



# BERT WILLIAMSON

## 54 BATTALION

### KILLED IN ACTION

19-20 July 1916

### BURIED

Fromelles (Pheasant Wood) Military Cemetery, France

### MEMORIALS

His father's headstone, Nyrang Creek Cemetery, NSW  
Plaque, Nyrang Creek Cemetery  
Australian War Memorial Honour Roll

Photo: Australian War Memorial

## PRIVATE ALBERT WILLIAMSON No: 4249

Albert Williamson, known to his family and friends as Bert, was born at Nyrang Creek, NSW on 21 September 1892. He was the tenth of fourteen children born to Joseph Williamson and his wife, Cecilia (née Brown). The Williamson's were a pioneering family, with Bert's grandfather, William being one of the first to select land at Nyrang Creek. Their large holding was known as *Rose Villa*.

Bert and his siblings were raised on *Rose Villa*. From a young age, all the children worked with their father and grandfather on the property, with Sundays reserved for worship at the nearby Methodist Church. Severe drought and the death of Bert's father in October 1914 put a strain on the family's finances. Perhaps looking to secure a regular income for his mother, Bert enlisted in the AIF in Cootamundra on 21 August 1915. He likely travelled to Cootamundra with another Canowindra local, Ted Stanford (4895), as they both enlisted on the same day.

Initially allocated to 2 Battalion, Bert set sail for Egypt with his unit on 20 December 1915 aboard *HMAT Aeneas*. His enthusiasm on reaching dry land was dampened when he was fined 10 shillings for creating a disturbance and being drunk in camp at Zeitoun. Shortly after, Bert was transferred to 54 Battalion where he happily found himself among some familiar faces including Reg Kiss (2835), Jack Staines (5492), Paddy Balcomb (4156), Barney Davis (4190) and Clarrie Nash (4341). Starved of news from home, the boys would swap copies of the *Canowindra Star* which were sent to Bert by his mother.

Bert and his mates trained in the oppressive heat of Egypt until late June when they were deployed to the Western Front. The German's had pushed into British territory near the village of Fleurbaix in Northern France and the objective on the evening of 19 July 1916, was to wrest it back and force the Germans to commit additional troops to the defense. The Germans were well prepared and heavily fortified, and with the Australian and British troops attacking in waves across open ground, the battle was a disaster. The losses at what became known as the *Battle of Fromelles* were enormous and Bert was numbered among them.

There was some initial confusion about whether Bert had survived and been taken a prisoner of war or was killed in action. When his identity discs were received from Germany, there was no doubt. Sadly, no information about Bert's place of burial was included and none was ever provided. The community rallied around the family, attending a Memorial Service for Bert, held in the Methodist Church at Nyrang Creek on 25 March 1917.

Ninety years later, and following extensive research, a burial ground was located at Pheasant Wood, near Fromelles in 2008. It contained the bodies of 250 Australian and British soldiers who had been buried behind enemy lines by the Germans following the attack at Fromelles. In 2014, Bert's identity was confirmed through DNA testing. He is now interred in the Fromelles (Pheasant Wood) Military Cemetery, France (Plot II, Row A). In addition to his regimental details, Bert's headstone bears the inscription, 'A mother's love endures'. He was 24 years old.

His is the 243rd name recorded on the Honour Roll at the Soldiers' Memorial Hospital, Canowindra.