

SAPPER VICTOR FREDERICK BIRD
6618 – 1st Tunnelling Company

Victor Frederick Bird was born in Cranbourne, Victoria in 1885 the son of Frederick Arthur and Louisa Maria (nee Jennings) Bird. In 1913 he was working as a labourer in Duchess, Queensland. While working in the Cloncurry district his partner was Mrs L.M. Coleman and they had a child.

At the Approved Military Recruiting Depot in Cloncurry, Qld the twenty-eight year old miner applied to enlist on October 4, 1916 passing his preliminary medical examination the same day. Personal particulars taken show he was 186cms (6ft 1ins) tall with a chest measurement of 100cms (39½ins) and unmarried, with his postal address being Cloncurry, Qld. His application was accepted by the recruiting office the next day.

Forms of Attestation were completed which add further details showing a dark complexion with blue eyes and brown hair. He weighed 81.8kgs (180lbs) and two distinctive scars were vaccination marks on his left arm received in childhood. Religious denomination was listed as Church of England and his uncle Mr Alfred Bird of Mount Cuthbert, Qld was nominated as next-of-kin but changed to his sister Mrs Jessie Meredith, of Union Street, Richmond, and later care of Post Office, Sale, Vic. Although he did not allot any of his pay in support of wife and children; the word wife had been crossed out on his Attestation Form but children was left open and unaltered.

Basic training commenced on October 13, 1916 with the 11th Depot Battalion for ten days. He was sent for dental treatment on October 23 before his relocation to the Miners' Depot (1st Military District) on November 1, 1916. Transferred to the Miners' training camp at Seymour, Vic on January 8, 1917 he was assigned to the January 1917 Reinforcements for the Tunnelling Companies three days later. His regimental number allotted was 6618 and a promotion to Corporal for the 'voyage only' took place on January 16, 1917.



Victor Bird
Photo courtesy Colin Purchase

The Reinforcements consisting of 168 members departed Melbourne, Vic at 3 p.m. on January 17, 1917 on board the HMAT A5 RMS *Omrah*. The mail ship arrived at 8 a.m. two days later at Adelaide, S.A. and headed off at 4 p.m. that afternoon. It sailed into the West Australian port of Fremantle on January 21 where the Reinforcements were granted Day Leave ashore the next day before leaving on January 24, 1917. The ship returned to Fremantle at 7 a.m. on February 1 and put out to sea again at 5 p.m. the next afternoon February 2. Durban, South Africa was reached at 7 a.m. on February 16 and sailed at 6 p.m. the following evening. The next port of call was Cape Town on February 20 arriving at 8 a.m. where two days later the men were granted Day Leave ashore until 11 p.m. on the 22nd before departing at 5 p.m. on February 24. The sights of Sierra Leone were seen closely on March 9, 1917 as the vessel docked at 8 a.m. and after refuelling left at 7 a.m. on March 12, 1917. The voyage concluded at Devonport on March 27, 1917 and the troops disembarked at Plymouth after 74 days at sea. The three officers and 165 other ranks were detrained to Tidworth and they marched into the Hardening and Drafting Depot at Perham Downs for further training for the front the following day.

On April 14, 1917 the Reinforcements proceeded overseas via Folkstone to France and marched into the Aust. General Base Depot at Rouelles the next day. Reassigned to the 1st Anzac Entrenching Battalion on April 21, 1917 for further integration work on the Front and Victor was appointed Acting Corporal with the E.D.P. (Extra Duty Pay)

A letter written to Base Records from Mrs L.M. Coleman of Cloncurry on May 5, 1917 requested his address as she had written several letters and received no replies. She advised that he had children and had made no arrangements in regards to payment for them. Base Records replied on May 17 advising the address to send correspondence to and informed her to contact the District Paymaster at Victoria Barracks in Brisbane, Qld as matters like this were not dealt with by their office.

In the field Victor marched out to the 1st Tunnelling Company on May 17 reverting to the rank of Sapper and was attached to the company three days later.

Mrs Coleman wrote again to Base Records from Kuridala, Lake Friezland, via Cloncurry on June 10, 1917 saying she had not received a reply to her previous letter. She advised that he had a three year old child depending on him and although not his lawful wife, she had been his partner for the past four years. She knew he had departed on January 17, 1917 and wanted to drop him a line to see if he was still in existence. Base Records responded on June 25 with the report they had received no advice of a casualty to Sapper Bird and assumed he was with his Unit, giving her the address to write to him. A repeat of the same paragraph referring her to the Paymaster followed and also advised they had replied to her last letter on May 17 addressing it care of the Post Office, Cloncurry. No further correspondence about this matter appears.

On October 16, 1917 he was sent to the 3rd Canadian General Hospital at Boulogne with a sprained right ankle. Twelve days later was transferred to the 7th Convalescent Depot then on October 30 he went to the 3rd Rest Depot before returning to the A.G.B.D. at Rouelles on November 3. He rejoined his unit on November 11, 1917. Blue Chevrons were due at that time.

Service and camp life continued without mishap until February 19, 1918 when he developed pains all through his body. Several days later on February 22, 1918 he was sent to the N.Z. Reinforcements Field Ambulance with Influenza then transferred to the 2nd N.Z. Field Ambulance. Next day went to the 2nd Canadian Casualty Clearing Station and conveyed on A.T.83 diagnosed with P.U.O. (Pyrexia (Fever) Unknown Origin) and admitted to the 8th Stationary Hospital at Wimereux.

The hospital ship *Cambria* conveyed him across the English Channel entering the 1st Southern General Hospital, Kings Heath Section at Birmingham on March 10, 1918 and admitted with P.U.O. Trench Fever. After eleven days as a patient his medical report states:

Has had several attacks this winter with severe pyrexia: now has pains in back and complains of cough.

By March 21 he was well enough to be transferred to the 3rd Aust. Auxiliary Hospital at Dartford to recuperate for nineteen days. Assessment now reads:

Trench Fever. Still has pain in back and legs; still can manage. Disability Class B16.

He was discharged to the Group Hospital at No. 3 Command Depot in Hurdcott on April 8, 1918 and their report states – Trench Fever reoccurred:

17/4/18 In bed 16 days, out of bed 3 weeks. Still slight pains in back. Heart & chest clear.

3/5/18 About 70 to 80. [percent] Looks fit. Disability Class B1a4.

21/5/18 This patient has developed Albuminuria (kidney problem) since admission to Fovant Military Hospital. Disability Class B1a2.

After four days in Fovant Military Hospital the report reads:

12/6/18 No album. Pains in back, low tension headache. Tachycardia (Rapid Heart Rate) Dyspnoea (breathless) on exertion.

On June 25, 1918 he marched out to No. 4 Command Depot at Hurdcott where on July 10, 1918 he was able to say he felt well.

The following Offence took place at Hurdcott Depot:

Offence: 9/7/18 Being in possession of his S.P.B. in which entry had been obliterated
Award: 7 days C.B. [Confined to Barracks] by order Capt N. Moriarty.

Victoria Barracks, Sydney, NSW wrote to Base Records, Melbourne, Vic inquiring if they had a record of 6618, V.F. Bird. The District Paymaster (1st M.D.) only had enlistment details in the 1st M.D. and concentrated in the 2nd M.D. with no further particulars are available. Extra Duty Pay 'voyage only' authorised payment of allotment of 30cents (3/-) per diem from 17/1/17 to 26/3/17. Name and address of allottee and unit of soldier were unknown. Base Records replied on July 20, 1917 stating that the soldier embarked as a Sapper on the RMS *Omrah* from Melbourne, Vic on January 17, 1917. Mr James Bird of Yarram, South Gippsland, Vic was shown as the allottee.

On August 13, 1918 he was fitted with full dentures and declared dentally fit on August 22, 1918. The same day he marched out to the Overseas Training Brigade at Deverill. A month later he was admitted sick to the Group Clearing Hospital at Sutton Veny on September 22 suffering from Influenza and after thirteen days in hospital was discharged on October 4, 1918.

On October 28, 1918 the following took place:

Offence: Sandhill – A.W.L. from Overseas Draft after being duly warned 25/10/18
Award: Forfeits 21 days pay by Major Commanding O/seas Training Bde.
Sentence Commuted: 6/11/18 from A.I.F. Dep. in U.K. to 14 days forfeiture.

He proceeded overseas via Southampton to France on November 2, 1918 arriving at the A.G.B.D. and marched out to his unit on November 10, 1918 the day before Armistice was declared, rejoining his unit two days later.

The Australian war photographer Captain Frank Hurley visited the Hooze Crater dugouts three days before the Battle of Menin Road and described the conditions he found:

It is a wretched job as they are working 25 feet below the surface level and most of the time knee deep in mud, which they jocularly term 'hero juice' on account of it percolating through tiers and tiers of buried corpses. Most of the men are miners and they are applying their knowledge to supreme advantage whilst the Boche shells whiz and burst around them.

Damien Finlayson 'Crumps and Camouflets', page 241

His unit remained in their region as part of the Army of Occupation assisting with rehabilitation of the area by clearing explosives on roads and bridges left by the enemy or assisting with drainage in their district. On December 3, 1918 Sapper Bird was admitted to the 20th Casualty Clearing Station suffering from Diarrhoea and after four days returned to duty.

On January 31, 1919 he was admitted to the 14th General Hospital at Wimereux with Influenza and invalided to the U.K. on February 9 on the ship *Jan Breydal*. He entered the 1st London General Hospital, at Camberwell diagnosed with Influenza & Haemorrhoids and was discharged to the 3rd Aust. Auxiliary Hospital at Dartford on March 3, 1919.

His sister Mrs Jessie Meredith care of Post Office, Sale, Vic wrote to Base Records on February 23, 1919 requesting information as she had not heard from her brother in four months. On March 17, 1919 correspondence from Base Records was sent to Mr James Bird, Butcher, Yarraville, Vic requesting the correct address of Mrs J. Meredith as a letter advising her brother's admittance to a London hospital was returned unclaimed.

Base Records replied to Mrs Meredith on March 27, 1919 that her brother had been admitted on February 9, 1919 to the 1st London General Hospital, Camberwell, England suffering from Influenza. The office had dispatched this news to her at Union Street, Richmond but the letter had been returned unclaimed. As

no further information had been received about him it was assumed satisfactory progress had been made. His address was also given and her correct address had been noted for future reference.

Discharged to furlough on March 6 Sapper Bird was to report to the No. 1 Command Depot on March 20, 1919. Orders from Headquarters London for a transfer to No. 2 Command Depot at Weymouth were received that day and he proceeded there.

The Argus – Victoria – Tuesday April 1919:

A.I.F. CASUALTIES

List No. 462

The 462nd list of casualties sustained by members of the A.I.F. was issued by the Defence department yesterday. The names of the Victorians are appended. Unless otherwise specified, the rank is that of private or its equivalent:-

ILL

V. F. Bird, Richmond.

Article Abridged

A Medical Report was issued from No. 2 Command Depot on March 24, 1919, which gives the following:

Disability:	Nil
Present Condition:	Nil
Medical Class:	A – Fit for General Service.

While at Sandhill camp, Weymouth on April 19, 1919 at the age of thirty-one, he married by license Miss Adeline Miles of Crockerton, twenty year old daughter of a timber cutter, Herbert Philip Miles. The ceremony was conducted in St Peter's and St Paul's Church of England by Vicar J.W.R. Brocklebank. His next-of-kin now became his wife who was residing at 27 Dryhill Crockerton, Warminster, Wiltshire, England.

He went on leave and on July 2, 1919 was transferred to No. 5 Group at Sutton Veny marching in on July 5, 1918.

Sapper Bird accompanied by his wife Adeline embarked from Liverpool on August 9, 1919 on board the H.T. *Ceramic* for the voyage to Australia. The ship docked in Melbourne, Vic (3rd M.D.) and at the Sturt Street Station on September 27, 1919 his Report on an Invalid was taken - it states:

Trench Fever 1917-1918
Now quite well.
He was declared dentally fit.

The transport *Ceramic* terminated its voyage in Sydney, NSW (2nd M.D.) on October 3, 1919. His military discharge took place in Melbourne, Vic (3rd M.D.) on November 4, 1919. The British War Medal (62924) and the Victory Medal (60854) were awarded to Sapper 6618 Victor Frederick Bird for serving his country.

On April 25, 1922 at Yarram, Vic he received his British War Medal. The following year on August 4, 1923 Base Records wrote to Victoria Barracks, Melbourne requesting the address of Ex-No. 6618 Sapper V.F. Bird in order to forward his Victory Medal to him. The Officer replied on August 14 with his address as Woodside, via Yarram, Vic. The medal was forwarded to him on December 16, 1923.

In 1924 he and his wife were still residing at Woodside, Yarrum where he was a farmer. From 1931 until 1936 they were at Box Ridge, Sale Road, Yarrum and he was a labourer.

Gippsland Times – Victoria – Thursday 2 March 1933:

Dangerous Driving.

Victor Frederick Bird, a sleeper cutter at Woodside, was charged with having on February 2, driven a motor car on a public highway in a manner dangerous to the public. Defendant, who pleaded guilty, said he was driving on the correct side at night time, and did not see a stationary transport bus till he ran into it. A fine of £4 was imposed, a stay of 14 days being allowed.

Adeline Bird (nee Miles) died in 1939 at Yarram, Victoria.

Victor Frederick Bird died in South Australia on 14 August 1968 aged 83. His last abode was Woodville, South Australia. He is buried at Cheltenham Cemetery, Woodville.

Graeme Byrd – grandson of Victor Frederick Bird:

(my father (Frederick Victor Bird) changed his name to Byrd as a protest against his father!!!)

“Victor had a daughter Joyce (the youngest child) who lived in suburban Adelaide and with whom Victor lived with in his twilight years. This fits in with Victor's death in Adelaide in 1968. This is where I once visited him when I was young with my mother and father.

Frances, who died young, was apparently a twin sister to Betty - the eldest child.

I also recall that Victor re-married and lived in Port Adelaide for a time, but again I do not have a lot of information there, but there were no children.

Don't have any photo's of Victor - seems like everyone except Joyce did not have a lot to do with Victor. They were a bit annoyed with his antics post WWI, but I guess being young they did not fully comprehend what he went through.

It was an absolute tragedy that Adeline died young of what I believe to be an asthma attack and preventable with today's medicine and ambulance system. Not much in Woodside Victoria where they lived it was just old shack, which my father said had dirt floors and hessian bags over the windows. How times have changed - tough times in those days.”

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with the assistance of Graeme Byrd, grandson of Victor Frederick Bird.

photo of Victor courtesy Colin Purchase

www.tunnellers.net

ADDENDUM 1

James Bird married Martha nee Townley in 1857 in Victoria. The couple had the following children:

James: b. 1858, East Melbourne

Anna Elizabeth: b. 1860, Cranbourne

Frederick Arthur: b.1861, Cranbourne

Emma Jane: b. 1865, Cranbourne

Charles Herbert: b. 1866, Cranbourne

Alfred: b. 1868, Cranbourne

Martha Louisa: b.1869, Cranbourne

Eleanor Edith: b. 1874, Cranbourne

Florence Amelia: b. 1875, Cranbourne

Ada Maude: b. 1878, Cranbourne

Frank: b. 1879, Cranbourne

Frederick Arthur Bird married Louisa Maria Jennings at Cranbourne, Victoria in 1883.

Children: Jessie: b. 1884, Cranbourne

Victor: b. 1885, Cranbourne

Jessie Bird married William John Meredith in 1915 in Victoria.

Electoral Rolls 1919:

Jessie Meredith: 513 Swan Street, Richmond - home duties

Electoral Rolls 1924:

Jessie Meredith: 3 Toorak Parade, Geelong West - home duties

William John Meredith: 3 Toorak Parade, Geelong West - labourer

Electoral Rolls 1931:

Jessie Meredith: 12 Balmoral Crescent, Geelong North - home duties

William John Meredith: 12 Balmoral Crescent, Geelong North - labourer

Electoral Rolls 1936:

Jessie Meredith: 191 Melbourne Road, Geelong North - home duties

William John Meredith: 191 Melbourne Road, Geelong North - labourer

Electoral Rolls 1937:

Jessie Meredith: 185 Melbourne Road, Geelong North - home duties

William John Meredith: 185 Melbourne Road, Geelong North - labourer

Electoral Rolls 1942:

Jessie Meredith: 185 Melbourne Road, Geelong North - home duties

William John Meredith: 185 Melbourne Road, Geelong North - labourer

Norma Jean Meredith: 185 Melbourne Road, Geelong North – munition worker

Electoral Rolls 1949 & 1954:

Jessie Meredith: 185 Melbourne Road, Geelong North - home duties

Victorian BDMs:

Jessie Meredith: died at Geelong in 1959 aged 72 (calc birth year 1887) parents unknown

William John Meredith: died at Geelong in 1947 aged 66; parents Edmond John Meredith & Harriet May, nee Wilson.

Victor Frederick married Adeline Miles in 1919 in England. We know the couple had at least five children:

Betty Louise: b. 1920 at Yarram; d. 1983 at Traralgon; m. Roy George Wilkinson;

Roy George Wilkinson, b. 30 September 1913, Truck and Tractor Driver;

WW2 – medically fit coastal areas south of Mackay – enrolled in Civil Construction Corps

NOK Betty Louise Wilkinson, 627 Station Street, North Carlton - then - 46 The Avenue, Windsor

1942 Census for Edward:

Betty Louise Wilkinson: 627 Station Street, munition worker

1954 Census for Yarram:

Betty Louise Wilkinson: Sale Road - home duties

Roy George Wilkinson: Sale Road – farm assistant

1968 Census for Omeo:

Betty Louise Wilkinson: Mirboo North - home duties

1972 Census for Traralgon:

Betty Louise Wilkinson: 31 Henry Street - home duties

1977 & 1980 Census for Traralgon:

Betty Louise Wilkinson: 1/21 Albert Street - home duties

Myles Edward Wilkinson: 1/21 Albert Street – labourer

Fran Jessie: b. 1920 died 1920 at Yarram

George: d. 1931

Frederick Victor: b. 24 October 1924 at Yarram, Victoria. In WW2 he served as:

V512858 Private Frederick Victor Bird, enlisting at North Fitzroy on 30 July 1943; discharged 26 May 1944; Unit: 28th Australian Infantry Training Battalion; NOK Betty Wilkinson,
and as:

449982 Leading Aircraftsman Frederick Victor Bird, enlisting at Melbourne on 27 May 1944; discharged 1 August 1945; Unit: I Stores Depot, Sandridge; NOK Victor Bird.

Reginald Ernest:

ADDENDUM 2:

The L. M. Coleman mentioned profile is believed to be Lilley (Lilly or Lillian) Maud Purkis who married a William Coleman in 1896. The Electoral Rolls record Lilly Maud Coleman being at:

1908: Camooweal

1913: Duchess

1919 & 1925 Royal Hotel, Cloncurry.

The Queensland BDMs record that William and Lilly Maud Coleman had the following children:

1898 - Sydney

1902 - Allen Henry

1904 - Elsie May

The BDM also records children:

1900 - Gregory – mother Lilly Maud Purkis, father not listed

1913 - Vera Eileen – mother Lilly Maud Purkis, father not listed

Lilly Maud Coleman married Frederick James Reid in 1925 in Queensland. Lilly Maud Reid died in 1966 in Queensland, recorded as the daughter of George Purkis & Annie, nee Tynan. Frederick James Reid died in 1969 in Queensland, the son of David Alexander Reid and Julie nee King.

Vera Eileen is believed to be the 3-year-old referred to by Mrs. L.M. Coleman in her 1917 letter. Vera married Frank James McMahon in 1937 in Queensland.

The Electoral Rolls record:

1963 Electoral Roll:

Frank McMahon, 37 John Street, Redcliffe – drainer

Vera McMahaon, 37 John Street, Redcliffe – home duties