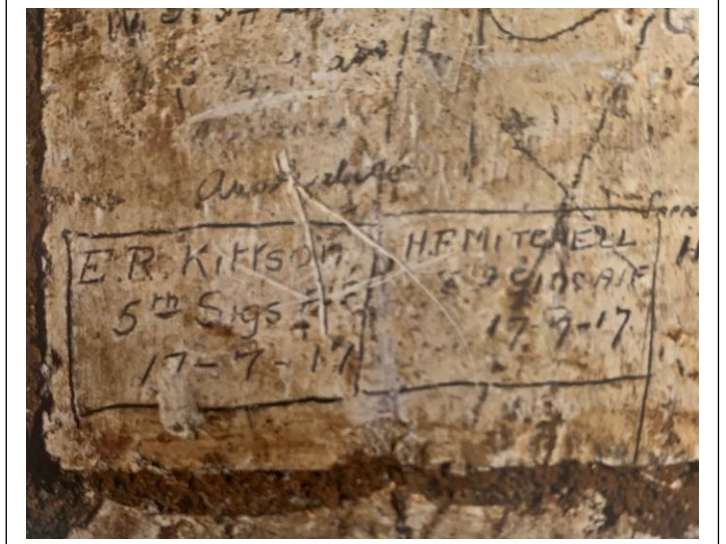


A Soldier of the Great War.

A Silent Soldier of Naours.
Sapper Errol Remfry Kittson.
Service Number 3657



Cpl Errol Remfry Kittson



Naours caves inscription

Errol joined the AIF on August 9 1915 at the age of 22 years old. He was a natural born British subject born and living in Heywood Victoria . He was a joiner before enlisting in the AIF at Bendigo enlistment office. His enlistment records indicate that his initial enrolment was with the 2nd signal divisional company. He then attended the AIF 2nd Engineers Signal school from the 14th September till the 15th October 1915 before his embarkation .

He embarked for the Great War on the 23rd November 1915 aboard the HMAT Ceramic from Melbourne. Arriving in Tel El Kabir in Egypt on the 9th March 1916 he was promoted to Corporal and transferred to the 5th Division Signals Company. He underwent continual training during this time. He would shortly be shipped to France.

Tel el Kabir



TEL EL KABIR

During the Gallipoli landings and the Sinai and Palestine Campaign of the First World War, Tel el Kebir was a training centre for the First Australian Imperial Force reinforcements, No 2 Australian Stationary Hospital, and also a site of a large prisoner of war camp. Some 40,000 Australians camped in a small tent city at Tell El Kebir of six miles in length.[5] A military railway was eventually constructed to take troops from the camp to their vessels in Alexandria and elsewhere for embarkation to Gallipoli landings.

SIGNALS COMPANIES

Division Signals Companies belonged to the the Royal Australian Engineers during WW 1. Later, the Royal Australian Signals Corps was created. The Division Signals Company was tasked with providing communications from the Headquarters to those of subordinate formations. In the case of 5th Division, this meant the 8th (composite) 14th (NSW) and 15th (Vic) Brigades and Division units (Artillery, Engineers, Pioneers, MG Battalions and Services etc).

Communications in 1916-18 would be by a combination of field telephone (requiring the laying of line) and limited radio towards the end of the War.

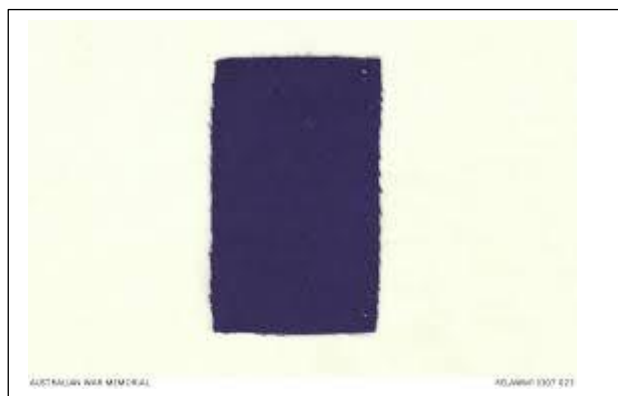
At various times homing pigeons and motorcycle despatch riders were also used. On Gallipoli, horses were also used for this high risk task.

Field telephones connected by line were the most usual means of electronic communication. Line was buried where possible but it would often be cut or broken by artillery fire or road traffic. Then it would have to be surface laid to maintain communications. Laying line was one of the most hazardous jobs in the front line. The "Linies" had to move above ground carrying a reel of wire. They could often be the only moving thing on the battlefield and thus attracted fire - both small arms and even artillery fire. Hence the task was often performed at night, with the added risk of getting disorientated on the battlefield. The "linies" also had the unenviable task of locating and repairing breaks in the line.

"Power buzzers" were also deployed forward to boost the signal being borne by the line. Later when radio began to appear, signallers would have to erect antennas / aerials, often exposing themselves to enemy observation and fire in the process. As antennas are invariably associated with Headquarters they would also attract the unwelcome attention of enemy artillery Forward Observers. *Steve Larkins Nov 2014*



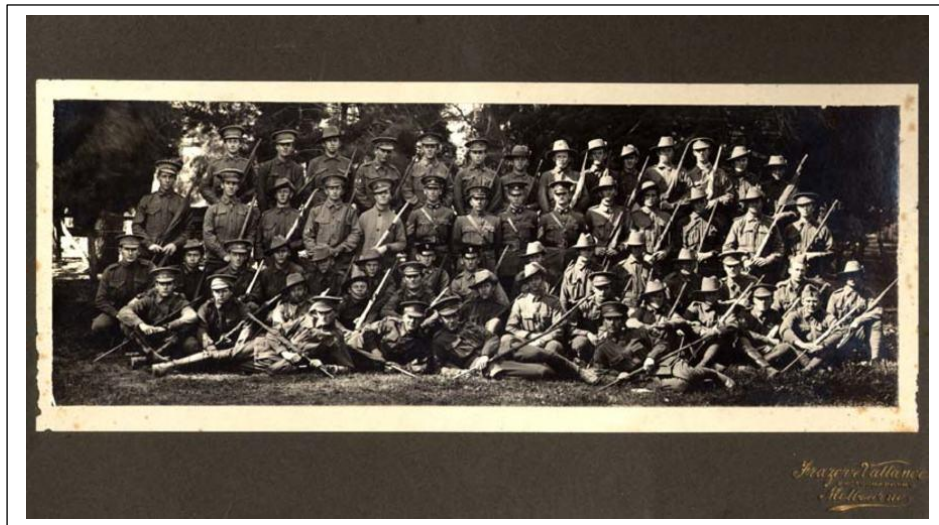
5th Signal Company in the Field.



5th Signal Company patch.



5th Signals Company dramatization



AIF Signals Company Broadmeadows Victoria 1915.
(is Errol amongst these ????)

He spent a few days in hospital in April 1916. There is no indication of his condition but it would probably be no battle injury and some type of influenza that swept through the camps in Egypt.

On the 17th June 1916 he finally left Egypt bound for the Western Front .He arrived at the port of Marseilles in France on the 25th June 1916.
He was then attached to the 3rd Squadron Royal Flying Corp.

Quite often signallers joined the observation tasks of the early airforce. They even went aloft in balloons to observe enemy lines and communicate to the General Headquarters. It would appear from the unit diaries that Errol would spend his first few months setting up communications in an around Croix de Bac and Saily not far from Armentieires. This area was known as the nursery where the first Australian units to arrive in France were to be exposed to trench warfare for the first time. It was an attempt to battle harden them for what lay ahead..

VIGNACOURT AND NAOURS.

In early November the 5th Signallers company would visit Vignacourt to set up communications. The war was not going well and the Germans had made significant ground. The behind the lines had to be prepared for the possibility that it would become the new front line. So preparations were made. Signals offices and cable laying took place to join the front line to headquarters in the safe villages of the Somme.

Errol was probably in Vignacourt from 8/11/16 to the 21/11/16 and again from the 3/1/17 until the 14/1/17. The unit diaries tell us this.

During this time either working/training or just recuperating Errol would have probably visited Naours. It is just a short drive away by signal motorbike.

Whether Errol had a Thuillier photo taken is still to be found out but other members of the Company certainly had theirs taken but not necessarily leaving their signature at Naours!

A Group portrait of three Australian soldiers. Identified, centre is 1056 Driver (Dvr) Clarence Aspinall, 5th Divisional Signal Company. Accession Number P10550.408 Maker Thuillier, Louis Place made France: Picardie, Somme, Vignacourt Date made c 1916-1918



A Thuiller /Vignacourt Photo.

Having rejoined the 5th Signallers company in early January 1917 he was now laying cable, establishing communication bases and ensuring everywhere was connected by telephone or telegraph. Even lighting was provided as part of their work. He may have even been relaying messages by motor bike.

After leaving the safety of Vignacourt he would be stationed in Ribemont, Fricourt and Bernafay over the coming months as the battles raged around him. All the time ensuring that the signals and wiring stayed intact.

The large cathedral town of Amiens was close by and later in 1918 a push by the Germans attempting to take this major railway junction to cut off supplies and provide a quick advance to the Channel and win the war.

In July 1917 Errol would find he and his signals company further north, this time in Belgium. He was training, laying cable and reequipping many of the the signal stations Dickebush, Messines and Ypre were the battlegrounds he was now providing communication support for.

During 1917, the battles in Belgium such as Passchendale, Ypres and Messines ridge were to take many lives. Errol would continue to work alongside his company replacing wires, setting up phone lines and messaging important information to the front by bicycle or motorbike.

Finally in January 1918, he and 30 of his company were rewarded for their service with leave to the UK. I am sure he would have relished the chance to escape the horrors of war. The Germans were about to make one final push but it was to fail . Errol would end the war on the Somme in Heilly near Corbie and Villers Bretonneux and finally in Peronne and Oisemont , Errol would hear of the Armistice here. He may have even telegraphed the news to others on the battlefields.

Errol left Australia in November 1915 . 3 years later he was lucky enough to have survived the horrors that would claim millions of lives and over 50000 young Australian men.

He played a vital role in providing communication between the soldiers at the front , others near by and General Headquarters who were planning the battles.

He returned to Australia from Warwickshire after a stint in hospital in England with influenza . He departed England on the 5/4/1919 and was discharged from the AIF on the 20/7/1919.He was to eventually move to Auckland ,New Zealand and would pass away on the 21/11/1962 at the age of 69 .

His legacy and service lives on though in the caves under a small village of Naours in northern France . It was here that he visited with mates on leave and left his name over 100 years ago, a reminder of the service he and others gave during the Great War.

His name and his service is remembered on a monument in Inglewood ,Victoria, Australia according to Virtual War memorial Australia. His brother is also remembered there as serving. It says that the monument holds the names of 213 serviceman from the region. His hometown of Heywood has a monument but does not contain his name.



An interesting sidenote of the only picture that survives of Errol (far right) in uniform (that we know of) is the fact that the soldier on the far left of the photo is Errol's brother Lieutenant James Frederick Kittson 5137, a member of the 8th Infantry Battalion who served and returned to Australia on the 30th June 1919. He was to receive the Military Medal for service in the field and would later go on to become a serving Australian Politician. At this time we have no indication of who the third soldier (in the middle) may be. Could it be another relative Reginald Kittson 3890?



