Saxon, Bertie Henry. Service Number 2708.
Bertie Saxon was the forth of seven sons born to John Thomas and Isabella Ellen Saxon, in Euroa in 1891. He also had 6 sisters. Within the family, Bertie was always referred to as ‘Punkin’. The family business was running newspapers. They owned and ran the Violet Town Sentinel and the Euroa Advertiser. Some of the boys, including Bertie, were members of the Euroa Fire Brigade. Four of Saxon boys would serve in the Australian Army during the course of the war. The eldest, John, did not serve and remained at home to help his father run the newspapers.
Bertie was a ‘compositor’ living in the Farmer’s Arms Hotel in Violet Town when he enlisted there on the 5th April 1916 as a 24 year old. He had earlier tried to enlist about the same time his brothers did, but was initially rejected, as he was only 5 foot 2 inches tall. At the time, these ‘height’ rejects where colloquially known as ‘Bantams’. By 1916 height restrictions had been eased and he was able to enlist. He embarked on the HMAT A10 Karroo on the 19th September 1916 as part of the 5th reinforcements to the 2nd Pioneer Battalion. A younger brother, Joseph Stanley was already serving in France with the 22nd Battalion and was ‘blown to pieces’ when attacking Pozieres Ridge on the 4th August 1916. It is not known if Bertie knew this before he sailed.
When he arrived in England he made his way to the Pioneer Training Battalion on the 15th November 1916 and he was taken on strength with the 2nd Pioneer Battalion in France on the 19th February 1917. He wrote home on the 26th February and this was published in the Violet Town Sentinel on the 15th May 1917.
‘Well, here I am, still alive and kicking, after a week in the field and have been having plenty of work, but am getting broken into it now. It was “pretty solid” on for me for the first couple of days, especially as I had done nothing for about three weeks prior to coming here. Was on the job today when Fritz started to throw some shrapnel over, but, as luck happened, no one was injured, as the shells went wide. I could see lots of shells bursting on a village some distance in front of us. I have met two Violet Town boys over here on Friday – George McCoomb and Reg Ramage, both of whom were well. I missed seeing my brother Tom by a couple of days, but met Walter Crisfield and George Leed, formerly of Euroa, also Ernie Kerslake, who told me Tom had gone back to the line again. Received parcel of sox, and very glad to get them – all my mates reckoned they were “bonzas.” Best regards to my district friends.’
Of the 5 people Bertie mentioned in this letter, only 2 survived the war.
He served without incident for most of his service and spent some time in a rest camp in October 1917 and had two weeks English leave July 1918.
He took part in the assault on Montbrehain on the 5th of October. Bertie and his ‘C’ company had taken over ‘Square Trench’ and assault began from there. He later sustained a ‘penetrating’ shrapnel wound to his neck. Exactly where he was and at what time this occurred is not known. He was taken to the 12th Casualty Clearing Station where he died the next day.
The family placed a death notice in the Violet Town Sentinel on the 22nd October 1918.
‘SAXON. - Died of wounds at 12th Casualty Clearing Station, France on the 6th October. No. 2708 Pte. Bertie H., fourth son of John Thomas and Isabella E. Saxon, Euroa, and beloved brother of John, Thomas A. (returned dangerously wounded), Joseph S. (killed in action, August 4th, 1916), Ernest L., Mrs J Wells, Mrs E. Stevens, Mrs A. V. Riddle, Grace and Jean.
After two years of faithful service
Another war-worn hero is at rest
And sleeping, “till the day breaks
And the shadows flee away.”
Our Bertie.

Inserted by his sorrowing parents, brothers and sisters.
On the 25th of October 19818, the Euroa Advertiser ran at tribute to Bertie.
ONE OF AUSTRALIA’S SONS.
PTE. BERT SAXON.
(Violet Town.)
The Empire call came sounding o’er
A thousand leagues of land and sea
Inviting men of British blood
To serve the flag for Liberty.
The “bantam” answered, “Here am I.”
(So willing he to join the fray)
“Rejected – under height,” they said-
The Bantam smiled, and went away.

Again the call – this time a note
Of urgency within its tone, -
“The inches do not make the man;
Do not reject for height alone”.
“You’ll do, “ the sergeant said, and gave
Enlistment for the dreadful play;
A last look around at type and press –
The Bantam smiled, and went away.

In Belgium’s field he bore his part.
Assisting for dear Freedom’s sake –
(The pick and shovel, day and night,
Find lines to build and roads to make.)
And when the order came along,
“Battalion moving out next day
For France another fighting ground,”
The bantam smiled, and went away.

One morn the sudden summons came
“All hands turn out to stem the foe!” –
The Hun was taught a lesson stern,
Before he laid a hero low !
That night the stretcher-bearers bore
The wounded soldier from the fray,
A grave eyed doctor shook his head
The Bantam smiled – and went away.

All evidence shows that this tribute was written by his brother Thomas.

His mother, Isabella was apparently overcome with grief by this stage, as she had lost two sons and the other sons who had served, William and Thomas, had been repatriated home in 1918 with serious wounds. She concentrated on finding the grave of her youngest son, Joseph, and wrote to the French General Pau who was visiting Australia when the war ended. No trace of Joseph could be found, but she was able to get a memorial cross for Joseph placed next to Bertie’s grave. The war graves commission suggested to her that she could place Joseph’s particulars on Bertie’s permanent headstone in place of a private epitaph for Bertie. This she did.
Private Bertie Saxon lies in the Tincourt New British Cemetery in plot VI. D. 18.
The ‘epitaph’ on his headstone was written by his mother, Isabella.
Also in Memory of
1564 Private J. Stanley Saxon
22nd Bn Australian Inf.
Killed 4.8.16

Bertie is also commemorated on the Euroa School Roll of Honour, the Euroa Fire Brigade Roll of Honour and the Euroa Memorial Drive.