

William Barry BECK

Service No. 2831

William Beck was born in Kilmore in 1890 and was one of eight children born to William John and Jane (nee Rentoul) Beck. William's father was the Sergeant in charge of the Kilmore Police Station 1887-88.

William was aged 26 years and 2 months when he enlisted at Melbourne in June 1916. His brother, Arthur Stanley, was already in active service and was killed in action in France in 1916. William was single, worked as a salesman and living at Canterbury, Melbourne, with his parents.

Following training William embarked for overseas active duty in October 1916. He had been promoted to Lance Corporal while in training and attached to the 2nd Pioneer Battalion. Further training took place in England and in August 1917 William proceeded to France.

Pioneer battalions were essentially infantry with light combat engineer skills. They constructed defensive positions, command posts and dugouts and prepared barbed wire defences. Their skills and capabilities were broad and they also quite often fought as infantry.

In October 1918 William sustained a severe gunshot wound to the left buttock which resulted in him being transferred to England for treatment. It may well have been during this time he met his future wife. His military file notes he was absent without leave 12-19 December. He subsequently married Dorothy May Friedel, a hairdresser, in February 1919 at the Holy Trinity Church, Islington in London.

William was declared fit on discharge from the AIF. He returned to Australia in August 1919 aboard the "Zealandic". He was awarded the British War Medal, the 1914/15 Star and the Victory Medal. His service is commemorated on the Kilmore Honour Roll.

Post-war William lived around the Melbourne area, Ballarat and Bairnsdale. He died at Carnegie in 1976 aged 88 years.

Compiled by Kilmore Historical Society. Pic. 2nd Pioneers 1918 constructing a "corduroy road". AWM.

