

Charles Albert Ernest Gilbert



Private (Pte) 2932 Charles Albert Ernest Gilbert enlisted in the 14th Infantry Battalion in the 4th Infantry Brigade of the New Zealand & Australian Division on 21 September 1915. He embarked overseas on 27 September and disembarked in Egypt in late October.

He later contracted broncho pneumonia and was hospitalised in Cairo at the 2nd General Hospital between 27 November – 10 December, after which he was taken on strength of the 14th Battalion, in the newly formed 4th Australian Division, at Ismailia on 19 January 1916.

He was hospitalised at the New Zealand Auxiliary Hospital at Ismailia with a fever between 23 February – 3 March, then rejoined the 14th Battalion at Tel el Kebir. The battalion departed Egypt on 1 June and disembarked at Marseilles on 8 June, then travelled north.

On 6 August, the 14th Battalion entered the line at Pozieres and participated in the unsuccessful assault on Mouquet Farm a few days later, for the loss of 487 casualties. During this action, Pte Gilbert had the gruesome task of burying his older brother, Joseph, who was killed in action on 11 August 1916.

The conditions in the trenches during the northern winter were atrocious and Pte Gilbert was just one of many who succumbed to illness when he contracted bronchitis on 23 December, for which he was treated at the 4th Field Ambulance until 31 December, when he rejoined the battalion.

Following the German withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line in March 1917, the battalion cautiously patrolled forward to ascertain the whereabouts of the enemy.

They moved into the new front line and took part in the poorly planned assault on the Hindenburg Line at Bullecourt on 11 April. The 14th Battalion, in the vanguard of the attack, with no artillery or tank support, sustained an incredible 601 casualties, including hundreds killed and missing (most of whom became prisoners of war).

Pte Gilbert contracted influenza and was treated at the 13th Field Ambulance between 8 – 13 May, then rejoined the battalion as they prepared to move north to Belgium. Following the Battle of Messines, the 14th Battalion successfully helped to defend the captured ground, for the loss of 50 casualties, during 7 – 8 June 1917.

Pte Gilbert was evacuated sick with venereal disease on 4 August. He was initially treated at the 4th Field Ambulance between 4 – 14 August, then transferred to the 39th General Hospital at Boulogne from 17 August – 3 October. He rejoined the battalion on 20 October then spent a week at the 4th Stationary Hospital at Arques with scabies between 6 – 13 November. He rejoined his unit again on 27 November.

The Australians remained in the north for the next few months, and the 14th Battalion entered the front line at Fusilier Wood in the Ypres Canal sector in late January 1918. On 30 – 31 January they were subjected to several German gas bombardments, often lasting hours at a time. The battalion sustained 108 casualties in that period, one of whom was Pte Gilbert, who was gassed on 31 January.

He was initially treated at the 3rd Canadian General Hospital at Boulogne from 2 – 6 February, then transferred to England, where he was admitted to the Graylingwell War Hospital at Chichester between 6 February – 8 April. He was granted leave until 22 April then spent the next two months at various training camps in Wiltshire. He returned to France on 3 July, where he rejoined the 14th Battalion, in the field at le Hamel, on 15 July 1918.

Pte Gilbert was wounded for the second time during the great allied offensive from Amiens on 8 August, when he sustained a shrapnel wound to his left foot during the Australian assault on Cerisy Ridge and Morcourt, one of 80 battalion casualties for the day.

He was evacuated to the 22nd General Hospital at le Havre between 9 – 15 August, then spent the period 15 August – 5 September at the Australian convalescent depot in the same town, before he rejoined the 14th Battalion at Estrees on 13 September.

The battalion participated in the successful Australian assault on the Hindenburg Outpost Line at Le Verguier and Le Grand Priel on 18 – 21 September, capturing 75 prisoners, 15 field guns and 80 machine guns, for the loss of 94 casualties of their own – about 25% of battalion strength by that stage. They left the line for the last time on 21 September.

Pte Gilbert was promoted to Lance Corporal (L Cpl) on 3 October, and he returned to England on 23 January 1919, where he embarked for Australia two months later.

Lance Corporal 2932 Charles Albert Ernest Gilbert disembarked in Melbourne on 26 May, where he was discharged from the AIF on 18 July 1919.

Name: Gilbert, Charles Albert Ernest	
Service Number	2932
Date enlisted	21 September 1915
Place enlisted	Broadmeadows, Victoria
Rank on enlistment	Private
Initial Unit	14 th Infantry Battalion
Date and ship embarked for overseas	27 September 1915 HMAT A20 <i>Hororata</i>
Stated age/DOB (if known)	20 years (31 January 1896)
Place of birth	St Leonards, Victoria
Marital status	Single
Occupation	Labourer
Religion	Church of England
Next of kin and address	Gilbert, Mrs Mary Ann, mother, "Redcliffe", St Leonards, Victoria
Permanent address	St Leonards, Victoria
Appearance	Fair complexion, brown hair, blue eyes, height – 5 feet 7 ³ / ₄ inches, weight – 9 stone, chest measurement – 34/37 inches
Final Rank	Lance Corporal
Final Unit	14 th Infantry Battalion
Theatres of war served in	Egypt, France, Belgium
Fate	Returned to Australia
Date and place wounded	31 January 1918 near Ypres, Belgium
Nature of wounds	Gassed
Date and place wounded (2)	8 August 1918 Morcourt, France
Nature of wounds (2)	Shrapnel wound to left foot
Date and ship embarked for Australia	28 March 1919 HT <i>Port Macquarie</i>
Date discharged	18 July 1919
Nature of discharge	Termination of Period of Enlistment
Honours/medals	1914-15 Star, British War Medal, Victory Medal
Notes	Brother of James and Joseph Gilbert. Died 11 August 1975. Remembered on the St Leonards Honor Roll, St Paul's Anglican Church Honor Roll, Portarlington Honor Roll and the Portarlington War Memorial.