

## 481 CORPORAL Herbert Hector SMITH

Herbert Smith was born at Brimpaen (a small town in the Wimmera region of Western Victoria) in 1896, the son of Bertha (nee Kruger) and Edward Smith. Edward had purchased 640 acres of land at Maroona for his son, Albert (which he farmed up until 1920), Herbert often travelled by bullock wagon from Brimpaen to assist his brother during busy times. Herbert attempted to enlist early on during the war, but because of a rupture (appendix/hernia?) he had to have an operation and wait to regain his fitness.

Herbert stepped forward at Horsham on his next attempt on 29 February 1916 (the clerk appears to have incorrectly dated some pages as March) he described himself as being a 19 year farmer, still single and gave his next-of-kin as his mother, Bertha. The recruiting staff recorded that Herbert was; *single. 5'10", 11 stone 6lbs, fair complexion light blue eyes, reddish hair, 8 vaccination marks on left arm, a birthmark and that all of right forefinger lost.* After a short time at [probably] a local depot, on 16 June 1916 Private Herbert Smith was sent to Campbellfield, where he became part of A Company with the newly forming 38<sup>th</sup> Battalion.



The 38<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been raised at Epsom Racecourse (Bendigo) commencing from 1 March 1916, the battalion was to be part of the 10<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Brigade with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Australian Division. However an outbreak of meningitis significantly interfered with the battalion's training, it was decided to re-locate the fit men to a new camp at Campbellfield on 5 June (where Herbert was taken on strength).

On 30 June the 38<sup>th</sup> Battalion sailed for England aboard the troopship *Runic*. It was not until 10 August that the *Runic* docked at Plymouth in the U.K., from Plymouth the battalion entrained to the Larkhill Camp on the Salisbury Plains.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Division remained at Larkhill until mid-November 1916, when it moved for service on the Western Front. Much of the delay in not



moving to France was due to nearly 3,000 men from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division being transferred to other divisions following heavy losses around Pozieres. That was presumably why Private Herbert Smith left the ranks of the 38<sup>th</sup> Battalion and headed for France on 23 September 1916, he was now earmarked as a reinforcement for the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion. At the Etaples Depot on the French Coast Herbert was re-allotted to the 59<sup>th</sup> Battalion.



Private Herbert Smith joined a draft of men (149 in total) sent to the 59<sup>th</sup> Battalion, they joined the battalion at Estaires on 8 October 1916. The 59<sup>th</sup> Battalion had not taken part in the Pozieres attacks, rather it had suffered horrendous casualties during the Battle of Fromelles back on 19/20 July 1916, the 59<sup>th</sup> and its sister 60<sup>th</sup> Battalion all but being wiped out during the fighting. The 59<sup>th</sup> and 60<sup>th</sup> were gradually being brought back up to strength, the 59<sup>th</sup> continued to man a quiet sector near Fromelles for the next few months.

The 59<sup>th</sup> Battalion were holding positions known as the 'Cellar Farm Dugouts' when Herbert and the others reached the battalion. The unit's war diary made a note about the 149 fresh reinforcements; *These men are composed of 1<sup>st</sup> Division, 4<sup>th</sup> LH [Light Horse] and 3<sup>rd</sup> Division men and although good type[s] of men [they] seem lacking in discipline and smartness.* The arrival of Herbert's draft allowed the 59<sup>th</sup> Battalion to release 3 officers and 127 men back to their own battalion.



Herbert was soon initiated into life in the trenches on the Western Front. Although not regarded as a particularly dangerous sector, the men were regularly subjected to enemy artillery fire, with occasional extra warning when it was believed to be gas shells. The men had to keep their heads down as enemy snipers were active, enemy machine-guns were also all too ready to engage any movement from the 59<sup>th</sup> Battalion's trenches.

On 13 October the battalion moved out of the frontline back to reserve billets at Rue Biache. The following day the battalion marched to Estaires, the battalion remained at Estaires up until 18 October. The battalion then retired to a camp at Villers Sous Ailly, here the men resumed training and what was becoming a familiar routine while slightly behind the frontline. Here the battalion had poor billets, the men's first task to get the billets to a reasonable standard, the training focused mainly on bayonet training and lectures, as well as physical training. On 22 October the battalion moved to a more substantial camp at Montauban, the battalion remained here, training, for the rest of the month.



On 30 October the battalion re-entered the frontline, taken taking over Carlton Trench, where the battalion remained for three days. Wet weather and the poor state of the trenches made the battalion's stay quite unpleasant. On 2 November 1916 the battalion retired to billets at Dernancourt, the billets the battalion took over were in a poor state. The men spent several days tidying up their billets.

A further move, this time aboard buses, occurred on 6 November, as the battalion moved to Flesselles. The billets here were good, with suitable sanitary arrangements. The battalion spent the next eleven days at Flesselles, training was resumed, with specialist training for battalion's Lewis Gunners, Grenadiers (bombers) and Signallers focused upon.

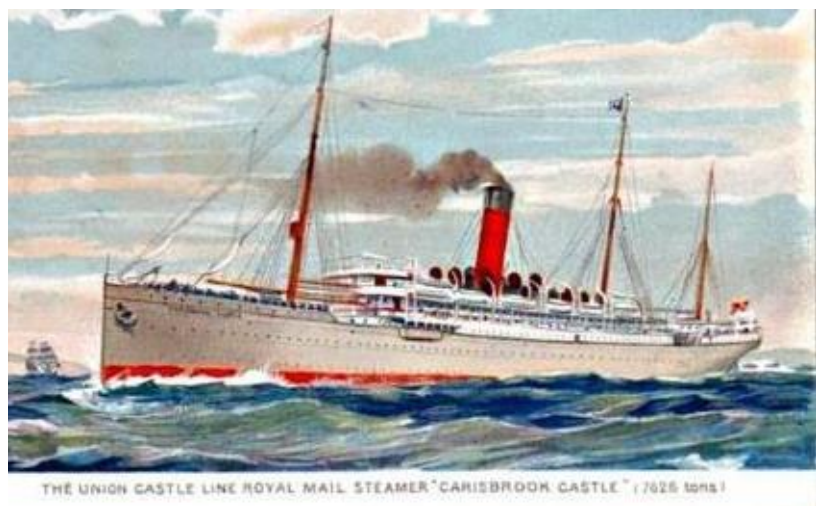
On 17 November the battalion prepared to re-enter the frontline, marching back to Dernancourt and then Montabaun. Billeted at A Camp at Montabaun, the battalion moved forward on 20 November to relieve the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Grenadier Guards, taking over a sector known as Needle Trench. Enemy and our own artillery were very active during the three days that the battalion held the frontline.

On 23 November the 57<sup>th</sup> Battalion moved forward and relieved the 59<sup>th</sup> Battalion. The 59<sup>th</sup> Battalion moving back to D Camp, where it remained for the rest of the month, from D Camp the battalion provided many fatigue and working parties. The 59<sup>th</sup> Battalion remained at D Camp for the first few weeks of December 1916, the unit's war diary recording that for most of that period the weather was cold and often wet and foggy.

The 59<sup>th</sup> Battalion re-entered the frontline in the Needle Trench Sector on 11 December, the war diary showing that B and C Companies occupied Zenith and Spring trenches. D Company occupied Gusty and Spectrum trenches, while A Company held Rose trench. The battalion held the frontline until 14 December.

Having retired to E Camp, it was here that Herbert reported to the Battalion's RAP (Regimental Aid Post) suffering from Trench Feet. Herbert was sent back to the 38<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station for treatment. Two days later on 17 December Herbert was admitted to the 1<sup>st</sup> General Hospital at Etretat on the French Coast. Herbert's daughter Lola, related that Trench Feet was a serious condition and would often result in the loss of toes or feet, herbert was lucky to save his feet, but was unable to rejoin his unit in the trenches.

On 2 January 1917 Herbert was transferred to the hospital ship, *Carisbrook Castle* for evacuation back to England. The *Carisbrook Castle* in its former life had been a 1<sup>st</sup> Class Passenger Staemer, sailing between London and CapeTown. Out of service for a few years in 1914 it became a hospital ship containing 439 beds, regularly crossing the English Channel.



Upon his arrival in England herbert was admitted to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Australian General Hospital at Brighton. Herbert only remained at Brighton for two days (obviously on the path to recovery), he was then transferred to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Auxiliary Hospital at Dartford. Similarly Herbert only remained at Dartford for a few days, before being released to furlough from the hospital, he was ordered to report back to duty at No 1 Command Depot at Perham Downs on 21 February 1917.

After only four days at the Perham Downs depot Herbert was transferred to No 4 Command Depot which was located at Wareham. Herbert was allotted to become part of the 65<sup>th</sup> Battalion on 26 March 1917, this battalion was to be part of the newly forming 17<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, the brigade becoming part of a newly forming 6<sup>th</sup> Australian Division. Forming at the Windmill Hill Camp at Parkhouse the division struggled to get the manpower to form, the divisions fighting in France



needing all of the men they could get from the U.K. depots and eventually in September 1917 the attempt to form the new division was disbanded.

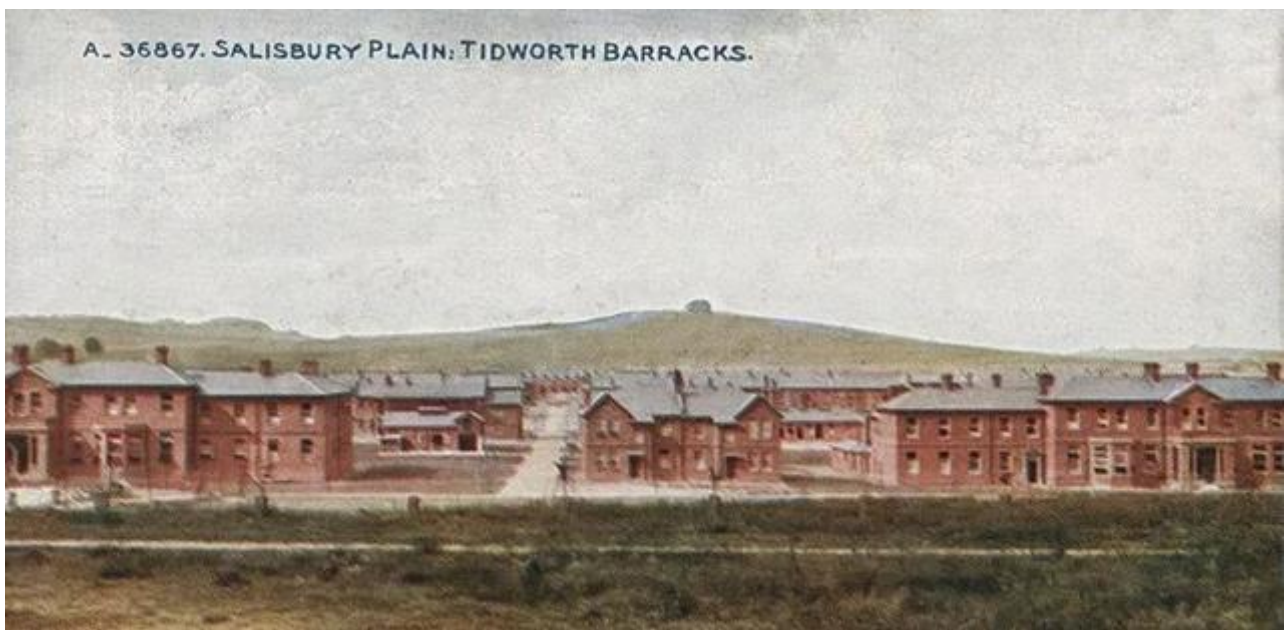
It appears that Herbert only remained with the 65<sup>th</sup> Battalion for a short time, his file indicates he was probably attached for duty as a military policeman with the Codford Detachment. Most certainly by the end of June 1917 he was carrying out 'Police Duties'.



Herbert was formally detached for duty with the Anzac Provost Corps on 31 August 1917, his file shows he remained posted to the Codford Detachment. This detachment generally numbered an APM (Assistant Provost Marshall) and 24 men, the detachments primary focus was on the discipline of Australian troops passing through No 4 Command Depot (Perham Downs). The photo below shows the Codford Detachment, most probably from 1918, unfortunately the men are not named, the officer shown (APM) in the centre front of the photo is Captain Warwick Fussell, a well respected officer within the corps. Fussell had taken command of the Codford Detachment following a stint on the Western Front, he took command at Codford on 1 January 1918.



Later entries on Herbert's file are labelled as Tidworth, but he may still have actually been with the Codford Detachment. Bhurtpore Barracks at Tidworth was the main depot for the [now] Australian



Provost Corps, Colonel Williams controlled the corps and its various detachments from Tidworth.

With a 1916 enlistment date, Herbert was probably happy to remain a military policeman in the U.K. throughout 1919 (even those military policemen with 1914 enlistment dates were encouraged to remain in England, rather than returning to Australia). On 10 February 1919 Herbert was promoted to corporal, the military police often promoted their men granting them an 'extra regimental' rank of corporal, this was seen as giving the men that little bit extra authority to carry out their duties.

The photo (**right**) shows Herbert wearing sergeant's stripes, his file shows no such promotion, permanent or temporary, this may have been towards the end of his time while in London (early 1920), as the senior ranking NCO's (sergeants) were getting thin on the ground, it may have been a VO Rank (voyage only) for his return to Australia.



An entry dated 1 September shows Herbert posted to the Warminster Detachment, this detachment consisted of an APM and around 50 men. Throughout 1919 Herbert became eligible for several periods of leave, which he would have taken in the U.K. Early 1920 shows him posted to the London Detachment (Warwick Square) this occurred as AIF numbers on the Salisbury Plains were greatly reduced as the troops returned to Australia.

Corporal Herbert Smith was finally granted his own passage back to Australia aboard the *Bahia Castillo* on 17 April 1920. The voyage was now normally taking a month, Herbert Hector Smith was not formally discharged from the AIF until 2 September 1920.

