbourne? - Email Reply." Received by Lyn Smith, 10 June 2025. From AWM Information Services - Research Centre. Response to request RCIS119603

¹⁰ Smith, Bridie. "10 Victorian Places Significant to WWI - Victoria Barracks." The Sydney Morning Herald, 11 Apr. 2015, www.smh.com.au/national/10-victorian-places-significant-to-wwi-20150409-1mhh3l.html. Accessed 01 July 2025.

In early September, Wilfred moved again - passing through a short processing stage before arriving at Broadmeadows Camp on 11 September 1916.¹¹ Just three days later, on 14 September - four days after his younger brother Walter - Wilfred was officially assigned to the 21st Reinforcement of the 6th Battalion, part of the 2nd Brigade in the 1st Australian Division (21st/6th)¹² The path ahead was now clearly set: training would soon give way to transport, and Australia would be left behind.



Image 5 - Group of 6th Battalion soldiers at Broadmeadows Camp 1916



Image 6 - Group of AIF soldiers waiting to board HMAT A71 Nestor at Station Pier on 2 October 1916

Across Continents and Into the Trenches

Wilfred's departure from Australia came swiftly. On 2 October 1916, he and his younger brother Walter boarded the troopship HMAT Nestor (A71), in Melbourne.¹³ The ship would carry them across oceans to a war that had already

claimed thousands of lives - and which would soon claim many more.

What Wilfred felt as the coastline of Australia slipped from view is lost to history. He left behind familiar landscapes, a close-knit family, and the quiet routines of rural life. But he did not leave alone. Walter was beside him, and the two brothers - once labourers in Victoria - were now soldiers of the Empire, bound not only by blood, but by the uniforms they wore and the long, uncertain road ahead.

¹¹ War Service Record of Wilfred Ernest Rokahr.", p 9

¹² War Service Record of Wilfred Ernest Rokahr.", p 9

¹³ War Service Record of Wilfred Ernest Rokahr.", p 5; "6th Battalion AIF." Diggerhistory.info, 2017, www.diggerhistory.info/pages-conflicts-periods/ww1/1aif/1div/02bde/6th_battalion_aif.htm. Accessed 25 July 2025.



Image 7 - H.M.A.T. A71 'Nestor'

The Nestor carried Wilfred far from home, and on 16 November 1916, he disembarked at Plymouth, Devon, England.¹⁴ The shift from the sun-drenched fields of Victoria to the grey chill of wartime Britain was abrupt. Wilfred was now one step closer to the

Western Front - but still a world away from the trenches.

Just days later, on 21 November, he 'marched out' (caught a train from Plymouth to the nearest station to Australian HQ on the Salisbury Plain and marched the last 10 miles) from Plymouth to Fovant, a training camp on the windswept Salisbury Plain, a distance of 123 miles (193 km).¹⁵ There, among thousands of other ANZACs, Wilfred entered the final phase of his military preparation. The days were rigorous and cold, filled with bayonet drills, gas mask exercises, trench simulations, and punishing route marches across the sodden countryside. Fovant was harsh and unrelenting - but it was also necessary.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

image 8 - Winter at Fovant - February 1917

¹⁴ War Service Record of Wilfred Ernest Rokahr.", p 5

¹⁵ War Service Record of Wilfred Ernest Rokahr.", p 5; Jakealoo. "Getting from Plymouth to the Salisbury Plains." Doing Our Bit, 23 June 2012, www.militaryandfamilyhistory.blog/2012/06/22/salisbury-plain/. Accessed 25 July 2025.



Image 9 - ChatGPT AI created image

Wilfred had arrived in Wiltshire as one of Britain's harshest winters in decades began to settle in.¹⁶ For Australians, more familiar with dust storms than snowstorms, the sudden onslaught of freezing temperatures, sleet, and icy winds came as a brutal shock. The fields of Salisbury became a mire of ankle-deep mud; the ground froze beneath their boots. Shelter offered little comfort - draughty huts that barely held back the cold. Many men fell ill with frostbite, respiratory infections, and sheer exhaustion.¹⁷ Training here wasn't just a test of skill - it was a test of endurance.

It is said that soldiers stated opinions like the following, "The cold gets into your bones, and the mud is up to your ankles. We sleep in our coats and wake with ice on our blankets. I never thought I'd miss the sun so much."¹⁸

For Wilfred and his fellow recruits, the English winter was not just a battle against the elements - it was a battle to hold onto morale. The cold tested their bodies; the monotony,

¹⁶ Imperial War Museum (UK). "Voices of the First World War: Winter 1916." Imperial War Museums, www.iwm.org.uk/history/voices-of-the-first-world-war-winter-1916. Accessed 15 June 2025

¹⁷ Following the Twenty-Second. "Sickness & Disease: The Impact of Non-Combat Casualties on Fighting Strength in the AIF." Following the Twenty-Second, 20 Jan. 2017, www.anzac-22nd-battalion.com/sickness-disease-the-impact-of-non-combat-casualties-on-fighting-strength-in-the-aif

¹⁸ Imperial War Museum (UK). "Voices of the First World War: Winter 1916"

their spirits. Yet all of it was simply preparation for the far greater trials waiting across the Channel.

At some point during his time in England, Wilfred was transferred - likely from No. 3 Command Depot near Hurdcott in Wiltshire - to the 2nd Training Battalion.¹⁹ These kinds of administrative movements were routine for reinforcement soldiers, who were constantly being reassigned, re-categorized, and reshuffled in the machinery of war. What remained constant was the trajectory: toward France, and toward the front.

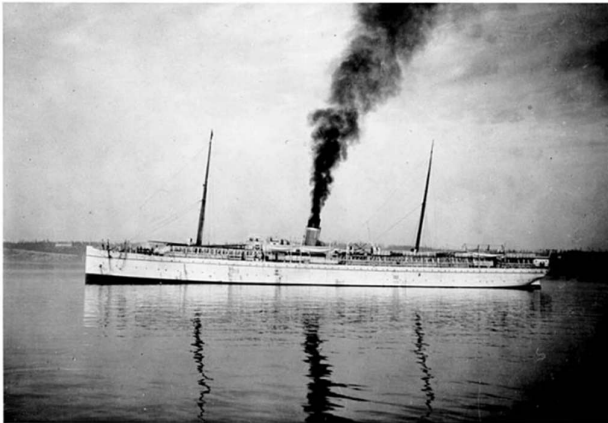


Image 10 - SS Victoria

relentless drill and harsh discipline, designed to harden the men for what lay ahead. For many, it was their first real taste of the war's severity, even before hearing a single shot fired.

On 18 February, Wilfred was officially taken on strength from the reinforcement pool.²³ Five days later, on 23 February 1917, he marched forward to join his unit in the field.²⁴ He was now a soldier of the 6th Battalion, AIF - an outfit already blooded in the Dardanelles (Gallipoli) and hardened by the mud and gunfire of the Western Front.

On 14 February 1917, Wilfred and Walter boarded the SS Victoria to cross the English Channel.²⁰ By the following day, they were in France.²¹ Two days later, on 17 February, Wilfred arrived at Étaples Base Depot - a sprawling and austere military complex situated among the dunes near the coast.²² Étaples was infamous among soldiers. Though far from the front lines, it was a place of



Image 11 - Training at Etaples

¹⁹ War Service Record of Wilfred Ernest Rokahr.", p 9

²⁰ War Service Record of Wilfred Ernest Rokahr.", p 9

²¹ War Service Record of Wilfred Ernest Rokahr.", p 9

²² War Service Record of Wilfred Ernest Rokahr.", p 9

²³ War Service Record of Wilfred Ernest Rokahr.", p 9

²⁴ War Service Record of Wilfred Ernest Rokahr.", p 9

The waiting was over. The war had truly begun.

One quiet source of strength amid the chaos was Wilfred's younger brother, Walter. The two had trained side by side since Broadmeadows and now found themselves serving in the same battalion, facing the front together. In the frozen mud of northern France, where comrades came and went with terrifying speed, that steady, familiar presence offered something rare: comfort. It meant everything to know that someone from home was close by - someone who understood not just the war, but where you'd come from before it.

Together, the Rokahr brothers shared the burdens of trench life: the ever-present rats, the endless lice, the bone-shaking artillery, the night watches broken by sudden flares and sniper fire. They endured the hunger, the filth, the bitter cold. But war has a way of prying even the closest bonds apart.

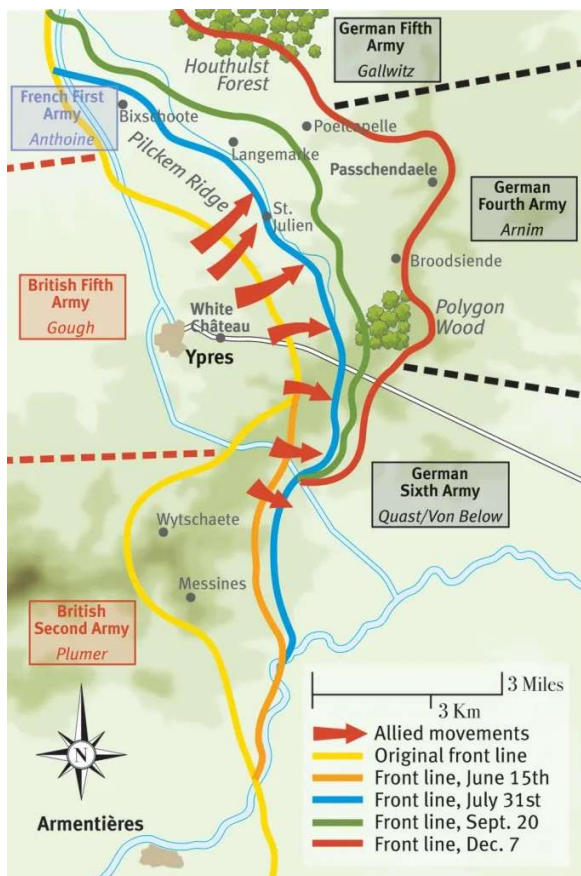


Image 12 - Troop movements 1917

And soon, it would.

The 6th Battalion AIF on the Western Front: March to October 1917

Between March and October 1917, the 6th Battalion of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) was deeply engaged on the Western Front in France and Belgium.²⁵ As part of the 2nd Brigade, 1st Australian Division, it participated in a series of demanding operations that reflected both the evolution of Allied tactics and the unrelenting hardships of trench warfare. From pursuing the retreating German Army in early 1917 to fighting in the infamous mud of Flanders,

these months marked some of the battalion's most intense and formative experiences.

²⁵ Sharkey, Neil. "The Bloody Battles of 1917 |." [blog post] www.shrine.org.au, 10 June 2021, www.shrine.org.au/bloody-battle-1917. Accessed 15 July 2025

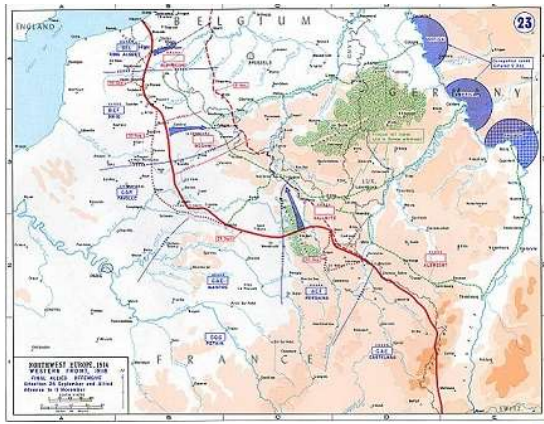


Image 13 - Map showing Hindenburg Line

In March 1917, the German Army executed a strategic withdrawal to the newly fortified Hindenburg Line.²⁶ In response, the 6th Battalion advanced into vacated territory, engaging in skirmishes near towns such as Bapaume and Lagnicourt.²⁷ While these operations lacked the scale of major battles, they played a critical role in maintaining pressure on the enemy and preparing for future offensives.



Image 14 - AIF soldiers at the 2nd Battle of Bullecourt

The battalion's first major test of the year came on 3 May at the Second Battle of Bullecourt.²⁸ Part of the wider British Arras Offensive, the assault on the Hindenburg Line was marred by poor coordination,

inadequate artillery support, and the failure of tanks to assist the infantry.²⁹ The 6th Battalion suffered heavy casualties in the face of determined German resistance.³⁰ Although some ground was gained, the operation proved costly and underscored the grim realities of attacking entrenched positions with limited technological support.³¹

²⁶ Baker, Chris. "Pursuit of the German Retreat to the Hindenburg Line", The Long, Long Trail, www.longlongtrail.co.uk/battles/battles-of-the-western-front-in-france-and-flanders/pursuit-of-the-german-retreat-to-the-hindenburg-line/.

²⁷ Australian War Memorial. "Bapaume to Bullecourt: The Fighting in France, 1917 | Australian War Memorial." www.awm.gov.au, 28 Feb. 2020, www.awm.gov.au/articles/blog/bapaume-to-bullecourt-the-fighting-in-france-1917.

²⁸ "Second Battle of Bullecourt." Australian War Memorial, www.awm.gov.au/collection/E84360. Accessed 17 June 2025; Peter Burness. "The Battles for Bullecourt." *Wartime: Official Magazine of the Australian War Memorial*, no. 18, Autumn 2002, pp. 24–29, p 27, Accessed 26 June 2025

²⁹ Peter Burness. "The Battles for Bullecourt." p 27

³⁰ Peter Burness. "The Battles for Bullecourt."

³¹ Peter Burness. "The Battles for Bullecourt."

Following the ordeal at Bullecourt, the battalion was withdrawn to quieter sectors for rest and reorganisation.³² From June to July 1917, they trained and prepared for a new offensive in Belgium - what would become the Third Battle of Ypres, or Passchendaele.³³



Image 15 - AWM art - The Battle of Menin Road Ridge – Image AWM ART03327

On 20 September, the battalion returned to action in the Battle of Menin Road Ridge, east of Ypres.³⁴ This marked a turning point in Australian operations.³⁵ Drawing on lessons from earlier failures, the AIF employed a more effective “bite and hold” strategy, with better artillery coordination and improved planning.³⁶ The 6th Battalion advanced under a well-timed creeping barrage and secured its objectives.³⁷

Though losses remained high, the success provided a much-needed morale boost.

Six days later, on 26 September, the battalion participated in the Battle of Polygon Wood.³⁸ While not all units were on the front line, the 6th was likely engaged in support or reserve roles, rotating in and out under fire.

Even in these roles, the men endured constant shelling, appalling conditions, and the threat of counterattack.



Image 16 - AIF soldiers at The Battle of Polygon Wood

³² Australian War Memorial. AWM4 23/23/19 - 6th Battalion War Diaries - June 1917. www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1342946 . Accessed 10 July 2025; Australian War Memorial AWM4 23/23/20 - 6th Battalion War Diaries - July 1917. www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1342948 . Accessed 10 July 2025.

³³ Imperial War Museums (UK). “What You Need to Know about the Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele).” Imperial War Museums, www.iwm.org.uk/history/what-you-need-to-know-about-the-third-battle-of-ypres-passchendaele.

³⁴ Australian War Memorial. ‘Battle of Menin Road’. www.awm.gov.au/collection/E84331. Accessed 28 June 2025; DVA (Department of Veterans' Affairs) (2023), *Third Battle of Ypres 31 July to 10 November 1917 – Battle of Menin Road Ridge*, DVA Anzac Portal, <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/ww1/where-australians-served/western-front/third-battle-of-ypres> , accessed 25 July 2025

³⁵ History of War. ‘Battle of the Menin Road Ridge, 20-25 September 1917’. www.historyofwar.org/articles/battles_menin_road_ridge.html#google_vignette. Accessed 16 July 2025.

³⁶ PhilB. “What Is ‘Bite and Hold’?” Great War Forum, 4 Dec. 2004, www.greatwarforum.org/topic/24160-bite-and-hold. Accessed 25 July 2025.

³⁷ Robert Wilde, “The Creeping Barrage of WWI: Theory and Practice.” ThoughtCo, ThoughtCo, 17 July 2005, www.thoughtco.com/the-creeping-barrage-of-ww1-theory-and-practice-1222116 accessed 25 Jul 2025.

³⁸ DVA (Department of Veterans' Affairs) (2023), *Third Battle of Ypres – Polygon Wood*



Image 17 - Australian soldiers at the Battle of Broodseinde

By early October, the battalion was drawn into the Battle of Broodseinde - one of the most strategically significant phases of the Ypres campaign.³⁹ The goal was the capture of Broodseinde Ridge, a key German defensive position. For the 6th Battalion, this would be their most critical operation to date.⁴⁰

Among its ranks was Wilfred Ernest Rokahr.⁴¹ Once a nervous recruit from Dunolly, he had by now become a seasoned soldier, hardened by trench raids, artillery bombardments, and the relentless brutality of war.

At dawn on 4 October 1917, Wilfred and his comrades advanced under the protection of a massive creeping barrage. - a military tactic used during World War I to support infantry advances across no man's land by coordinating artillery fire with troop movements.⁴² It involved a line of artillery fire that moved forward in stages, just ahead of advancing infantry.⁴³ The ground was sodden from weeks of rain, churned into a nightmarish sea of mud and craters. ⁴⁴Tangled wire and shell holes made progress slow and perilous. Yet the barrage was devastatingly effective, catching German troops mid-deployment and inflicting severe losses.

³⁹ DVA (Department of Veterans' Affairs) (2023), *Third Battle of Ypres - Battle of Broodseinde*

⁴⁰ Paul Carolan. "RSL Queensland | Battle for Broodseinde Ridge." RSL Queensland, 18 May 2021, rslqld.org/news/latest-news/battle-for-broodseinde-ridge. Accessed 1 July 2025.

⁴¹ War Service Record of Wilfred Ernest Rokahr.", p 16

⁴² Robert Wilde, "The Creeping Barrage of WW1

⁴³ Robert Wilde, "The Creeping Barrage of WW1

⁴⁴ Carolan, Paul. "The Battle for Broodseinde Ridge in Belgium on 4 October 1917; Westerman, William. The Battle of Broodseinde Ridge 1917 . 2018, www.awm.gov.au/collection/LIB100047114?utm_source=chatgpt.com. Accessed 25 July 2025.



Image 18 - Carrying soldiers off the Frontline

Still, the fighting was fierce. Amid machine-gun fire and exploding shells, Wilfred was struck by a gunshot wound to the abdomen.⁴⁵ He collapsed in the mud as the battle raged around him. Though stretcher-bearers reached him and evacuated him under fire, his injuries were severe.⁴⁶

He was taken first to the No. 3 Australian Field Ambulance and

then transferred to the No. 3 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station - one of the largest medical facilities behind the lines in the Ypres Salient.⁴⁷ Despite the best efforts of doctors and nurses, Wilfred died later that day, 4 October 1917.⁴⁸ His war ended just miles from where he had fallen, amidst the chaos and urgency of a brutal offensive.

Victory at Broodseinde was hard-won and tactically significant.⁴⁹ But for Wilfred's family, the cost was incalculable. On 8



Image 19 - No. 3 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station

October, a cable confirming his death was sent to military headquarters.⁵⁰ His brother Walter - recovering from wounds in an English hospital - was informed within the week.

⁴⁵ War Service Record of Wilfred Ernest Rokahr.", p 16

⁴⁶ War Service Record of Wilfred Ernest Rokahr.", p 28

⁴⁷ War Service Record of Wilfred Ernest Rokahr.", p 26 + p 28

⁴⁸ War Service Record of Wilfred Ernest Rokahr.", p 9; War Service Record of Wilfred Ernest Rokahr.", p 26

⁴⁹ Carolan, Paul. "The Battle for Broodseinde Ridge in Belgium on 4 October 1917

⁵⁰ War Service Record of Wilfred Ernest Rokahr.", p 26



Image 20 - Chat GPT AI created image - Grieving Family

For a sibling who had crossed half the world with him, the loss must have been shattering. The family in Dunolly were notified by November and placed a bereavement notice in the local paper on 7 December 1917.⁵¹

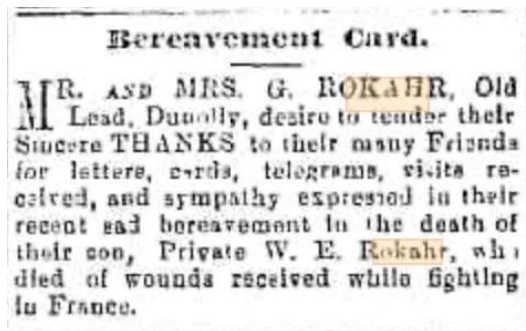


Image 21 - Local newspaper article - Bereavement Card placed by George and Mary Jane Rokahr after their notification of Wilfred's death

A special field report was completed on 13 December 1917, documenting Wilfred's death with clinical precision.⁵² His personal effects - a wallet, letters, photographs, notebook, badge, pouch, and two identity discs - were returned to Australia nearly two years later, arriving on 22 May 1919 aboard the *Euripides*.⁵³ They were small in monetary value, yet immeasurable in meaning: fragments of a life, returned across the sea to a grieving home.



Image 22 - Wilfred's gravestone at Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery in Belgium

Wilfred was buried at Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery, southwest of Poperinghe, Belgium.⁵⁴ Unlike many cemeteries carved from the battlefield, Lijssenthoek stood beside a major casualty clearing station.⁵⁵ Now tended by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, it is the final resting place of over 10,000 soldiers - many, like Wilfred, who made it just far enough to receive care but not far enough to return home.

⁵¹ Wilfred Ernest Rokahr, Bereavement notice, "Family Notices" Dunolly and Betbetshire Express and County of Gladstone Advertiser (Vic. : 1915 - 1918) 7 December 1917: 2. Web. 25 Jul 2025 <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article152640365>>.

⁵² War Service Record of Wilfred Ernest Rokahr.", p 26

⁵³ War Service Record of Wilfred Ernest Rokahr.", p 23 + p25

⁵⁴ War Service Record of Wilfred Ernest Rokahr.", p 21; "Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery, Poperinghe, Ypres Salient Battlefields, Belgium." Greatwar.co.uk, 2025, www.greatwar.co.uk/ypres-salient/cemetery-lijssenthoek.htm. Accessed 25 July 2025; Commonwealth War Graves Commission. "Private Wilfred Ernest Rokahr (1895 -1917) -..." Findagrave.com, 2017, www.findagrave.com/memorial/12071938/wilfred-ernest-rokahr . Accessed 1 July 2025.

⁵⁵ "Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery (CWGC)." Remembering the Fallen, 2025, www.wwlcemeteries.com/lijssenthoek-military-cemetery.html. Accessed 25 July 2025.

On 26 September 1922, five years after his death, a letter from Wilfred's father arrived at the Base Records Office in Melbourne, inquiring about the war medals of both Wilfred and Walter.⁵⁶ The following day, a memorial plaque, later known as the "Dead Man's Penny", was issued to his next of kin.⁵⁷ It bore the inscription: "He died for freedom and honour."⁵⁸ His medals—the British War Medal and the Victory Medal - were finally received on 10 April 1923.⁵⁹ Perhaps they were kept in a drawer in Dunolly or placed on a shelf beside his photograph, silent reminders of a life cut short.



Image 23 - Replica of a 'Dead Man's Penny'

Wilfred Ernest Rokahr was just 22 years old at the time of his death.⁶⁰ He left behind no children, no great wealth, and no first-hand account of his experiences. What endures are scattered records, personal effects, and a grave on foreign soil.

Yet his story is not forgotten.

Epilogue

In the years after the Great War, the world began to rebuild. Trenches faded into the earth, and battlefields were reclaimed by grass and trees. But for the Rokahr family in Dunolly, the war's echo did not fade. Less than a year after Wilfred's death, his brother Walter was also killed in action (August 1918). The last hope that one son might return was extinguished.

⁵⁶ Wikipedia Contributors. "'Dead Mans Penny', Memorial Plaque (Medallion)." Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 10 Dec. 2024, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memorial_Plaque_(medallion). Accessed 15 July 2025

⁵⁷ War Service Record of Wilfred Ernest Rokahr.", p 20

⁵⁸ Australian War Memorial. 1914–1918 Memorial Scroll and Plaque (Dead Mans Penny). 2012, www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/memorial_scroll. Accessed 15 July 2025.

⁵⁹ War Service Record of Wilfred Ernest Rokahr.", p 32

⁶⁰ Victorian Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages. 2025. "Birth Certificate Entry for Wilfred Ernest

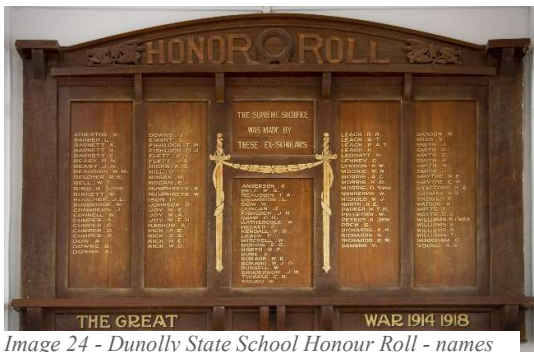


Image 24 - Dunolly State School Honour Roll - names within the square wreath are the former students who gave the ultimate sacrifice

He was a son, a brother, and a labourer from a quiet town. He did not go to war for glory, but for duty - and perhaps because someone had to go. There is no statue in his name, no great monument. But in remembering him now - more than a century later - we restore his voice, his place, and his story.

Let that be enough.

Wilfred's name is etched into the stone of Lijssenthoek Cemetery, but it also lives on—on honour rolls in Victoria, in yellowing military files, and in the memory of a family that bore the full weight of sacrifice.



Image 25 - Names of the Dunolly men who were killed in action during WWI

In Memory Of

Private

WILFRED ERNEST ROKAHR

Service Number: 6555

6th Bn., Australian Infantry, A.I.F. who died on 04 October 1917 Age 23

Son of George and Mary Jane Rokahr, of Dunolly, Victoria, Australia.

PEACE PERFECT PEACE

Remembered with Honour

LIJSSENTHOEK MILITARY CEMETERY

XX K. 17A



|||||
COMMONWEALTH
WAR GRAVES
|||||

COMMEMORATED IN PERPETUITY BY THE COMMONWEALTH
WAR GRAVES COMMISSION

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- . *AWM4 23/23/20 - 6th Battalion War Diaries - July 1917*. www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1342948 .
- . *AWM4 Subclass 23/23 - 6th Infantry Battalion Diaries*. www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1339164 .
- . "Bapaume to Bullecourt: The Fighting in France, 1917" 28 Feb. 2020, www.awm.gov.au/articles/blog/bapaume-to-bullecourt-the-fighting-in-france-1917 .
- . *Battle of Menin Road*. www.awm.gov.au/collection/E84331 ..
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