

CAPTAIN WILFED PERCIVAL AVERY

1st Tunnelling Company

Born 10 December 1885 in Mackay, Queensland, Wilfred (Wilf) was the 4th child, and 3rd son of John Symons Avery and Elizabeth Livingstone (nee Edgar). The family moved to Brisbane in 1894, and Wilf completed his education at the Brisbane Grammar School before studying at the Ballarat School of Mines from 1903 where he attained an Associate Diploma in Mining Engineering, achieving the best pass of his year in 1906.

Wilf was elected as an Associate Member of the Institute of Mining Engineers in 1910 and held 1st Class Certificates in Mine Management under Queensland and New South Wales State Governments.

The AUSIMM journals record him working at:

1912: Great Fitzroy Mine, Mount Chalmers, Queensland

1915: Klong Sa Mine, Sn Tammarat Mining Syndicate, Bandon, Siam

He was a member of Masonic Lodge - Perserverance No.2820 E.C., Queensland: Initiated 26 November 1910, Passed 25 February 1911, Raised 30 March 1911. The Masonic Roll 1921 states William Percival, not Wilfred Percival.

In Queensland on 1 January 1915 he married Estelle Muriel Millicent Grace Eglinton, the daughter of Ernest and Anna Maria Alice (nee Bell) Eglinton. The couple had one daughter, Anna Millicent Grace Avery was born on 17 January 1916.

He completed the 'Attestation Paper of Persons Enlisted for Service Abroad' on 23 December 1914 and spent 4½ months with No.3 Company Field Engineers, A.I.F. in 1915, acting as Company Sergeant Major. He named his wife, Millicent Grace Avery, c/o E. Eglinton P.M., of Kelvin Grove, Brisbane, as his Next of Kin.

Wilf passed through the Signalling School, Broadmeadows, and the Officers School of Instruction in Brisbane, before completing an Application for a Commission on 28 August 1915, having qualified at a competitive examination for first appointment to 2nd Lieutenant. His application was recommended by the District Commandant on 29 September 1915. He was Commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant on 8 October 1915. By November 1915, Wilf had joined the newly formed Mining Corps in camp at Casula, (photo below) and on 1 January 1916 he was promoted to Lieutenant.



Wilfred Avery
taken while working in Siam



Officers (peaked caps behind drum, left to right)

Lt Frederick Phippard
(Captain, MC, MiD;
2ATC)

Lt Leslie Coulter
(Major, DSO; O.C. 1ATC
KIA 29 June 1917)

Lt Edric Mulligan
(Major, DSO, CdeG(Bel), MiD(3);
O.C. 2ATC, died 1965 after
36 yrs in mental institution)

Lt Wilfred Avery
(1ATC;
KIA 25 April 1917)

A second Application was completed on 9 February 1916, at which time he held the rank of Lieutenant in No. 1 Company of the Mining Corps (this was probably just an administrative exercise dealing with establishment of the new Corps).

The Mining Corps embarked from Sydney on board HMAT A38 *Ulysses* on 20 February 1916 with 1246 members, including Lt Wilfred Avery.

At a civic parade in the Domain, Sydney on Saturday February 19, 1916, a large crowd of relations and friends of the departing Miners lined the four sides of the parade ground. Sixty police and 100 Garrison Military Police were on hand to keep the crowds within bounds. The scene was an inspiring one. On the extreme right flank, facing the saluting base, were companies of the Rifle Club School; next came a detachment of the 4th King's Shropshire Light Infantry, then the bands of the Light Horse, Liverpool Depot, and the Miners' on the left, rank upon rank, the Miners' Battalion.

Following the farewell parade in the Domain, Sydney, the Australian Mining Corps embarked from Sydney, New South Wales on 20 February 1916 on board HMAT A38 *Ulysses*.

The Mining Corps comprised 1303 members at the time they embarked with a Headquarters of 40; No.1 Company – 390; No.2 Company – 380; No.3 Company – 392, and 101 members of the 1st Reinforcements.

Ulysses arrived in Melbourne, Victoria on 22 February and the Miners were camped at Broadmeadows while additional stores and equipment were loaded onto *Ulysses*. Another parade was held at the Broadmeadows camp on March 1, the Miners' Corps being inspected by the Governor-General, as Commander-in-Chief of the Commonwealth military forces.

Departing Melbourne on 1 March, *Ulysses* sailed to Fremantle, Western Australia where a further 53 members of the Corps were embarked. The ship hit a reef when leaving Fremantle harbour, stripping the plates for 40 feet and, although there was a gap in the outside plate, the inner bilge plates were not punctured. The men on board nicknamed her 'Useless'.

The Miners were off-loaded and sent to the Blackboy Hill Camp where further training was conducted. After a delay of about a month for repairs, The Mining Corps sailed for the European Theatre on 1 April 1916.

The ship arrived at Suez, Egypt on 22 April, departing for Port Said the next day; then on to Alexandria.

The Captain of the ship was reluctant to take *Ulysses* out of the Suez Canal because he felt the weight of the ship made it impossible to manoeuvre in the situation of a submarine attack. The Mining Corps was transhipped to B1 Ansonia for the final legs to Marseilles, France via Valetta, Malta. Arriving at Marseilles on 5 May, most of the men entrained for Hazebrouck where they arrived to set up their first camp on 8 May 1916.

A 'Mining Corps' did not fit in the British Expeditionary Force, and the Corps was disbanded and three Australian Tunnelling Companies were formed. The Technical Staff of the Corps Headquarters, plus some technically qualified men from the individual companies, was formed into the entirely new Australian Electrical and Mechanical Mining and Boring Company (AEMMBC), better known as the 'Alphabetical Company'.

When the Mining Corps was dis-banded into Tunnelling Companies, Wilf was assigned to the 1st Australian Tunnelling Company, and worked with that unit at Hill 60 and other places for the next 11 months.

He was promoted to Captain 25 August 1916 - while commanding a section of the Tunnelling Company, the promotion coinciding with a period of leave in France from 21 August to 7 September 1916.

In January 1917, Wilf was briefly hospitalised in France with Amblyopia (defect vision for which there is no recognizable cause. It has been happily described as a “disease in which the patient sees nothing and the physician sees nothing”).

Captain Wilfred Percival Avery was killed in action on the 2nd anniversary of the Gallipoli landing, 25 April 1917, when an explosion in a mine chamber killed 3 Officers and 7 other ranks, including one of the rescuers. He was buried at Poperinghe New Military Cemetery, grave I E. 2.

A photograph of his grave was forwarded to his widow in June 1920, the Memorial Plaque and Scroll, and his British War Medal and Victory Medal were also passed to Estelle in the ensuing years.

War Diary held by the Imperial War Museum:-

IWM - WO95 / 489

1ST AUSTRALIAN TUNNELLING COMPANY A.E.

S E C R E T.

To
Controller of Mines
2nd Army.

Left Sector.)

Right Sector.)

Centre Sector. “A” Sounds of windlass and knocking plainly heard, reports of walking noises confirmed.

“D” C. On 22nd distinct sounds of boring, 23rd enemy heard to charge bore-hole with torpedo. 25th unconfirmed report of walking.

“Adelaide” 25th dull hammering noises.

On the 25th instant during a heavy enemy bombardment a minewerfer exploded in the Officers’ Mess completely wrecking the adjoining sleeping room and the kitchen.

The timbers were driven through into the Berlin which was damaged for a distance of 30’ to 35’; the dugout used by the batmen was also damaged.

I regret to report that Captain Avery, Lieuts. Tandy and Evans and 7 O.R. were killed. 5 other Officers were badly gassed but were rescued in time. Every effort was made to force an entrance for rescue operations but the gas was too bad to permit much headway.

The Proto Corporal lost his life by a fall of earth while in the execution of his duty. I should like to bring to your notice the very efficient work done by the Proto Staff of this Company. They have always shown an extraordinary confidence which comes only with a thorough knowledge of their job; this reflects the very greatest credit on the 2nd Army Mines Rescue School.

(signed) J Douglas Henry Major A.E.

Commanding Officer

From Capt. Oliver Woodward’s War Story:-

"Matters on the Hill proceeded in a normal manner until April 25th. I had come back to Camp on the previous night and on the afternoon of the 25th we went to Proven to play a return Rugby Football match with the 177th Tunnelling Company. After a hard game we won by 3 point to nil. Just when the match finished word came through that a disaster had occurred on the Hill, as a result of which 3 officers and 7 men were killed, and 4 officers and about a dozen men were badly gassed. ... On arrival at the Hill I found that the disaster arose from a premature explosion when a charge was being prepared for a mine in "D" Left Gallery. The only one of our officers who escaped had returned to our Headquarters Dugout to get a measuring tape. He noticed that a 50 pound box of Guncotton was being prepared as a primer for the charge and overheard the remark, "We did not test the detonators for continuity". Evidently it was decided to test the detonators while they were in the primer, and by a thousand to one chance there must have been a supersensitive detonator which exploded when the testing current was put through the circuit. The whole of the Officers' Dugout was wrecked and it was only by the purest good fortune that the other 4 officers were not killed. It was not until the 28th April that we had recovered the bodies of our comrades, who were buried in the cemetery at Railway Dugouts."

Those killed in the above action on 25 April 1917 were:

	EVERY, Wilfred Percival	Capt	30	Mining engineer	Brisbane, Qld
	TANDY, Arthur Elton	Lieut	33	Mining engineer	Bathurst, NSW
	EVANS, Glyndwr David	Lieut	32	Mining engineer	Randwick, NSW
261	SAXTON, John William	Sapper	21	Striker	Holdsworthy, NSW
387	MANHOOD, Walter	Sapper	23	Well-borer	Casula, NSW
581	HAMILTON, Kenneth George	Sapper	20	Hairdresser	Fitzroy, Vic
3605	GRAY, Arthur Alva	Sapper	38	Farmer	Didcot, Gayndah, Qld
5326	GLEW, Charles	Sapper	37	Miner	Charters Towers, Qld
6005	WALLACE, John	Sapper	43	Railway Tunneller	Cannamulla, Qld
5605	RANGER, Lyle	Sapper	18	Wheeler	Young, NSW

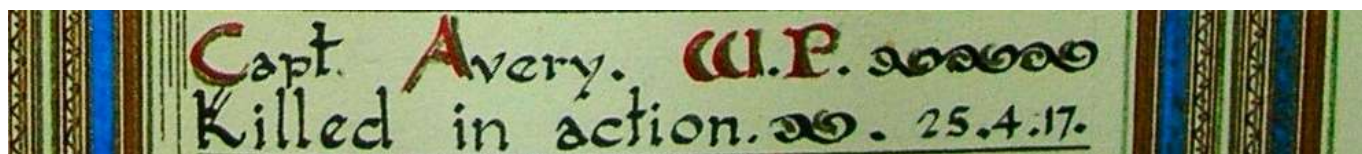
The Sydney Morning Herald - Saturday 23 July 1921:

ENGINEERS' ROLL OF HONOUR

The Royal Engineer War Memorial Committee are arranging to deposit a roll of honour of all ranks of the Royal Engineers whose names were officially published as killed in action or died of wounds or disease in the war in the chapel of St. Paul's Cathedral, and the Engineer corps of the dominions, colonial, and Indian armies have been invited to deposit similar rolls of honour in St. Paul's, to be attached to that of the Royal Engineers. This invitation has been accepted in Australia. The roll will be inscribed on vellum and enclosed in a casket of Australian timbers to rest on a slab of Australian marble.

This extract from Tunnellers Roll of Honour included in profile with the kind permission of the Dean and Chapter of St Paul's Cathedral, London

Photos courtesy of Robin Sanderson, Paris



AWM Image Id: P00735.017
Ypres, Belgium. Memorial to men of the 1st Tunnelling Company, AIF, who were involved in tunnelling and mining operations at Hill 60, near Ypres, in 1916-1917.
(Donor: J.L. Holmes)



AWM Image Id: RELAWM05099.001

Rectangular enamelled steel dedication plaque containing the details of 14 of the 29 Australians killed serving with the 1st Australian Tunnelling Company during 1916-1917. Sections of enamel are missing due to weathering prior to removal.

In 1919 the veterans of the 1st Australian Tunnelling Company erected a memorial on Hill 60, honouring the 29 comrades who had died there in 1916-1917. The memorial and its stone enamelled plaques weathered badly, and in 1923 a new and more robust monument, which stands on the site today, was constructed. The three original plaques, bearing the dedication and the names of the company's dead, were returned to Australia.



Ypres, Belgium. c. 1923. This structure replaced an earlier one constructed in 1919 by the Company. This replacement is very plain and bears no symbol whereas the first memorial was surmounted by a cross.
Postcard donated by Murray Ewen of W.A.

The Mercury - Hobart, Tasmania - Thursday 18 December 1924:

VANDALISM.

WAR MONUMENT DAMAGED.

LONDON, December 16.

(Australian Press Association.)

The War Graves Commission has advised the authorities at Australia House that the inscription on the tablet of the Australian Tunnelling Company monument at Hill 60 in Flanders has been considerably damaged, many of the letters having been broken, and some entirely removed, evidently by a hammer and chisel. Inquires into the outrage are now proceeding, and the matter has been referred to the Anglo-French Mixed Committee.

Wilfred Percival Avery's name is located at 26 in the Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial.

1ATC – War Diary – April 1916 – Appendix 10:

Trench 39

4-5-17

To C.O. 1st Australian Tunnelling Company A.E.

Following your instructions I have to report as follows:- On the afternoon of the 25th April at 2-15 p.m., during an enemy bombardment, a minenwerfer or heavy shell pierced the Officers Dugout Quarters, exploding therein. The damage done was purely local in wrecking the O.C. Advance Mica's office, Mess Room, and stairways leading to Larchwood Dugout System. Two Officers were instantly killed and one died almost immediately on being lifted on to a stretcher. Five other Officers were more or less gassed by Carbon Monoxide and Nitrous fumes.

Lieuts. Armstrong and P. Jones with proto men were immediately on the scene and with the assistance of other N.C.O. and sappers, succeeded in rescuing and resuscitating these Officers. On account of the enemy still shelling Marshall walk, these Officers were sent down to the A.M.C. Dressing Station at Larchwood, as the air in the whole dugout system was slightly vitiated with poisonous gasses. At the opposite end of the system, and near the seat of the explosion, were the Batman's Quarters, which were cut off, with the exception of one small hole just large enough to allow a Proto-man to go through. This portion of the system was very heavily charged with carbon monoxide and nitrous fumes, and caused the death of six batmen. Corporal Saxton with proto set on immediately made an inspection of this part, but did not succeed in locating any men alive, but on account of the density of the fumes could not see very well. Corporal Treacy then made an inspection and reported that all bodies seen appeared to be lifeless. The ground overhead was running sand, particularly at the entrance and it was with difficulty that Corpl. Treacy was got out, on account of his Proto Set, and feet getting entangled in some electric wires. I then told Corporals Saxton and Treacy just to stand by in readiness for future operations, and myself proceeded in resuscitation of others who had been more or less gassed. Corporal Saxton evidently made another inspection of this portion of the system and was buried by a fall of earth at the exit. It was immediately reported to me and with the assistance of Lieut. P. Jones, Corpl Smith and others we soon had his head clear, and the mask of a Novita Apparatus in his face. Corporal Saxton was breathing for a period of nearly two hours in this position; the mask not being removed but the cylinders being changed quickly on the apparatus. Time after time we got the earth off his head and shoulders, but another fall would bury him again. On some occasions he was completely buried for a period of two minutes, but continued breathing all the time. There was only room for one man to work in the face at a time, and the average time a man worked did not exceed five minutes, on account of carbon monoxide filtering through the sand from the Batman's Quarters. On the recovery of Corpl. Saxton's body it was found that his feet had become entangled in some electric wires at the exit, and that a wire had caught under his throat, which was unnoticeable to the rescue party. During the rescue operations from ten to twelve men working in this face were more or less affected by the poisonous gases but were treated by the usual method taught and employed at No.2 Army Proto School. Between twenty and thirty cases were sent to the Dressing Station, and several other mild cases were treated by the proto squad. In all cases the treatment proved very efficient, but I would like to draw your attention to the fact that in some cases where the patient was left in charge of the stretcher bearers of the R.A.M.C. that Ammonia was administered, which had a tendency to undo the resuscitation work, sending the patient into an unconscious state.

(Sgd) R.A. Clinton Lieut. Proto Officer

1st Aust. Tunn. Coy. A.E.

Interview with McBride – date and interviewer not known:

[Capt William John McBride MC, 1ATC]

How I got my MC - They were going to blow a mine at Caenflay (?). I wasn't on duty. Capt. Avery and Lt. Tandy had prepared a charge in the little officer's dug-out we used in the sandy layer. Avery was quick tempered. Tandy was a kanaka – South Sea Islander. His eyes went bloodshot like a native's when he had rum. Usual routine to test detonator with battery to make sure filament was working; didn't put enough current through to make it glow. They hadn't put detonator under sandbag, should have done. They had gun cotton and dry primer there – put detonator in dry primer and then passed current through it. It went off and blew them all to pieces.

I was playing football at Popperinghe. SOS came to go up to Hill 60 at once. They had blown officers' dugout to pieces, nearly filled it with sand. Blast had gone along corridor to proto room, where several men had been gassed and killed. We cleaned up the rescue room, dug the sand out of the dug-outs and sieved it. Collected remains of Tandy and Avery, wrapped in blankets and sent down to cemetery. Wives got the pensions. Lost about 13 altogether. OC of No. 4 Section was one ½ - Bill Avery. Proto men went in first and found bodies. Trapped in with sand and timber – timber propped up by hand. No nails or screws.

In 2006, Wilfreds' grave was visited by students of the Mackay North State High School during their 'Debt of Honour' Tour. A photo and card were left to record the visit.

Wilfreds' brother, Reginald, had been researched by Kiera McClelland of the MNSHS for the tour, and Wilfred was kindly included in the commemorations.



In 1937 Wilfred's daughter, Anna Millicent Grace Avery, was a bank clerk living at Victoria Road, Kelvin Grove, Queensland with her mother, Millicent Grace Avery living at 'Estelmere' Victoria Park Road, Kelvin Grove.



'Estelmere' was the home of Ernest and Anna Marie Alice Eglinton from 1915. Ernest, Anna and Grace lived at Alabama Hill, Charters Towers where Ernest was the Police Magistrate between 1908 and 1913.

The Electoral Rolls record that from 1921 through 1972 Millicent Grace Avery was living at 'Estelmere' 146 Victoria Park Road, Kelvin Grove.

Wilfred's wife Estelle Muriel Millicent Grace, nee Eglinton, Avery died in Queensland in 1974.

1870 Private Reginald Edgar AVERY – Killed in Action 4th April 1918.

Reg was born in Mackay, Queensland on 5 March 1880 and started his education at the Coningsby State School, where his service is still commemorated on the very impressive 1914-1919 Honour Roll.

He attended Brisbane Grammar School from 1895 and their history records that he was a jackaroo on Barcardine Downs before studying assaying at the Ballarat School of Mines in 1902 and mining in Western Australia. The history also records that he was involved with pastoral pursuits.

Stating that he was a Drover by calling, he enlisted in the A.I.F. on 31 January 1916 in Brisbane, and initially named his father, John Avery of Taringa, near Brisbane, as his Next of Kin.

His Will of April 1916 names his mother Elizabeth L Avery of 'Coningsby', Taringa, as his sole beneficiary.



He embarked for the European theatre of war on board HMAT A46 'McGillivray' on 1 May 1916, disembarking at Alexandria, Egypt on 13 June. He embarked from there on 6 August per TS 'Megantic' for the British Expeditionary Force, and after some time at the 13th Training Battalion, Rolleston, England, marched out to the 41st Battalion on 23 September of that year.

Reg proceeded to France with the 41st Bn. on 23 November 1916 and in January 1917 found himself in hospital with the mumps. After rejoining his unit, Reg continued to serve with the 41st until 14 June 1917 when he was transferred to the 59th Battalion. Reg enjoyed some furlough in England in January 1918 before rejoining the 59th Bn. on the Western Front.

On 16 April 1918, a Lieutenant Hugh G Hanna of the 15th Machine Gun Company, A.I.F., wrote to Mr. & Mrs. Avery stating that he had found the body of an Australian soldier in the village of Bousencourt wearing the colours of the 59th Aust. Inf. Batt with 'an identity disc on his wrist bearing the number 1870, Pte. R.E. Avery, 59th Bn. A.I.F. On his sleeve was the red band worn by a runner and a smashed cycle lay beside.'

Lt Hanna went on to advise that his valuables and pay-book were missing, but that a pack had been found close by in which was a Pocket Book, which he was returning to them. Lt. Hanna advised that he had made arrangements for the soldiers' burial and the erection of a cross over his grave, and concluded his letter by offering his deepest sympathy.

Red Cross files (available on the Australian War Memorial website) provide witness statements taken as early as July 1918, which indicate that Reg was killed at Bouzincourt on the Somme by a shell fragment while he was holding the line. Cpl Linton states that as the enemy were attacking, it was not possible to bury him, and that he, Cpl Linton, had secured his wallet and personal belongings and handed them to the Adjutant of the Battalion.

The Commonwealth War Grave Commission record that 1870 Private Reginald Edgar Avery is commemorated on the Villers-Bretonneux Memorial, having no known grave.



Personal Effects of Reg Avery, consisting of a writing wallet, letters and a protractor, were forwarded to his mother in May 1918. A Separate package containing a torch belonging to Reg was forwarded in June, as was a wallet containing a military pass, photos, 1 letter and a Will. The Memorial Plaque and Scroll, and his British War Medal and Victory Medal were forwarded to his family in the ensuing years.

Reginald Edgar Avery's name is located at 166 in the Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial.

Avery family history has it that Reg was a despatch rider and that at the time of his death he was delivering papers (?orders) from Brig. Gen. 'Pompey' Elliott.

Major John Goodall AVERY – Surgeon – Australian Army Medical Corps.

John Avery was born in Mackay, Queensland on 11 May 1882 and started his education at the Coningsby State School, where his military service is still commemorated on the very impressive 1914-1919 Honour Roll.

He also completed his education at the Brisbane Grammar School where, in 1900, he was the winner of the (Sir Charles) Lilley Gold Medal for distinction (now termed High Distinction) in Greek, Latin and English in the Upper School. BGS history records that he was Champion Gymnast in 1898 (shared award with V. McDowall); 1899 and 1900 (shared award with C.S. Graham). His qualifications and employment up to 1919 are also recorded in the BGS history.

He applied for a Commission in the Australian Imperial Force on 31 July 1915 and his appointment was confirmed on 16 August of that year. He named his wife, Violet, of Tocumwal, New South Wales, as his Next of Kin. A qualified Medical Practitioner (M.B., B.S., 1st Class Honours 1906), Doctor Avery embarked from Brisbane on board the 'Kygrra' on 16 August 1915, as a reinforcement to the 2nd Australian General Hospital, disembarking at Suez on 21 September.

On 30 September of that year, John Avery proceeded to Al Hayat Convalescent Depot, Helouan. He left Alexandria on 19 March 1916, arriving at Marseilles on 25 March. Attached to the 5th Field Artillery Brigade for approximately 9 months, he was transferred to the 1st Aust. Derm. Hospital, Bulford, England, on 24 December 1916.

John returned to Australia on board D9 H.T. 'Gaika', embarking in London on 12 May 1918, leaving England on 17 May, and disembarking at Melbourne on 5 July 1918. His appointment as an Officer in the A.I.F. was terminated on 22 July 1918 for 'Family Reasons', possibly because his parents had lost 2 sons in the war already and 1 previously, and he was the last surviving son. His mother died only a month after his return and perhaps her illness was also a consideration. He was entitled to wear the 1914/15 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

The Avery Memorial Prize was instituted at the Brisbane Grammar School by John and Violet:

"Founded in 1944 by Dr and Mrs JG Avery, in memory of their sons, Sergeant John Dennis Avery, who was killed in action with the AIF in New Guinea, 1943, and Don Edgar Avery, who was accidentally killed when about to enlist in the RAAF.

Award offered for proficiency in Science in Form V"

It was last awarded in 1967.

Major / Doctor John Goodall Avery died at East Malvern, Victoria on 15 August 1968, aged 86 years.

Note of interest: On 10 April 1912 at Ballarat, Victoria, John married Violet Alberta Elliott, sister of the later Maj. Gen. Harold Edward 'Pompey' Elliott, Commander of 15th Brigade in WW1, of which Reg Avery's 59th Battalion was a part.

The Avery family was instrumental in setting up the Coningsby State School, near Farleigh, outside Mackay. John and Reginald Avery are both commemorated on the Coningsby State School Roll of Honour.



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www.tunnellers.net
with the assistance of the Avery and Eglinton families