

John Robinson



Private (Pte) 1658 John Robinson enlisted in the 37th Infantry Battalion in the 10th Infantry Brigade of the 3rd Australian Division in Melbourne on 17 March 1916. He embarked overseas on 27 May and disembarked in Plymouth on 18 July, where he was joined the 37th Battalion at Lark Hill Camp on 10 August 1916.

The battalion left England on 22 November and disembarked in France the next day, where they entrained for the Armentieres sector in the north.

The 37th Battalion's first major engagement on the Western Front occurred on 7 June 1917 at the Battle of Messines Ridge, where the 3rd Division helped capture the high ground with New Zealand and British troops – 37th Battalion casualties numbered 402.

The battalion later moved up to the Zonnebeke area on 2 October in preparation for an attack on Broodseinde Ridge, which began at 6:00 am on the morning of 4 October. The 37th Battalion sustained another 224 casualties, but all the objectives were achieved, and the battle was considered a success. Then the rain started to fall.

The battalion's next action, an attack on the village of Passchendaele on 12 October, was a disaster. The soldiers were subjected to German artillery fire while they waited then, once the attack commenced, were pinned down by machine gun fire and hindered by deep mud, so made no headway at all, at a cost to the 37th Battalion of 71 men killed and 179 wounded.

Things quietened down at the conclusion of Third Ypres in November 1917, and the Australians used the next few months to recuperate and re-train. Pte Robinson was granted leave in England from 29 January – 14 February 1918, during which time he married Miss Mildred Street at Guildford, Surrey on 8 February.

After news of a massive German offensive on the Somme filtered through in late March, the 3rd Division was rushed south to help stem the German advance. While the main enemy thrust had petered out by the time they arrived at Morlancourt Ridge on 28 March, and only minor skirmishes ensued, the battalion remained in the area for several months.



The 37th Battalion occupying a sunken road in front of Marett Wood, on Morlancourt Ridge, 7 April 1918. The Germans occupied the ridge in the distance.

The 37th Battalion was 10th Brigade reserve for the allies' Amiens offensive on 8 August and played no active part. They did, however, take part in the unsuccessful attack on Proyart on 10 August, for the loss of 103 casualties. As the Germans retreated, the front line kept moving east and from 28 – 31 August 1918 the battalion supported the 2nd Division's left flank in an action near Clery-sur-Somme.

By late September the allies had reached the Hindenburg Line. The 3rd Division, which included the heavily depleted 37th Battalion, joined with the 5th Division and the full strength 27th and 30th American Divisions for an attack which commenced on 29 September.

As planned, the 3rd Division "passed through" the 27th American Division the next day but discovered the inexperienced Americans had not sufficiently cleared out the German dugouts. As such, hundreds of German soldiers emerged behind the attackers, meaning the Australians not only had to capture their own objectives, but also many of the American objectives too. This took several more days of hard fighting until the Australians were finally relieved on 3 October.

Following the battle, 37th Battalion strength was just 90 rifles, so the decision was made to disband the battalion and re-allocate the remaining men within the 10th Brigade. Pte Robinson was subsequently transferred to the 38th Infantry Battalion on 12 October 1918.

He was granted leave in England from 7 – 25 November then returned to France. He sailed to England for the final time on 28 February 1919 and, together with his new wife, embarked for Australia on 23 July.

Private 1658 John Robinson disembarked in Melbourne on 11 September, where he was discharged from the AIF on 26 October 1919.

Name: Robinson, John	
Service Number	1658
Date enlisted	17 March 1916
Place enlisted	Melbourne, Victoria
Rank on enlistment	Private
Initial Unit	37 th Infantry Battalion
Date and ship embarked for overseas	27 May 1916 HMAT A11 <i>Ascanius</i>
Stated age/DOB (if known)	23 years 9 months
Place of birth	Geelong, Victoria
Marital status	Single
Occupation	Fisherman
Religion	Roman Catholic
Next of kin and address	Robinson, Mr John, father, 48 The Strand, Newport, Victoria
Permanent address	Newport, Victoria
Appearance	Fresh complexion, light brown hair, blue eyes, height – 5 feet 7 inches, weight – 8 stone, 9 lbs, chest measurement – 34/37 inches
Final Rank	Private
Final Unit	38 th Infantry Battalion
Theatres of war served in	France, Belgium
Fate	Returned to Australia
Date and ship embarked for Australia	23 July 1919 HT <i>Canberra</i> (with wife)
Date discharged	26 October 1919
Nature of discharge	Termination of Period of Enlistment
Honours/medals	British War Medal, Victory Medal
Notes	Married Mildred Emily Street at St Hugh's Catholic Church, Guildford, Surrey on 8 February 1918. Brother of George, Henry and Leo Robinson. Remembered on the St Leonards Honor Roll.