



# GAS INCIDENT

## 25/08/1918

Joseph Cooper wounded Sailly Le Sec, the Somme

### JOSEPH COOPER

Joseph Cooper was born a 'cockney' in Alfred St, Bow in 1892. He emigrated to Australia on the SS Orama leaving London 30/01/1914. He joined the AIF in Bundaberg on the 02/10/1916 returning to Australia on the 15/01/1919. He died, aged 40 on the 20/04/1932 from his war injuries and is buried in Nanango Cemetery.

### John Birrer

Grandson of Joseph Cooper and Lucy Toomer, son of John Birrer and Isabel Birrer (nee Cooper).

## **About the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion:**

### **1<sup>st</sup> World War:**

The 15th Battalion AIF was raised from late September 1914, six weeks after the outbreak of the First World War. Three-quarters of the battalion were recruited as volunteers from Queensland, and the rest from Tasmania. With the 13th, 14th and 16th Battalions it formed the 4th Brigade, commanded by Colonel John Monash. The 4th Brigade landed at ANZAC late in the afternoon of 25 April 1915.

After Gallipoli, the unit served on the Western Front and gained the following Battle Honours: Somme 1916, Somme 1918, Pozieres, Bullecourt, Messines 1917, Ypres 1917, Menin Road, Polygon Wood, Passchendaele, Arras 1918, Ancre 1918, Hamel, Amiens, Albert 1918, Hindenburg Line, Epehy, France and Flanders 1916-1918, ANZAC, Landing at ANZAC, Defence at ANZAC, Suvla.

The battalion continued operations until late September 1918. At 11 am on 11 November 1918, the guns fell silent. In November 1918, members of the AIF began to return to Australia for demobilisation and discharge.

When the First World War began, Prime Minister Joseph Cook and Opposition Leader Andrew Fisher pledged full support for Britain.

For Australia, the First World War remains the costliest conflict in terms of deaths and casualties. From a population of fewer than five million, over 400,000 volunteers enlisted, of whom more than 60,000 were killed and 156,000 wounded, gassed, or taken prisoner.

Now, 100 years after the end of the First World War, the Australian War Memorial stands directly opposite the Australian Parliament House as a poignant reminder to the men and women elected by Australians.



### LUHU (LIHU?) FARM AND JEANCOURT

After their relief on the night of August 10, 1918, at a quarter past midnight, the Battalion marched to its new billets in trenches near Saily le Sec. Throughout the march heavy shelling lashed all the roads and the neighbouring country, but fortunately without inflicting much damage.

In the new billets, situated in an open field lined with hedges, the Brigade canteen got in a supply of English beer, which was greatly welcomed, although it ran to only a quota of one small bottle per man.

The number of teetotallers in the unit at this time was apparently above average, for some of the members obtained sufficient bottles to have a quiet and orderly party.

Three days later the Battalion was once more on its forward journey to the front line. Passing through Saily le Sec, they crossed the Canal and passed through Hamel to LaMotte and thence to Santerre.

When skirting Bayon-Villiers, and when almost clear of the town, disaster overtook No.3 Platoon of A Company, commanded by C.S.M. Fleet.

A big shell landed right in among the men, and nine of the platoon were killed and two wounded. Among the killed was Corporal George Williams, D.C.M., one of the youngest, if not the youngest corporal in the unit, but who at that period probably held more active front-line service in France than any other N.C.O. of his rank. Williams' fearlessness and outstanding courage on all occasions kept him in high respect throughout the unit, and his loss was keenly felt.

At 10.30 pm men were in billets in the sunken road lying between Bayon-Villiers (Bayonvillers) and Lihu Farm, at no great distance from the railway. A conference was held of all senior officers and I.O.'s at which General C. H. Brand attended and gave a resume of what was expected when the line was actually occupied.

A slight alteration in plans had taken place, and instead of the imminent hop-over, a series of silent preparations which had at this time become the vogue, was contemplated.

The Battalion was still under the command of the Tasmanian, Major Burford Sampson, and three of the company commanders at this period were from the "tight little isle" also.

They were Captain W. Domeney, of "A" Company, Lieutenant W. Goninon, of "C" Company, and Lieutenant C. W. Goss, of "D" Company.

Two of these, Lieutenants Goninon and Goss, were original members of the Tasmanian section of the 15th Battalion. Captain W. L. Domeney was a Gallipoli reinforcement from Tasmania.

Lieutenant J. L. Dryborough, a Townsville man, was the sole Queenslander in command of a company. He had "B" Company. The Second-in-Command of the unit was Captain B. Atkinson who was an Englishman, and the Adjutant was Lieutenant Eric Robinson, better known as "Bags." Lieutenant Maurice Cook was the Signalling Officer.

The relief of the 2nd Battalion at Lihu Farm Was completed at five minutes past midnight on the 16<sup>th</sup> August 1918, with only one casualty, and that man slightly wounded.

Throughout the whole movement the enemy shelled Crepy Wood and its environs, but without doing any material damage to the advancing men. "B" Company took over the left sector of the

Battalion front-about one hundred yards - and pushing out patrols connected with the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion on the left flank. "A" Company, doing likewise with the 46<sup>th</sup> Battalion on the right flank.

The 46<sup>th</sup> Battalion at this time was commanded by Lieut. Colonel J. J. Corrigan, whose rise from a private to a Colonel constituted the record achievement for any member of the Battalion.

"U" Company passed into the support line, and "D" Company took over the Reserve Line.

On the night of the 17<sup>th</sup> August the front-line companies moved forward on a silent penetration manoeuvre and occupied a new set of trenches slightly in advance of the old French Line. The weather had remained fine throughout this period and enemy shelling, though at times heavy on supports and reserves, was light compared with many previous actions in which the Battalion had taken part.

Battalion Headquarters situated on the fringe of the road, became the target for much of the shelling that took place, and Lieutenant M. Cook was slightly wounded.

That same afternoon an astonishing mishap overtook part of an American force, whose cooks had arrived and planted themselves in the wooded hollow directly across the road from Battalion HQ adjacent to the first-aid post commanded by Captain Lance Hunter.

Warned over and over again of the danger of the thick clouds of smoke arising from the cooks, several of the Americans thought they would climb nearby trees and a telephone pole, to see how far distant the front line lay.

When the enemy opened on the cooks, a direct hit was scored on a full dixie of boiling stew. Several men were badly scolded and a number wounded, all being treated by Captain Hunter and his staff.

Those up the trees and the Telephone pole were amazed to see a direct hit on the base of the pole and an American clinging frantically to half a dozen wires as the pole bounced about like a bucking horse.

Cut and bleeding, the man was finally hurled to the ground and, semi-conscious, was borne off to receive first-aid.

One of the strongest drinks ever captured from the Hun was secured by the men from a German canteen secreted in the wood. This potent brew was commonly known as "Green Kummel." It was rumoured that German troops at the time of the big advance at the commencement of the year had been freely issued with this firewater so that they would face the prospect of heavy casualties with all the patriotic fanaticism that had been noticeable among them at the beginning of the war. If this were true, methylated spirits and boot polish is fruit cocktail by comparison.

Lieutenant "Sarky" Englert, reported with some reinforcements on the night of 21<sup>st</sup> August, and was posted to "C" Company, proceeding up to the front line immediately Englert was to become one of the Rugby football team members and made quite a name for himself as a player.

News that the Battalion would be relieved somewhere about the 27<sup>th</sup> August was brought in person by General Brand on a routine visit to the frontline system. It took place slightly earlier **on the night of 24/25<sup>th</sup> August.**

Nothing approaching this relief had ever been experienced by the majority of the men in the unit. The few old hands of the Pozieres, Mouquet Farm, Messines and Polygon Woods sectors looked upon it as one of those queer misfortunes that-for no apparent reason whatsoever-just happen to a Battalion on active service.

The 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 59th French Infantry Regiment were the relieving force. The 1st Battalion relieving the two 15th Battalion front-line companies, "D" and "C," and the 2nd French Battalion relieving the 15th Battalion's "A" and "B" Companies,

It is doubtful whether the enemy had any knowledge that a relief was imminent, though for five hours Fritz laid down a heavy barrage of gas and H.E. shells, covering all saps into the front line, and support and reserve lines, besides lashing the roadway from Battalion H.Q. to the disused German hospital on the road to Allonville.

At the meeting place of the 15th Battalion guides and the French relieving columns, the trouble started when a German H.E. shell landed directly in the roadway just as the parties met.

A number of casualties occurred among both parties. From then onwards the French force was led through an ever-increasing hail of shell to their various positions in the trenches, our men marching out in good formation when relieved.

The gas used is stated to have been Yellow and Blue Cross, the former being better known as "Mustard Gas." It was stated by many who experienced it that much was dispensed from a shell which burst in the air and sprayed the gas in liquid form over everything and everybody within range.

Many of the men began to feel itchy skin beneath their clothing, and about the neck and wrists. All exposed parts were quickly covered and everything possible was done to prevent any gas touching the skin. One of the first casualties was Lieutenant W. Ryan, who was hit by the nose cap of a gas shell near the hip. Of the other officers in the line those gassed included Lieutenant Wes. Goninon. When leading "C" Company out, his men came under heavy shell fire and a piece of shell destroyed his runner's helmet.

Goninon changed helmets and finished the journey without any protection. Captain W. Domeney was also gassed along with his two subalterns, Lieutenants Eric Simon and Jim Greenwood.

Buses were waiting in the neighbourhood of Battalion H.Q. to take the unit direct to billets in Allonville. This much appreciated by the men, but it proved only a doubtful blessing.

Within the crowded buses the gas put in the major part of its deadly work. The heat of the men's bodies seemed to generate the vapour until over fifty per cent of those travelling were affected in some form or other. It is realised now that had the unit marched, as was so often the case in the early days, much heavy loss of men might have been averted, for the gas on boots and clothing would have been distributed into the air and blown away by the breeze.

The 46th Australian Battalion relieved the same night also suffered heavily from gas, while the relieving French units lost nearly 70 per cent of their personnel. It was a very subdued unit for several days following its return to Allonville. The next day men twisted in agony or completely blind-for the time being-lay all over the village many dropped in their tracks on the footpath or in the gutter, and others lay on the roadway.

A willing crowd of helpers brought these men into the First Aid Post, and Dr. Hunter, after doing what he could in the emergency, despatched them as rapidly as he could to the hospitals.

Reinforcements and details arrived with the unit at this juncture and, by August 27 it had rebuilt its strength to 17 officers and 480 other ranks. From this number eight Officers and 94 other ranks were detached for other duties of a routine nature. In the interim a Court of Inquiry was held into the reason for the large number of casualties in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 46th Battalions. The result of this inquiry completely exonerated anyone from blame.



Joseph Cooper 1892 to 1932





Far right, back – Joseph Cooper, Signaller 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion AIF WW1



No. 6789

Name COOPER Joseph

Unit 2nd REINFORCEMENT

Joined on 2nd October 1916

Questions to be put to the Person Enlisting before Attestation.

1. What is your Name? ... .. Joseph Cooper
2. In or near what Parish or Town were you born? ... .. In or near the Town of Selington in the County of Kent England
3. Are you a natural born British Subject or a Naturalized British Subject? (N.B.—If the latter, papers to be shown.) ... .. Yes
4. What is your Age? ... .. 25 yrs 3 mths
5. What is your Trade or Calling? ... .. Laborer
6. Are you, or have you been, an Apprentice? If so, where, to whom, and for what period? ... .. Millipin Paper Mill
7. Are you married? ... .. No
8. Who is your next of kin? (Address to be stated) ... .. Mr & Mrs Susan Shelley  
16 Morley St, Lambeth  
Road, London SW
9. Have you ever been convicted by the Civil Power? ... .. No
10. Have you ever been discharged from any part of His Majesty's Forces, with Ignominy, or an Incurable and Worthless, or on account of Conviction of Felony, or of a Sentence of Penal Servitude, or have you been dismissed with Disgrace from the Navy? ... .. No
11. Do you now belong to, or have you ever served in, His Majesty's Army, the Marines, the Militia, the Militia Reserve, the Territorial Force, Royal Navy, or Colonial Forces? If so, state which, and if not now serving, state cause of discharge ... .. No
12. Have you stated the whole, if any, of your previous service? ... .. Yes
13. Have you ever been rejected as unfit for His Majesty's Service? If so, on what grounds? ... .. Yes Terrible
14. (For married men, widowers with children, and soldiers who are the sole support of widowed mothers) ... ..  
Do you understand that no separation allowance will be issued in respect of your service beyond an amount which together with pay would reach eight shillings per day? ... .. Yes
15. Are you prepared to undergo inoculation against small pox and enteric fever? ... .. Yes

I, Joseph Cooper, do solemnly declare that the above answers made by me are true and correct, and I hereby voluntarily agree to serve in the Military Forces of the Commonwealth of Australia within or beyond the limits of the Commonwealth.

And I further agree to allow not less than two-fifths of the pay payable to me from time to time during my service for the support of my wife and children.

Date 2/10/16

Joseph Cooper  
Signature of person enlisted.

\* This clause should be struck out in the case of unmarried men or widowers without children under 18 years of age.  
† Two-fifths must be allotted to the wife, and if there are children three-fifths must be allotted.

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 Dist 232

Statement of Service of No. 6739 Name COOPER Joseph

Unit in which served	Promotions, Reductions, Casualties, &c.	Period of service in each rank.		Remarks
		From—	To—	
11 <sup>th</sup> Depot Batta 22/15	Private Do Embarked. Brisbane "Kyarra" Disembarked Plymouth	6/10/16 7-11-16 17-11-16 30-1-17	6-11-16	W/lt Capt.   S.O.28
	26 <sup>th</sup> Ints 4 <sup>th</sup> Inf Bn from Australia. B.R. 1917	Goodford	30/1/17	Pz 1 <sup>st</sup> Lt 2005 2/17
P.S.M.	Pte. Comm. 20 <sup>th</sup> from Penzance 15.6.17 till 7.4.18 then 19.6.17. Awarded 4 days P. 1/102 2nd Lt 4/11/17 19.6.17. Total 5 days pay for 19.6.17 commencing 2/9/17.	Goodford	18.6.17	Pz 2/50/4370 E 20/7/17
	Pte/Pvt of 10 <sup>th</sup> of 15 <sup>th</sup> Bn ex. 4 <sup>th</sup> Inf Bn Batta Goodford	Goodford	10/4/17	Do 604/5086 E 15/4/17. LR 8008
	Pte/T.O.S. of 15 <sup>th</sup> Bn att. from 22 <sup>nd</sup> Inf Bn to 15 <sup>th</sup> Bn Battalion		25.9.17	Do 68/6617 13.10.17
	Paid in France.		25.4.18	
	Pte to Hospital 22 <sup>nd</sup>		5.8.18	Do 40/4803. 22/8/18.
	Pte Rejoined Unit.		12.8.18	Do 41/4942. 29.8.18.
	Pte Adm S/pt Strm Bn Wadley Rd. Massed	Byham	1.9.18	LS 818. HR 26.
15 <sup>th</sup> Bn	Pte. Wounded in Action	France	25/8/18	Do 43/5337 11/9/18
15 <sup>th</sup> Bn	Pte Invalided to U.K. ex		30.8.18	Do 44/5573. 18.9.18

Wounded entry in service records 25/08/2018 – see Battalion history Pages 3-4.

Report.		Record of promotions, reductions, transfers, casualties, &c., during active service, as reported on Army Form B. 213, Army Form A. 36, or in other official documents. The authority to be quoted in each case.	Place.	Date.	Remarks taken from Army Form B. 213, Army Form A. 36, or other official documents.
Date.	From whom Received.				
20.9.17	6739	Ex Bn 15th Bn	Essex, England	20.9.17	239
6.18	C/O 15th Bn	Present with Unit	Field	1-8-18	58.4108 &
10.8.18	do	Placed in Hospital Sick	France	2.8.18	AR 20441503(1918)
3.8.18	11 <sup>th</sup> A.D. Comd	Placed in Hospital Sick	do	3.8.18	Jax 2973/113
6.8.18	12 <sup>th</sup> C.C. Bn	Placed in Hospital Sick	do	6.8.18	AK 2973/113
17.8.18	60.13 <sup>th</sup> Bn	Placed in Hospital Sick	do	17.8.18	AK 2973/113
31-8-18	C.O. 15th Bn	WOUNDED IN ACTION GAS	France	25-8-18	D 8787 DO 4315357(1918)
24/8/18	4 <sup>th</sup> A.D. Comd	Placed in Hospital Sick	do	25.8.18	Jax 2973/113
4.9.18	55 <sup>th</sup> C.C.S.	Placed in Hospital Sick	do	15.8.18	AK 2973/113
29/8/18	12 <sup>th</sup> C.C. Bn	Placed in Hospital Sick	do	25.8.18	AK 2973/113
30.8.18	Quartermaster	Embarked for England	France	30.8.18	AK 2973/113
1-9-18	21st Gen Hosp	Placed in Hospital Sick	Dunley Rd	1-9-18	W 818
19.9.18	3rd Aux Hosp	Placed in Hospital Sick	Dunley Rd	19.9.18	AR 732
23.9.18	do	Placed in Hospital Sick	do	23.9.18	AR 845
26.9.18	10 <sup>th</sup> A.D. Comd	Placed in Hospital Sick	Weymouth	23.9.18	AK 2973/113
26.11.18	D.S. General	Placed in Hospital Sick	Dunley Rd	25.11.18	AK 2973/113
11.12.18	1st B.D.A.	Placed in Hospital Sick	Bullford	10.12.18	AK 2973/113
24.12.18	do	Discharged	Bullford	23.12.18	AK 2973/113

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Joseph COOPER

Regimental number	6739
Place of birth	Essex, England
Religion	Church of England
Occupation	Labourer
Address	Maryborough Road, South Bundaberg, Queensland
Marital status	Single
Age at embarkation	25
Next of kin	Mother, Mrs S Shelly, 16 Morley Street South Lambeth Road, London SW, England
Enlistment date	2 October 1916
Rank on enlistment	Private
Unit name	<a href="#">15th Battalion, 22nd Reinforcement</a>
AWM Embarkation Roll number	23/32/2
Embarkation details	Unit embarked from Brisbane, Queensland, on board HMAT A55 <i>Kyarra</i> on 17 November 1916
Rank from Nominal Roll	Private
Unit from Nominal Roll	15th Battalion
Fate	Returned to Australia 15 January 1919
Miscellaneous information from cemetery records	Parents: John COOPER and Susan GREEN (as stated on Roll of Honour records)
Other details	War service: Western Front

A 102913

AUSTRALIAN



MILITARY FORCES.

Q 12116

# AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE.

## Attestation Paper of Persons Enlisted for Service Abroad.

No. 6739

Name COOPER Joseph

Unit 13th REINFORCEMENT

Joined on 2nd Oct 1916

### Questions to be put to the Person Enlisting before Attestation.

1. What is your Name? ... .. 1. Joseph Cooper
2. In or near what Parish or Town were you born? ... .. 2. In the Parish of \_\_\_\_\_ in or  
the Town of Salisbury  
in the County of Wiltshire  
England
3. Are you a natural born British Subject or a Naturalized British Subject? (N.B.—If the latter, papers to be shown.) ... .. 3. Yes
4. What is your Age? ... .. 4. 25 yrs 3 mos
5. What is your Trade or Calling? ... .. 5. Labourer
6. Are you, or have you been, an Apprentice? If so, where, to whom, and for what period? ... .. 6. Milliner for 18 mths
7. Are you married? ... .. 7. No
8. Who is your next of kin? (Address to be stated) ... .. 8. Mrs Ther Susann Spelley  
16 Mortimer St, Hanbury  
Road, London SW
9. Have you ever been convicted by the Civil Power? ... .. 9. No
10. Have you ever been discharged from any part of His Majesty's Forces, with Ignominy, or as Incurable and Worthless, or on account of Conviction of Felony, or of a Sentence of Penal Servitude, or have you been dismissed with Disgrace from the Navy? ... .. 10. No
11. Do you now belong to, or have you ever served in, His Majesty's Army, the Marines, the Militia, the Militia Reserve, the Territorial Force, Royal Navy, or Colonial ... .. 11. No

*His answer to this question shall not be construed as on the nature of service*



Hello John,

Well some bits and pieces which you may have already and a wedding registration for John Cooper and Susannah Mary Green which if you send for it from the GRO or Government Registry Offices over here in England then this should give you the name of John's Father and the Father's occupation. If you do not have a contact number or address to apply for this then let me know and I'll send it to you. Anyway here is the Registration.....John Cooper married Susannah Mary Green July August Sept.1881 St. George Hanover Square London. Volume 1a Page 779. You need to give all this information when ordering the certificate.

I could not trace John's parents as too many John Coopers of that year born!!! But I found what is possibly him on the 1881 Census where he is down as John Cooper 1853 Islington a Cab Driver living at **2 Barnsbury Drive, Islington.**

Then he is on the 1891 Census as John Cooper 1832\* and not 1851 Westminster a Groom and Hackney Carriage Driver. He is with wife Susannah born 1861 Deptford Kent plus the following children:

William John 1884 Islington

Susannah R 1885 Islington

Annie 1890 Islington.

**They are living at Alfred Street, Lower Holloway, Islington.**

In 1901 John has died..I think possibly in 1899 and Susan as she is now called is a Field Worker or Agricultural Labourer. She has the following children with her:

William 1884

Annie 1890

**Joseph 1892 \***

Elizabeth 1894

Charlie 1896.

Thats all I could find on John..you already have Susannah's line. John's birth of 1832 could be a clerical error on the 1891 Census or the transcribers have read the 5 as a 3? Certainly if you get their marriage certificate you will get the next lead back from John.

Hope some of this is of use John? Best Wishes Michelle. Let me know if I can help anywhere else

Three dates John.....

Annie Cooper Baptised 5/5/1889 Barnsbury, St. Clement, Islington.

Elizabeth Jane 6/8/1893 as above.

Then another girl who must have died before the 1901 Census where she should be and she is

Harriet Dorothy 15/7/1897 Barnsbury, St. David, Islington.

I couldnt find John and Susannah's other children's Baptisms unless they were not done? Michelle.



UK Trip 2018 – 16 Morley St, Lambeth.



At the Australian Memorial at Sully-Le-Sec 25/08/2019 – 100 years to the day.