To War and Home Again

AIF 3756
Victor Owen Williams

Kerry Blinco
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1st AIF 3756 Victor Owen Williams

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Photograph: Owen Williams: Vic Williams in uniform on horse at the Plainby Farm 1919
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Throughout this volume the authors' notes are in italics whilst transcripts of original documents are in normal text.

Warning: The transcripts of original documents sometimes contain culturally insensitive language that would have been deemed appropriate at the time. These comments have been retained unedited for context and accurate reproduction.
Photograph previous page: Studio portrait Vic Williams. 1917.
Introduction

When my father, Russell Williams died in 2008 we found bits of family history all over the house, including a small old brown suitcase. The suitcase contained memorabilia from my Grandfather, Victor Owen Williams’ service in World War I. There were photographs, negatives and postcards. In a drawer somewhere else in the house we found two diaries. I was surprised to find the photographs - I hadn’t considered that soldiers might have had cameras with them in World War I. I knew the less the photographs and negatives were handled the better. Unable to decide what to do with this family “treasure” at the time, I shut the suitcase - quickly.

Recently I came across Craig Deayton’s book “Battle Scared - the 47th Battalion in the First World War”. I knew a little about Pa’s service as the family already had access to Pa’s service record thanks to the National Archives of Australia. I knew Pa had been wounded in France. I knew he had been transferred from one Battalion to another. Until I read Craig’s book I hadn’t realised how lucky we were that Pa returned. I knew all the things in the suitcase were of interest to our family but didn’t realise until reading Craig’s book that they might be of interest to others.

Pa’s diaries document every day of his journey by ship to England, his training in England, and every day of the return journey. The only information that survives in his own words about the time he spent between these journeys is an oral history documented by Ron Pechey. The photographs and souvenirs he brought home provide more clues.

Did diaries ever exist for the time he was deployed to active service? There are very few surviving diaries of the 47th Battalion. Was the experience too difficult to write about or were there war diaries and they were lost in the battle of Dernancourt where he was wounded?

I now know I should have asked Pa a thousand questions whilst he was alive. Would he have answered them? Perhaps if I had done my research respectfully beforehand - perhaps not. I always thought of him as a soldier and a staunch RSL man but realise now he actually didn’t talk about his experiences in the war itself. My Aunts tell me he didn’t talk about it to anyone.

I’ve compiled this book as a gift to my family so that they may share the items for which I seem to have become accidentally responsible. I haven’t included all the postcards and photos in this book, only a selection of those that have writing on them or that can be linked to the other textual material.

I have offered the original material to the State Library of Queensland. Given the approaching centenary of World War I the SLQ is excited to receive this material. They will ensure the original materials are preserved in proper conditions and available to generations of Williams to come.

Rather than solely reproducing existing material I’ve attempted to provide some context and make some linkages between the different sources. I hope this helps us better understand Pa’s story.

Kerry Blinco
January 2013
Notes on Photographs and Postcards

Before I could begin to compile this book, the photographs, negatives and postcards found in the brown suitcase needed to be sorted and digitised. The original diaries were also digitised. The original items were photographed and then processed using Adobe Lightroom (TM). Our home digitising studio was not able to achieve archival/preservation quality but the results are of sufficient quality for family requirements and will limit necessary future physical handling of the original material, assisting in conservation.

Negatives were photographed and processed into positives. Photographic images of the originals have been deliberately enhanced to make them more viewable and printable. Photographs have only been cropped to remove completely unrestorable areas. Very little touching up has been done. Original unprocessed digital versions have been retained. Thank you to my wonderful husband for helping with this process, and to the Northern Territory Library for the loan of a light box. Both were critical to processing the just over 1000 images involved.

Photographs

Photographs dating before Vic’s departure from Australia are either studio photographs or appear to have been taken by Vic’s father Owen Williams. Except where noted the remainder of the photographs in this book were taken by Vic Williams himself.

There are no original photographs of the journey to England. The only original photograph from the 12th Training Brigade was taken by “some chap” and purchased by Vic for four pence.

Standing orders for the 1st Australian Convalescent Depot clearly state that no man was allowed a camera or to take photographs. This was generally the case for the Western Front - only official photographers allowed. Apparently the order was not always obeyed. The two photographs included from the 1st Australian Convalescent Depot appear to be the work of a professional photographer - possibly an official photographer for the Depot.

The ban on cameras must have been relaxed after the Armistice. There are a few photographs from Vic’s ten day leave in March 1919 in Europe. These are poor quality compared to the later photos. Perhaps Vic borrowed a camera. Vic acquired a camera on his return to England from France. The subject of photographs from this date including Sutton Veney, travels around the United Kingdom, and the trip home correlate reasonably well to the documentary record. Two roles of film were lost in a developing accident on the ship on the way home.

Not all the photographs have been included in this volume. The supplementary volume, To War and Home Again - 1st AIF 3756 Victor Owen Williams - Illustrative Supplement will contain the complete set of digitised items.

Postcards

Only those postcards with writing on them, that must have been included in letters home, have been included in this volume. Other postcards will be included in the supplementary volume.
Chapter 1 - Before the War
Photograph previous page: Studio portrait. Theophilus (Oph), Lillian and Victor Williams. c191?
The text in this chapter is from the oral history prepared from Mr Ron Pechey's conversations with Vic and various sets of associated notes. (See Sources for more details)

Before he enlisted Vic was a typical Australian farmer's son.

Mr Pechey noted  Though Vic readily admitted he had lived through really exciting and interesting times it was not easy to extract his memories. You had to run his mind up a slope, as it were, and let him free wheel down. He had seen the advent of telephone, electricity, car, radio, black & white TV, colour TV, aeroplanes and antibiotics and other things we now take for granted and all of them pleased him. He noted the pressures on young people these days and a greater awareness of injustice. “Now there is always someone to point out injustices and hardships”.
From the Oral History by Ron Pechey:

**Victor Owen Williams was born on 11 May 1898 in Toowoomba, the second of four children. He had two sisters, Lillian Grace (19 July 1896 - 18 September 1991), Joyce Margaret (22 August 1915 - 3 January 1995) and a brother Theophilus Cornwall (12 December 1902 - 22 June 1986). His parents Owen Charles Williams (3 January 1872, Stanthorpe - 10 July 1942) and Bertha Mathilda Federike Nitz (circa 1874 - 23 February 1938) were married in 1894. They lived at Rosevale in Plainby where Owen was a farmer and grazier.**

Vic’s grandfather Thomas Williams (1835, Newlyn Cornwall - 16 April 1920) had been a sailor and a fisherman. He married Catherine Maddern (24 September 1837 - 23 October 1879) on 18 January 1862 before coming to Australia in 1868. (Her sister married a Cossart) Thomas worked as a surveyor’s assistant in the Stanthorpe area before taking up a selection in the Crow’s Nest area and continued working as a surveyor’s assistant for Mr Hume. His wife Catherine died in childbirth in 1879. The children left were Tom, Owen, Fred, Arthur, Mark, Corney, Lilly and Kate. In 1886 (17 August), Thomas remarried Charlotte Hains Ward (circa 1850 - 9 May 1911). There were no Social Services. After Catherine died and before he married Charlotte, it was quite impossible for Grandfather to carry on his work and also raise a family. The children were taken in by various other families as their own. Vic’s father, Owen, went, at nine to Gus Mitchell’s father. At that time he had no schooling. The Mitchell’s must have been good to him because he remained on very friendly terms with them all his life. It is said that at his first meal, Mrs Mitchell said to him “Little man, how many eggs can you eat?” “One” “Oh, my goodness, your little belly needs stretching - there is a man here eats seven.”

Most of the families at Plainby when Vic was a boy were original settlers, including Vic’s father Owen. Owen was a great mate of Gus Mitchell’s.

Amongst the other families were Len Ward - 2 blocks of 160 acres each; Ted Loveday; Bill Pettiger (from Yorkshire); The Suhrs, Swains, Smalbones, Jobsons, Butters, Wicox, Reinkes. Len Ward and Owen Williams lived together in a hut built on their dividing fence for years. They paid half a crown an acre and had to live on the block and carry out certain improvements.

The first thing to do was to fell a patch of scrub and burn it. Corn and potatoes were planted in the ashes. The soil was so friable potatoes could be planted and easily dug with the hands. The bandicoots were very bad and they used to dig up the grain when it shot. They used Strychnine baits made by boiling it up with corn to kill the bandicoots.

Nearly all the families were Methodists and went to church every Sunday. Vic recalled one occasion when John Pukallus (Harry’s father) came to Church with all his Medals on (Mementos from the Franco Prussian war of 1866).

Dairying was solely for domestic use until the factory started in Crow’s Nest in about 1906. Settlers undertook contract work while developing their farms, fencing, timber splitting and railway construction. There were practically no cattle until in 1902 - the drought would have killed them anyway.
Vic recalled “husking parties” at night when prizes were won for husking so many pots or tins of corn. Owen once won a big kettle which Vic still has. At the finish of the party big bundles of husks would be carried out and the boys would try to catch a girl and roll her in the husk.

There were also surprise parties and “Tin Kettlins”. “The “Tin Kettlin” occurred when the newly married couple moved in the hut or house and commenced (after the neighbours has gathered silently) with a blast of blank shot from a shot gun. At surprise parties people would arrive silently, get out the accordions and striking up, march towards the house in a flock. Corn and corn bags would be dragged to one corner of the barn, a lantern set up and dancing would commence. The smaller children slept under the seats.

Practically all their food was of the homegrown variety. The whole family took part in the gardening and four neighbours would slaughter as a team each taking a quarter. The Williams family had a high netting chook run and there were always plenty of chooks and eggs.

About 1910 Owen went over to the Oakey district to buy a stud milking short horn bull from a man called Grey. Grey said “Owen I’ll give you a few shoots of a new grass from Africa”. Kikuyu! It ruined the orchard but Owen encouraged it elsewhere as it was highly prized for the scrub soil. Owen eventually discovered chooks would eradicate it. Vic believes all the Kikuyu in this district originated from Owen’s plot.

I asked about soil erosion and he recalled a fall of 10” in a night which washed out a round post in the piggery.

Years later in the twenties there was a freak storm - 4” in 30 minutes “there was so much water in the air the plow horse could hardly breathe” said Vic.

When he was a lad no one worried about soil erosion - water had to take its natural course, they said - if it went through your paddock that was just too bad. Herman Mewing said it was natural for soil to move from West to East and Moreton Bay was the farmland of the future. The paddocks still seemed to grow great crops of corn and potatoes anyway. Vic said Ravensbourne should never have been cleared - it would have provided timber for generations. He had seen a tallow-wood tree on Taylor’s farm that was 39’ round the butt.

Cooking was done on an open fire in a detached kitchen. They bought flour in four bushel bags and made their own bread. The three bushel (or ‘Chapman’ bag) did not come in until about 1908.

Vic’s mother had the first (wooden) clothes washing machine in the district. You had to keep water in it or the wood opened up. It was worked by turning a handle - how the children hated toiling on that handle!

Mother had an old “Singer” Sewing Machine and she used to shake the whole house after everyone went to bed.

Boots and shoes were bought but Mother made all the clothes for the boys and girls. In those days many people went barefoot and most children went thus to school, but in Vic’s family that was considered a dreadful sign of ignorance.
Fathers used the strap freely on boys and sometimes girls especially for not doing as they were told. Girls were more confined to the house and generally got on better with their mothers than the boys who could get away from the house.

Farm women mostly wore black and may only have had one dress.

Normally children were born in a private hospital in Toowoomba. The women went well before and stayed for a fortnight after. Perhaps the present day women are harder.

School days and growing up

Vic had two sisters and one brother. Vic recalled when he was rising three years old there was a big snow storm. The board walk to the detached kitchen had enough snow on it to make a full size Snowman, complete with a pipe in his mouth. When the snow cloud passed over and the afternoon sun came out the heavily timbered range glistened like a fairyland. The details of the early pioneer cottage became part of a scene that so impressed a child’s mind to have remained while other events did not register clearly until the first school day which was at the age of 4. The bag of lollies used by the teacher Mr Jack Littleton created another never forgotten memory.

Vic’s next clear recollection was a 1908 trip to the Brisbane exhibition when he disgraced himself by getting lost. Highlights of this trip were a visit to H.M.S. Powerful in Moreton Bay and the kind lady at the boarding house. Owen returned to the selection while the family spent a few more days with relatives. A young man that was staying with the relatives insisted that father had run off with a black gin. “It caused a lot of amusement on the Toowoomba Railway Station when I [Vic] shouted “There’s Daddy he did not run off with a black gin”.

The first school was on ground given by the Swain family. One of the Swain girls married John Littleton. It was a provisional school built by the parents. Vic was sent off to school at four because of his sister’s accident. [Lillian had been badly burned.]

Vic’s grandfather was a great proponent of the old “Cornish Hug” wrestling and Vic was the only grandchild interested, although Mark was a gymnast and weight lifter. All the boys were experts with the Shanghai.

Jack Littleton gave lessons for adults at night. For children who did well at their lessons he would produce a lolly from a bag he kept in his desk. Vic walked one and a half miles to school but some children had to go 6 miles. Jack Littleton must have been pleased with Vic because at his first prize giving the teacher rushed off to his own library to find a book for Vic. There were about 40 pupils.

The school was built before the Douglas, Bergen, Upper and Lower Pinelands Schools but those at Wichelo, Pechey and Crow’s Nest were earlier.

Vic’s first day at school was cold and windy. His mother was away from home with a badly burned sister and the girl employed to look after him had him rugged up so that he could hardly breathe.
The following notes were handed to me by Vic:-

“There was the school day shock of the cricket bat slipping from my one-handed grasp when trying to play and eat school lunch at the same time. The handle speared into a Butters boy’s temple. He gasped “I’m dead” and went out cold.

He recovered later but gave us a big fright - me particularly.

Years later the same boy stood in my way of scoring a goal at football. A hand stab to ward him off struck his jaw bone and badly dislocated my thumb. Many people had a go at putting it back into place unsuccessfully so it was very swollen when medical help was sought. Three hours under chloroform and it was still out and cutting the sinews was contemplated, unless the chemist might have a device called a “Chinese Puzzle”. Father who feared one unit of the milking team might be lost, rushed off and triumphantly returned with the puzzle which did the trick. Father said “Will he be able to milk cows alright now?” [Note: A chinese puzzle is a woven bamboo tube which when put over a finger and pulled traps the finger tighter and tighter the more it is pulled. Generally used as a gag toy, they are still employed today to treat a type of fracture known as a Bennett’s fracture.]

There was the great thrill when the small school defeated Crow’s Nest School under my captaincy.

Then there was the pain of 6 “cuts” for forcing a Butters boy to slide down our favourite creek bank. His dirty serge shorts brought complaints from his Mother. I had a fellow feeling for a Pettinger boy who suffered a similar fate after playing the wag successfully for 6 weeks. Of the three Fred is alive - his Mother lived to 99.

My brother ‘Oph attempted to fall a tree that had a bush fig growing in it - he was looking for a tree for Arbor Day. Having left school and finding him hacking away at the old tree, I put him out of the way and successfully felled it on myself, pinning myself in the thick scrub around it. Unluckily it was a dead scrub lignum, hacked from all sides, and it did not fall where expected. One of its very low limbs struck me on the side of the head and I came to with a broken thigh. A horse was harnessed, the cart filled with straw and a neighbour called. Taking hold of the broken limb his distress was such that he didn’t concentrate, and the limb and my body went in different directions. After a three hour journey in the cart the leg was very swollen and contracted. No facilities were available at the old residence that served as a hospital and in due course the apprentice from the furniture store cum funeral parlor rigged up a couple of boards and a pulley at the elevated end in which a 28 lb bag of sand was hung. This slowly edged the limb to nearly its correct length but the sharp edges of the under-plank soon brought up a huge blister and much cotton wool was needed from time to time. The Doctor (Henderson) at this time enlisted and was killed in the war, but before he left the leg, now very thin, was placed in plaster as soon as the use of crutches was permitted. I toppled down a flight of steps at my Aunt’s home but no damage resulted and with light use the leg returned to normal size. This caused the plaster to cut off the circulation and intense pain set in - another emergency. This time a quicker horse in the cart and a new doctor got the plaster off in time to save an
The Brisbane Courier
Saturday 5 June 1915 p7

An accident happened today at Plainby (our Crow's Nest correspondent wired yesterday) Victor Williams, a son of Mr Owen Williams, who is well known for his one-man farm exhibits, was falling a dead tree and was pinned under it when it fell, his thigh being broken and his head cut. His father who was a quarter of a mile away, witnessed the accident, and hurried to the spot and freed his son, bringing him into the Crow's Nest Hospital, where he is under the attention of Dr. Henderson.


Photograph: Vic Williams. Plainby farm corn
amputation job. Pressing the leg over a stool to bring the knee stiffness back to normal was the final [treatment].

At this time an eye tooth with the nerve taken out and only a dressing in the cavity turned septic and could not have an injection to extract it. A doctor and chloroform was said to be needed but I insisted it could be pulled without any painkiller.

The dentist finally agreed to have a go. At one stage my neck seemed to be stretching inches longer but it came out pus and all and the face swelling due to poison soon subsided."

The knee that had been bashed against a tree by a pony years before must have benefited by the rest and worked better.

Vic said this was the wildest winter he ever knew - 6 weeks of swirling dust cloud from the west.

Vic continues:

"One incident I recall clearly was when learning to use a single furrow hand plow, and reaching the stage where a deal of pride was taken in perfectly straight furrows. Two travellers in a buck-board passed by as I turned the horses around the corn. “Fancy” said one to the other, “doing that for a living - poor little bugger”. Pride deflated!

I was fond of capturing carpet snakes to put them in the barn to cope with the mice. Once finding a large brown slithering over the barn full of corn cobs I chased him around and to my amusement he went so hard and fast he got his head inside a wire loop that was around the top plate of the barn, and in a flash was held stuck by the neck.

A working man who had a room attached to the barn once trod on the head of a small brown during the night. The steel shod heel killed the snake unbeknown to the wearer of the boot.

I remember Loveday's (neighbours) well which had a windlass and bucket which we used. Much depended on the reliability of the boys on the crank handle but no accident or drowning occurred. We used to marvel at the sight of stars visible from the bottom of the well.

The neighbours' boys used to chase kangaroo rats into hollow logs at night for sport, but my parents frowned on this activity. In their absence one night I joined in the hunt and while rolling a big stone against the hollow log my finger nail was crushed. The pain caused a sleepless night suffered in fearful silence.

Our parents were very keen on One Farm Exhibits at the Brisbane Exhibition and every conceivable product from the farm was gathered. I knew of a huge carpet snake which came out of a cleft in a rocky gully to sun himself. Capturing the huge fellow without any damage to the skin was the problem. At the slightest noise he retreated to the safety of his rocky cave. Wearing sneakers one day, the plan was I got hold of him, Dad followed with a rifle to shoot him (it had to be nowhere but the head!). I managed to get hold of the tail but much of his body was firmly under the rocky shelf and couldn’t be pulled out. Each
time he contracted his body I felt I was going in with him! The tug of war lasted a long
time as Dad was determined not to damage the skin. When the battle was over we had a
skin 11 feet 6 inches long and up to 16 inches wide. We grew wheat in up to 20 small
plots and it was threshed by flail for exhibit. A special mouse proof room was needed to
assemble all the grain etc. and when the last nights preparations were finished, the final
load placed on the train in a special rail wagon and, parents aboard, we frequently fell
asleep on the way back home leaving the horses in charge for the journey.

We all took great pride in building sheaf stacks and no moisture ever penetrated beyond
the outside sheaf butts in spite of rain that fell from Xmas to New Year on one
occasion. Only horse drawn vehicles could cross Butters swamp in a flood of that
nature."
Photographer: F.W. Thiele Brisbane. Williams Brothers One Farm Exhibit at the Brisbane Exhibition
Photograph previous page: Owen Williams, Vic Williams and Allan Arthur in Light Horse uniform at the Plainby Farm 1917
Vic and his friends were typical of many young men of their generation. They couldn’t wait to enlist, and planned to do so as soon as they turned 18. Vic was injured in a tree felling accident in 1915 and had to wait until his leg was strong again before he could head off to his war. Vic enlisted in Toowoomba on 17 April 1917 at the age of 18 Years and 11 Months. As he was less than twenty-one Vic required his parents’ permission to enlist and this permission was granted subject to his not leaving Australia until he reached 19 years of age. Vic was described by the doctor as 5’8”, 154 pounds, chest measurements of 34-37 inches, with a fresh complexion, blue eyes and fair hair. The Doctors didn’t seem to notice that he had one leg shorter than the other.

His best friend, and next door neighbour Allan Arthur, enlisted on 26 April 1917 at the same office. Vic and Allan were both taken into the Australian Imperial Force as part of the Light Horse (L.H.D.R) and began training on 28 May 1917 at the Rifle Range Camp at what is now known as Enoggera Barracks in Brisbane. On 10 June they were both transferred to the 8th Reinforcements 41st Battalion and sent to Sydney to embark for Europe. Much to Vic’s dismay his journey was short lived. He was separated from his dear friend Allan, and two days later was transferred to the 10th Reinforcements 47th Battalion. Vic returned alone to Rifle Range Camp to await his embarkation that would come some 6 weeks later. There are two versions as to why he and Allan didn’t leave on the same ship. In the diary version the embarkation was over strength. In the oral history version, Vic was stopped from boarding because the Army had no record of having his parents’ permission to enlist. The records show his parents’ consent being stamped on 17 April 1917 - the day he enlisted.

The day Vic departed Rifle Range Camp he decided it might be a good idea to start a diary. Every day of his voyage to Glasgow and his training at Codford in the Salisbury Plains is faithfully recorded. The diaries are a little short on punctuation as though written hurriedly. Resounding of the digger of mythology, the diary tells of an Aussie boy off on a great adventure. The ship was full of larrikin Aussie soldiers rebelling against authority (though our Vic seems to be a pretty good lad). Despite his lack of modern social media Vic used very current language for a country boy. The term Aussie is in everyday use in the diary but only came into common usage in 1916/17. He also used a surprising amount of teenage “today style” expressions in his writing. It is amusing to see Mt St Michael described as “an old joint”. Vic’s interest in new and exciting technology is apparent in the detailed descriptions of the workings of the Panama Canal and his interest in aeroplanes. Like all teenage boys he had a great interest in food - and never passed up the opportunity for a meal.

Whilst at Codford he is reunited with his friend Allan who is at a camp 10 miles away in Fovant. They managed a number of visits and had a good time though it’s not clear what they did. Vic assured his Mother that he is respected and doing splendidly both morally and physically.

In December 1917 Vic managed to go to Cornwall on leave and visit some of his Grandfather’s family - minus his kit and overcoat which remained in London at the Y.M.C.A. when the show he was seeing at the theatre runs late. The Y.M.C.A. is closed when he returned to collect his belongings and he rushed to catch his train to Cornwall without them. He managed to win a leave pass in January by being the best dressed night guard and was able to return to London to retrieve his kit and cash a £5 money draft he has received from home. When the orders to embark for France finally come, Vic posted his diary home for safe keeping.
From the Oral History by Ron Pechey:

“In 1914 the war had begun and my mates and I were waiting for me to turn 18 in 1916 so that we could enlist (with parents' written consent)”

In May 1915 his slightly older school mate Billy Ward [William Louis Ward Service Number 2490] joined the AIF without him. Billy was killed by a Whizzbang in September 1916 before Vic saw military service. [Note: Whizzbangs were shells that travel faster than sound so the soldiers hear the whizz of the shell before the bang of the gun]

In June 1915 Vic injured his leg and rather than joining up as soon as he turned 18 Vic needed his leg to become strong first. Vic and his friend Allan Victor Arthur, [Service Number 3259] whose brother Leslie Raymond Arthur [Service Number 292] was killed at Gallipoli on 7 August 1915, joined up in April 1917.

Proof of Dr Henderson’s work came in 1918 in France when the leg was called on to carry its share of an 80 pound pack, a rifle and a spell with a Lewis Gun over a 28 mile forced march to relieve the South Africans who had been cut to pieces in a German advance. “That was the longest march (all night actually) that a full pack was carried by an Australian Battalion.” [Note the 47th Battalion War Diaries claim 17 miles - see P.58. It probably felt like 28 miles.]

I asked Vic what made him so keen to get away? He replied “I thought our chaps were so good, that it would all be over before I could get there.”

After he enlisted he was at Enoggera Camp, they all had to sleep on the floor and Vic’s first experience of this was enlightened by three black fellows who “smelt terribly”. Medical exams were fairly perfunctory and Vic had no problems. He came home on pre-embarkation leave travelling on the Midnight Horror which arrived at 3am at Toowoomba. He spent the night at the School of Arts Hotel ( One pound B&B, plus hire of a horse to go to Plainby). The horse bucked Vic off at Meringidnan but the school teacher managed to turn it into the School yard. It took 3 hours to get to Plainby and he entered the Church in uniform “causing a bit of a stir”. Joe Barnes was the preacher and he said “We’ll go back to Toowoomba in the Ford, your parents have gone to meet you in Harry Pukullus’ overland.” It took an hour to do the return journey in 1917 and after 24 hours Vic’s sister rode back to Toowoomba with him. He travelled by train via Brisbane to Liverpool where there was no accommodation ready. They were issued with blankets and camped on the ground to find everything stiff with frost in the morning. Boarding the boat he was pulled off by a sergeant. “You haven’t got your parents' consent” “Yes, I have” “Well we have no record of consent. You have to go back to Queensland with Blundell’s Band (all medically unfit personnel). So Vic had a few trips around the Harbour, saw Taronga Zoo under construction, cutting out caves for the animals, and returned to Queensland with “Blundell’s Mob”. “Three feeds a day and nothing to do” as they said and after a lot of delay managed to get a leave pass to return home for his parents' consent.

They left Sydney on the “Miltiades” (formerly a cattle ship) and experienced a terrible storm on the way to New Zealand. [Note: The Miltiades was never a cattle ship. Prior to being a troop ship she was a passenger ship which could carry 150 1st class and 170 3rd class passengers. The
Miltiades carried a medical contingent who presumably were berthed in the better cabins and the regular soldiers left to 3rd class or as we sometimes refer to it - cattle class? The padre bought out his pedal organ and played “God of Our Fathers” and other hymns. There was no leave in Wellington for fear a few Shanghaied men might jump ship. [Note: Vic’s diary attributes the lack of leave to the visit by the Mayor of Wellington and the Brigadier General to the ship.] They sailed past Pitcairn and were the first troop ship through the Panama Canal. From there they travelled in Convoy. Temperatures ranged from 120°F at Panama to very icy weather off Canada. The drill instructor (they did a lot of drilling on the troop ship) said “You’d last 10 minutes in the water”. Coming down the Scottish coast they disembarked at Glasgow then by rail to Salisbury. They were glad to see the last of the crowded hammocks in the cattle stalls.

The food was plentiful at sea because many were too seasick to front up for meals. But England was desperately short of food and porridge was the main item at Salisbury. “Those who couldn’t eat it got pretty thin.” said Vic.

They arrived in England in late 1917, had 3 or 4 months training at Salisbury and landed at Le Havre after Christmas. Vic had enlisted in the Light Horse but they would have been useless in the mud so they did a lot of infantry training following tanks. [Note: Vic was transferred from the Light Horse to an Infantry Battalion before leaving Australia.]
Front cover of the first diary

The first page of the first diary. The diary is small enough to fit easily into a pocket. The writing is tiny.

Telegram from Vic to his father Owen Williams advising of his departure.
Diary Number 1 - V.O. Williams:
July 31 1917 - January 14 1918

It has just occurred to me that it would be very interesting to write a diary so as I have this spare wallet with me I have decided to turn this into a diary. I enlisted on the 17th April 1917 & entered camp on 28th of May. I assure anyone reading this diary that it gave me a very funny feeling that day signing papers & going through the formulas that they seem to consider necessary to attach a recruit to the army. I will not dwell long on the 2mts which I put in in camp save that I had the misfortune to lose my best mate. The cause of it being we were only 14 days in camp when we were sent to Sydney to embark on the Hororata. I was sent back to Rifle Range through the unit being overstrength. I being anxious to join my mate I sailed with the 10 Rein 47 Batt about 6 weeks later.

Monday July 31st: Entraining for Sydney at 6AM to Embark aboard the Miltiades. No sleep during the night owing to departure. Roll call at 12AM & 2AM. Crowds at Roma St Station to see us off much cheering & flag waving during the whole journey. Toowoomba will be my eventful stop I will see my sister there all being well.

Saw my sister loaded with cakes fruit etc. Several stops before getting to the border for refreshment provided by the local ladies. Travelled all night in the train.

Aug. 1st: Journey continued very good reception in N.S.W. reached Liverpool at 4.30PM where we camped. Much discussion whether we will get leave on the 2nd as we do not embark until the 3rd Aug.

Aug. 2nd: Leave allowed all off by train to Sydney having promised to get back by the 10.30 train at night.

Aug. 3rd: Up at 3AM to embark. Entrained to Sydney at 5AM marched through Sydney carrying our sea-kits. Crowds in the streets of N.S.W. boys going with us. Girls running about women crying eventually boarded the boat & took up our positions at our troop deck mess tables. Messes fixed we went on deck to give a cheer as we go out. Left the wharf at about 7AM. Wharf crowded with people. Lay out in the harbour until 2PM & left for sea then followed by motor boat crowded which had been around the troopship all the time. Feeling a bit sea-sick towards evening nearly everyone more or less sea-sick a terrible feeling anyhow.

Aug. 4th: Still a bit sick, decks & sides lined with the sick as the sea is very rough.

Aug. 5th: Feeling pretty right. Nothing to see & nothing much doing during the next few days until perhaps we reach New Zealand.

Aug. 6th: Sunday makes one think of what one did at home on Sunday. Church parade at 10-45AM which was very difficult to hear on account of the crush & so many sea-sick but sea-sick & all joined in the Hymn's.

Aug. 7th: All looking for land & seeing none as yet. Land sighted about 4PM. It looks like a cloud with the snow topped mountains in the distance. Everybody speculating as to whether we will get
shore leave as we are the first Australian troops to come to New Zealand.

Aug. 8th: Beautiful morning as we go down through the heads to Wellington splendid scenery. We are not getting leave evidently as we are not going right up to the wharf. A coal barge is coming out to where we are lying. Guard called out to patrol the deck. Water and coal barges bringing out supplies. Much grumbling about leave. During the night 4 of our men get ashore on the water boat.

Aug. 9th: All we can do is look at the shore and watch operations. The order is a full dress parade as the Mayor of Wellington & the Brigadier General to inspect us but I think they will get a very poor reception as they say they are the cause of us getting no leave. It is just as I said. Although everything is polished up the boys threaten to hoot them. They are sending 30 cases of fruit 1150 packets of smokes but when they inspect us things were very cool & some even hooted as they went off. The N.S.W. men say that over there they gave the New Zealand troops a splendid reception. I am so interested in the place that I will come and see it when I get back from this trip. We managed while here to get some carpenters to post us some envelopes which they put stamps on in Wellington. We don’t reckon to get them censored. Well we are off again leaving New Zealand behind just as dusk. The Major tells us we will not see land for 25 days.

Aug. 10th: Nothing but water again & a lot are sea-sick again. We had our first concert tonight which was a great treat.

Aug. 10th: Again today as we have to get our time fixed according to the English time. I wonder will we lose a days pay. We will get an extra days pay coming back however. The YMCA is giving us games & books & they are giving out mouth organs & whistles which all helps to make our trip easier. The canteen took £75 today they only sell soft drink however which is a very good thing the bottles were all hurled overboard until a chap went round with a bag. Any bags any bones any bottle. Today the same old story in the same old way by which he is making money 1/- per doz.

Aug. 11th: Sports today - boxing & tug of war. We all get our noses & throat sprayed every morning now. The sports were very good. I have forgotten our washing parade which we had this morning. It was a salt water wash but I managed to get some soft water. Some of us got our clothes dry or near enough. Others are hanging or drying in the rain today as it is wet today. I think we all missed home in that washing parade however we must soldier on.

Aug. 12th: Sunday today it was good to see officers & men singing away at that church parade the text of the chaplain’s address was St. John’s gospel the 26th chapter. [Note: My cousin Susan points out that St. John’s Gospel doesn’t have a Chapter 26]

Aug. 13th: Still very dreary weather seems to get no better fast.

Aug. 14th: Light rain and heavy winds today bringing the spray across the well deck. The O.C. was knocked down today in the Port Deck with a wave it was the only one that ever got up there but it was a beauty and made for a few dripping figures.

Aug. 15th: Lovely day today it has changed being smooth & sunny. The boys are out with wet clothes & we are ordered to put out all our blankets out to air. Camera’s are in evidence taking snaps of the array of socks & towels blankets etc. We had our first boat drill today everybody
rushing for their boat station. I should say raft stations as our unit are allotted to rafts.

**Aug. 16th:** Pleasant weather, nothing exciting happened today.

**Aug. 17th:** We are practicing with rifles today as we are going to practice shooting at a floating target next week. Some body must have had dirt on him when [reporting] sick before the Doctor this morning as we were all ordered to strip off & get under a big hose on the well deck. Some chaps said they refused to be sprayed like horses but nobody moved. The O.C. got mad at that & said they were like a lot of old women & stripped off & got under it himself. Needless to say we were hard on his heels. It is an order now & 11 N.S.W. men were men in the cage on refusing to go under the salt water spray.

**Aug. 18th:** We are having sports this evening first of all a few free fights & then a general tug of war. Our team beat the A.L.C. & the Engineers and F.A. also beat their opponents so we will have to pull them next Sat. At about 2PM we saw another ship & in front of us is an Island. (It was Pitcairn Island). The other ship came very close to us in order to pass the island & great argument arose as to what side she would pass. Eventually as it was getting dark she passes in our side & after dark as the Island faded away our ship sent up a red & white flare & a blue rocket 3 times after which she did the same. We travel in darkness but she had all her lights on & by morning she was out of sight.

**Aug. 19th:** Sunday today it is a beautiful day getting very warm and most of the boys have cut off the legs of their dungarees & made knickers. We had church parade at 11-45AM on the well deck the F.A. & the Engineers & the band.

**Aug. 20th:** Ordinary parades today nothing else except a couple of cases of mumps breaking out.

**Aug. 21st:** Excellent weather today.

**Aug. 22nd:** I am having my turn at guard today we have 28 guardsmen everyday from every unit on the ship in turn.

**Aug. 23rd:** Quiet day today.

**Aug. 24th:** We are getting along in good style one gets used to the ship & the days pass fairly quickly.

**Aug. 25th:** The usual sports this evening but our team were beaten in the pull off in the tug of war. We are told we will soon be at out next port & will only be allowed to post only 2 letters. The chap has 28 written and was going to send 30 more.

**Aug. 26th:** Sunday today we have a splendid address from the chaplain who is a good speaker. I & a mate drop into the morning service which is held every morning from 9 to 9-30 occasionally to hear his addresses.

**Aug. 27th:** Everything going well.

**Aug. 28th:** As I have not written any notes for there is nothing to write except we had rifle
shooting over the back of the ship at a floating target. I will go along to the great event of our trip our passing through the Panama Canal.

Aug. 31st: We did not go quite a direct course as we passed Pitcairn Is coming from New Zealand we saw practically nothing until we saw the coast of Panama. We saw land early in the morning of August 31st but we were not close to it until after 12 noon. They anchored right outside & a Patrol boat came out & said the pilot would be out & we would be right through. At 1-30PM the pilot came aboard & we went ahead. The harbour master came on as we passed down the passage & other authorities in very fast motor boats driven by niggers. We slowly passed pretty hills & trees etc & came to Balboa where the canal begins. Here the niggers and Yankees gave us a great reception our band was playing nigger tunes & they danced & clapped we were very excited having been so long from land. They have forts on both sides which protect the canal. Naos Is. is one it is connected with barriers or breakwater of rocks & at night a submarine net is put across the mouth of the canal. As there are several thousand soldiers guarding the canal we saw some of them at Balboa. We dropped anchor again at 4.20PM as it was too late to go in the canal. The soldiers came round in a motor boat & brought us papers & books & we learned that a hospital ship carrying wounded men to New Zealand had just gone through & also a transport going through ahead of us about 24 hrs before. They had a few dredges working here. The wounded men had a great reception & went ashore but we were not allowed to go ashore & so as not to allow anybody to find out anything about us we were not supposed to speak to the niggers at all but we found out afterwards that they knew as much as us & it was a great joke between us to say to one another don’t tell them where you came from. For one thing we always used to cooee to the people on shore which puts an Australian away. Well we pulled up anchor at 7AM on Saturday September 1st.

It is only a few hundred yds to the first locks from Balboa you travel down an arm of the Sea dredged of course and then the ship is met by two nigger rowers with long ropes before the ship leaves Balboa about a dozen negroes came aboard to work the ropes. I might say that these are all British West Indian Negroes & can handle machinery well. These ropes are fastened to the ship & the ship which is not allowed to travel under her own steam through the locks is now towed by electric trams. Tram lines run along side the locks which are laid on the rack system so that the tram can run up or down hill at just an even pace. These trams are made the same shape at both ends & has a revolving drum in the center also a swivel so that the rope can be wound around the drum if necessary to tighten it & yet swing about so that the pull is straight on the ship. Now the locks are double so that one ship may go up & the other down. The wall between the locks has two tram lines & on each outside wall one tram line on each side. The ship is now towed by a tram on each side past the first door in the lock. These huge doors open at the middle & swing right into a recess in the wall. As you pass the door it is closed behind & the water allowed to fill the lock raising the ship up to the level of the bottom or as low as the water is allowed to run out of the next lock. The ship is now towed into the second of what is named the Miraflores locks. She rises again & passes out into a small lake being now raised to a level 55 feet above the Pacific level. She now travels on her own steam for ½ miles to Pedro Miguel lock which rises her 30 ft & on coming out she makes her way through the Culebra Cut. This cut is an enormous excavation 9 miles long & cut through hills which tower 400 to 500 ft above the waters level. This cut is 300 ft wide at Bottom. Here we witnessed the place where the big land slip occurred after the canal had been opened of course. About the dangerous places niggers are at work keeping the water drains going so that no land slips in the channel. The channel is from 500 to 1000 ft wide at the top of the waters. We had a great time at the locks exchanging coins badges etc with the American soldiers. They are fine fellows & as we went through the Miraflores locks they cheered and waved & the
Facts about the Panama Canal listed in the back of the diary.

Length: 40 Miles
Width: 500 to 1000 ft at top
Width at Bottom: 300 to 650 ft

Time of passage: 10 hrs
Through locks: 3 hrs

Gatun Dam:
Length at crest: 8000 ft
Extreme width: 2600 ft
Height above natural lake level: 30 ft

Locks:
Gatun: 3 double sets
Pedro Miguel: 3 double sets
Miraflores 2: double sets
Average lift: 32 ft
Average length: 1000 ft
Average width: 110 ft

Culebra Cut lengths: 8 mls

Total men employed: 40,000

Total Cost: 375,000,000

Area at canal zone: 448 sq mls

Photograph: Vic Williams Panama Canal lock taken on the way home 1919
niggers yelled & clapped like mad. The same at Pedro Miguel locks & through the cut the niggers threw fruit right from the bank to us. We saw some splendid scenery as we came out into the Gatun Lake. Now this was a great swampy piece of ground which was dammed up & as it has plenty of water flowing into it it formed a great lake. It is really a great structure of Rocks & earth between two hills impounding the water of Chagres river & its tributaries that makes the great lake. Here with the pilots direction we thread our way through Gatun Lake for 24 miles at full speed to Gatun. Now to prevent the dam from breaking away which holds Gatun Lake a concrete structure 300 ft wide was let into a hill of almost solid rock which has great piers 45 ft apart along it & swings steel gates which regulate the level of the lake. This is the great spillway which can let out 154,000 cubic feet of water per second which is quicker than the Chagres river runs into the lake. Now a hydro electric plant is situated here to harness the discharge water & generate enough power to work Panama Railroad & light up the whole canal zone. We are at this stage of the journey at Gatun 85 ft above the sea level on the Atlantic side but we are soon lowered by a series of 3 locks each lowering us about 28 ft. It takes us about ¼ of an hour to pass into the sea and during that time we were surrounded by the American soldiers all the ladies the place could sport & smiling nigs prancing to our band tunes & struggling for pennies. We adopted all kinds of ideas to get souvenirs from the people on the lock walls who threw everything they had almost to walking sticks pipes watches even in this excitement when they had no more souvenirs left. What we wanted was the Soldiers buttons & badges & yankee coins. I threw over a tin of stuff & got back some good souvenirs but of course a few odd & end fell in the water during the day. We were all delighted with the good fellow-ship between our officers & the Yanks who stripped off all their badges of Rank etc and threw over to each other.

We sailed out at last & down an arm of the sea for 7 miles to Colon where we pulled into the wharf to coal. The machinery here is wonderful. Coal trucks pass above the big store of coal heaped in a big square & they are filled by a great shovel. This shovel drops down & grabs a mouthful of coal carries it up to the platform where it empties it into a waiting truck. The trucks work round get filled & empty over a shute which is carried on a great machine that runs along the wharf & can empty the coal into the ships hold at a terrible pace. Everything here is worked by machinery as is all the canal machinery. Niggers do all the work almost.

As we arrived at Colon at 3.30 Sat. PM we were there Sunday when as we could get no leave we had souvenirs views of Canal etc brought aboard. The nigs sold us fruit & we were absolutely loaded with papers magazines.

Sept. 2nd: Sunday. They are filling our old troop ship up with coal today right enough. We can not leave the ship so we are buying things over the side. We found when we got the latest paper here that they know all about us here having the names of the transports down in great style. The Medic is here having come through the night and we can talk to the boys from our poop deck. We are leaving the wharf at 7PM tonight.

Sept. 3rd: Lying out in the harbor today waiting for the other ships to congregate.

Sept. 4th: We expect to be here a few days as they are allowing us to go over in our turn to the beach for a swim in our small boats.

Sept. 5th: We had a splendid day or rather morning as it was our turn to go over to the beach. We rowed over had a swim got a few coconuts & came back about dinner time.
**Sept. 6th:** There is 3 transports here now we saw a yankee submarine today it cruised around showing what a submarine looks like on top & just her periscope above because we all will have sub guard to do when we go out of here.

**Sept. 7th:** We are having a treat this evening as the yanks are coming aboard a concert crowd to give us a concert. The Yanks say that they will soon be over to the front with us & they sang some very good songs about what they are going to do when as one said the Americans & the Australians get going you can’t beat that combination. It was a very good concert.

**Sept. 8th:** We left port at 6-30AM this morning a cruiser leading we 4th & 2 behind us 6 boats & a cruiser. They look well following each other. 102 men with rifles are doing submarine guard over different parts of the ship. We are close together at 4PM in two lines.

**Sept. 9th:** Sunday today church parade & a very good address by the chaplain. The other boats are travelling close up now.

**Sept. 10th & 11th:** Travelling in convoy.

**Sept. 12th:** 102 out of the 47th detailed for submarine guard. I am one. We have a loaded rifle & 20 rounds of ammunition & we do 4 hrs on & 8 hrs off. Constant watch while we are on do not turn our heads.

**Sept. 13th:** Off duty today.

**Sept. 14th:** Sub guard again today 32 of us to make a relief as the artillery cannot furnish enough men.

**Sept. 15th:** We came round close to the island of Bermuda today and the American cruiser Charleston left us & the place is now taken by a British Cruiser.

**Sept. 16th:** There is no church parade today as a unit kit inspection is taking place it seems as if the rumour is true that we are leaving this boat to join a bigger & faster.

**Sept. 17th:** Getting into very cold weather now. It is wet & cold today.

**Sept. 18th:** On Sub guard they are packing up aboard ready to transship when we get to Halifax. We know we are going to Halifax as we just passed a light ship named Halifax. We are all in port tonight taken off sub guard now & put on port guard to see no one leaves the ship.

**Sept. 19th:** We expected leave today but it seems we won’t get it. We can see the clock on the post office & the shore looks nice after 7 1/2 weeks aboard. The order to transship is cancelled we are to have a 4-7 gun put on this boat. [Note: Probably refers to a Quick Firing 4.7 inch gun which though obsolete for warships by World War 1 were often remounted on merchant ships.] An American transport came this evening. I think we will have a convoy from here. Some got ashore this evening but they caught the joke and put on a big guard.
Commercial postcard of Panama Canal sent from Halifax to Owen and Bertha Williams from Vic Williams 1917

19 Sept 1917

Dear Mother & Father,

Just a scribble if it reaches you all one can do is to write & risk the rest, to let you know that I am well. I suppose you got the cards I sent from the Canal. I wrote one myself & the other I gave a lady the address to send as we did not leave the ship ourselves. Well we are at Halifax now & may not get ashore here either. We had a splendid trip through the canal & I have a 6 page letter on it to send also some views a few souvenirs & brooch of the ship to send as souvenirs. We have had a rare old trip around I never thought to come to Canada though With best love from your loving son Victor

XXXX

Vic Williams 1917
At light out we hear a noise then as arranged we made an awful noise belting dixies with sticks imitating dogs cats cattle. I think they will give all leave tomorrow.

*Sept. 20th:* The adjutant went ashore & got a launch & in 2 minutes we were dressed he giving us the tip before he got alongside. 1000 of us ashore in 2 boats in 20 minutes. Of course we had to march through the city out to a lovely pine forest & back to town where we were granted an hours leave. The people were all right but for a while did not know who we were however we are in good spirits again having walked on Canadian soil & stretching our limbs.

*Sept. 21st:* They have our 4-7 gun aboard & are giving out a long line to drag a cask or barrel at the back of the boat when going out that being the way a convoy keeps together. They sent a guard ashore to fetch a few men who did not come back but they are in the guard room now. It is about 5.30PM in the evening of the 21st Sept as the first troopship moves past. Ships packed with Americans, New Zealanders, Canadians, Australians. They are all passing us close enough for us to yell out to one another. The convoy’s names when we came here were Themisticles A-32 Anchisis A68 Medic A7 Miltiades A28 Ruhena NZ11 [Ruahine HMNZT92] Mocoa NZ91 [Mokoia HMNZT92] but now the Medic has transhipped on to another ship she being too slow they left her behind. As far as I can make out between 14 & 16 ships went out 2 not carrying troops & 2 auxiliary cruisers they are boats like ours only with big guns no cruisers are with us. We had to go last as we had ammunition to get aboard for the 4.7 gun it was 6.30PM as we went out. I will never forget the funny time we had at this port it was great sport getting the major to grant us leave right enough he has not got over it yet when he comes down to enquire the cause of the noise for last we shouted what do we want, leave he said I have just got a message from shore same as at Colon some one shouted & with that they began to sing tell me the old story & with that he bolted to the accompanymont [sic] of belted dixies howls etc. However we are leaving now on the most dangerous part of our trip.

*Sept. 22nd:* We are up with the other ships the [sic] of them we can see 2 are painted white fore & aft & one painted like a zebra the idea is to be less easily seen the zebra is an auxiliary cruiser.

*Sept. 23rd:* It has turned rough & cold we are not far from where the Titanic went down we are going up north which makes it cold. We had a splendid address by the Chaplain down in the mess deck as it was too rough and cold for church parade on the deck.

*Sept. 24th:* My word it is cold again today the sub-guard was taken off at night.

*Sept. 25th:* We are detailed for Sub-guard our Sergeant complained to the adjutant & was put under arrest by our O.C. but got out of it all right he should have complained to the O.C. first to be correct. It is warmer now one of our chaps fired at a suspicious light tonight but it turned out to be a passing vessel.

*Sept. 26th:* We have a holiday today as we always do when coming off guard. We have been getting very bad tucker different times we were thinking of having a funeral the same as the artillery did they took their stew up on deck coming across the Pacific & buried it with a mournful procession but things did not improve so we will have to make the best of it with our tucker.

*Sept. 27th:* The weather continues good we are going to have some big gun practice down. The H.M.S. Victoria Auxiliary cruiser is firing at a floating target & as it comes past our ship fired
her 4-7 & had 6 pounder guns at it. It was a cloudy day today & one could see the flashes a treat & see the shells drop around the target.

**Sept. 28th**: Bad news today this morning one of the Engineers died. He had pneumonia [sic] since we left Colon. He will be buried at 11 o'clock a drill ordered parade by every unit & a firing party which made the funeral very solemn. The convoy slowed down & our ship stopped her engines while the body was lowered & we were standing to attention until it was all over & the last post sounded. All though we had a meningitis case at the beginning of the voyage & (all our throats were sprayed every day for 10 or 12 days) we never had a death it would have been a record. They expect 10 or 12. Destroyers to pick us up tomorrow to travel with us. We are having a final sports meeting tomorrow, Saturday.

**Sept. 29th**: One of the prizes today was for a fancy dress costume & my word they were good. The winner had a little boat made with washing hung on a line. A notice to Subs up. This ship is going the other way. He got in the boat propelled it with a bough & threw the usual bread stew and rubbish a troopship has overboard. His field glasses consisted of bottles tied together on a string. Stewart 10/47 took second having dirt all over him dressed in rags & was scrubbed by an old woman with an advertisement. Pears soap. As the Sergeant major is known as the milkman by going round so early rousing everybody in the morning one chap had a dixie of milk costume to match. It was a great day for rubs. The dressed up swagmen asked the major for a cigarette etc. In spotting the pigs eye blindfolded I get the eye on Lieu Murray our O.C. cheek it looked intentional. In cock fighting sitting down with a stick under the knees & through the elbows I pushed 2 out of the ring but took 2nd place in the final. Hunter 10/47 won the comic song with a composition on the O.C. having us on the well deck. Just then the destroyers were seen coming & we all raced off to watch them. It was splendid to see them coming at top speed. After tea before dark two chaps played a sketch A Sister to Assist Her.

**Sept. 30th**: It is Sunday but we have to go on ships guard just the same. I was on no 2 post happened to be where they held the memorial service for Sapper Davis. It was very impressive service. The sisters & all hands being there. The major told us this evening that we were going to Glasgow and would be there Wednesday morning. He said he was pleased with us all but didn’t want to kid us. We had told him in the night of the row up at Colon he was trying to kid us about leave. Today he said he had kidded us, “laughter”, he had heard that someone had wanted to know why he didn’t get all hands on subguard perhaps he said he had too many “laughter” but it was good exercise for service conditions altogether we had a good time “cheers” & “laughter”.

**Oct. 1st**: Last night we were amongst the subs right enough. We received a wireless message from a vessel 40 miles away that she was being shelled, a destroyer left our convoy but she was sinking & the destroyer sunk her outright before leaving so that she would not be likely to make the passage unsafe. We were supposed to have been followed by a sub & a destroyer at the rear of the convoy sunk her anyway we never saw it.

**Oct. 2nd**: We are running down the passage that leads to the Clyde this morning. The Yankee ships have left us & are making along with some others to Liverpool. The destroyers have also gone & after carrying our lifebelts everywhere with us for 3 weeks we can leave them below for we have beaten the subs & OK right oh. My word it is pretty here it is the prettiest I have seen yet cattle & sheep hedges & haystacks. We are in the biggest ship building yard in the world everywhere is
ships of all kinds in all stages of construction it is a very interesting sight. Heaps of people mostly girls boys & old men. They yell out what do we want, men. Are we downhearted, no. A jack tar on a destroyer yells Let em all come we'll give em beans. [Note: A slang expression from WW1] We packed away our hammocks etc. & are ready to disembark. 200 yds down we get into a train & at 6.30 we leave Glasgow & are off to Salisbury. We stop at several places & get out though we are not supposed to & get a few things & the first stop in England they provide refreshments for us.

Oct. 3rd: We did not get much sleep during any minutes of daylight as there was much to be seen coming down. It was splendid looking over field & hedge. We arrived at Codford about 9.30AM & were told to hop out we marched by the way carrying both our kits & equipment to the camp where we were put into huts & had an address by the Major who gave us a few hints we found pretty well everything was a crime here. Also it appears that in case of any disease breakout we would be isolated for 3 wks.

Oct. 4th: We have our tucker dealt out to us here that way we don't waiste [sic]any.

Oct. 5th: One lad down with meningitis hit hut no 13 is isolated today.

Oct. 6th: We begin our drill today. The PT up the hill boots & trousers & shirt all extra clothes off makes one lively.

Oct. 7th: It is turning a bit cold.

Oct. 8th: A Picture show for the isolated tonight.

Oct. 9th: Getting used to things here now one sees aeroplanes everyday here.

Oct. 10th: Big Aust mail today smile on everybody [sic] face I had a letter from Allan besides 4 from Aust

Oct. 11th: Struck a lovely job today decorating the parade ground with flags we made the job last all afternoon. This for a medal presentation tomorrow.

Oct. 12th: March past & presentation today a battalion on parade looks well.

Oct. 13th: Sat means a half holiday but as we were inoculated yesterday we get a whole day off. We were inoculated twice since coming here. I am getting used to it something like dinner.

Oct. 14th: Sunday church parade arraigned [sic] for the isolated troops out in the open air band for music. I expected Allan all afternoon but he did not get over.

Oct. 15th: Monday morning parade breaks the old Sgt. Major's heart he cannot get the boys to work to his satisfaction on P.T. Head backward, stretch, quick march, hold up your heads. There's no half crown down there. I was out at 6 o'clock this morning he shouts & we double up the hill & back. We have putties, tunic, hats off for PT which is an hrs hard work then we get an hr of something else. They call the parade ground the Bullring and you get your hours drill of Gas or Bombing with a special instructor. The meningitis case is getting better & the 30 isolated men can leave their hut again.
Vic sent a postcard on arriving at Codford in October 1917: “This is just how this looks from the railway. We could see it quite close coming down from Scotland. A lot of the chaps though it was an advertisement for White Horse Whisky. It is quite close to Codford right on Salisbury Plains or what they call plains here.”

In 1973 Vic and Ruth travelled to the UK and Europe. Vic sent a letter home to his son Russell: “19.9.73 On the way down we drove through the Salisbury Plains area where I spent 3 months in army training camp & was quite thrilled to put in ½ an hr taking shots of the little village of Codford the nearest village to our army camp & to see that the Austr. Military badge is still on the hill side where our engineers had it cut down to the white chalk...We missed the white horse of Westbury which has been a feature of that area in white chalk. You see the subsoil is white chalk & the turf has to be taken off & occasionally cleaned. This is a much bigger job with the white horse as the whole body stands out in white on the green hill & of course it has been there for hundreds of years. They told me our badge was cleaned up about 2 years ago. Codford village is nearly the same as 50 odd years ago not so many thatched roof now....had a mini-bus tour to Bath... on the way the driver got me a view of the white horse of Westbury which we used to see so well from the built up railway.”
Codford  Nov 16 1917
Dear Mother & Father
I wrote a letter to you a few days ago saying I had received letters No. 3 & 4 but since that I have received letter No. 2 in which Lill says you are going to number the letters. I also got your letter Mum with the 2 photos in it so I have 3 now. It is good of you to write so regular. The chaps envied me I can tell you when I received 7 letters of course some got more than that but 7 Ausie letters go a long way over here. I like those photos. It is quite a change to see an Australian with a cap on we all have to wear hats over here. Allan’s T.B. wear the leaf down & rising sun in front. Oh you were worrying about the Meningitis it was not bad on our boat only one case & he is pretty right again they sprayed all our noses & throats for a fortnight but we were never afraid of it. Don’t worry about me mother I am keeping splendidly both morally & physically. The boys all know me & they say, I hope its true respect me. Oh I had a letter from J. Gnatz in reply to my inquiry the AIF headquarters told me he was at Weymouth but when replying he was at Hurdcot about a mile from Fovant it is so I may see him yet he has just had a 14 day sick leave being almost right I saw Arthur Smyth last Sunday he is only about 2 miles from here now in the 31st. I am sending you a small parcel of Holly it is growing at a farmhouse near here, with best love to all at home your loving son Victor XXXX
The parcel you are sending or rather you sent is not at our field P.O. yet but the boat is here so as it takes longer for a parcel to come down than a letter it will soon be here.
I have not been in Salisbury yet it is 14 miles from here but I may run down on some Sat. afternoon now that I have the bike just to have a look at it. Do you get the aeroplane over Stonehenge. We had 7 big battle planes fly over our camp a few days ago. Allan & I went over & he showed me one that landed the day he was over here. Where they were at Darrington is the big aerodrome encampment. When I get back & the old separator begins to hum I will be looking up for planes.
Vic Williams 1917
Oct. 16th: A funny thing happened today a M.P. grabbed a Canadian soldier in the village & a mob of soldiers of all sorts raided the guard room & got him out & smashed the canteen & they turned out the 48th who armed with rifles cleared the raiders off at last. This all occurred at night the damage was estimated at £200. The New Zealanders took offence to the 48th turning out to them & threatened to raid our camp next night. A plan of defence arraigned [sic] by the officers was a lewis gun at 4 points & everybody issued with a rifle & to have 5 rounds of ammunition & we who had no rifle issued had handles of entrenching tools. They came with yells about 8PM but they did not attempt to break through. [Note: The War Diary for the 12th Training Battalion records this incident as occurring on 14 October. A riot in the village was the cause of the Canadian soldier being arrested and much liquor was involved in all parts of the incident. The C.O. commends the Australians and puts the blame firmly on the New Zealanders and a few Canadians.]

Oct. 17th: We had to turn out tonight again in case of a raid. The same thing for the next 2 nights when they were satisfied that the raiders had given best.

Oct. 19th: Route march around the country & back.

Oct. 20th: Sat half holiday & therefore much looked for day. I know my feet are so sore that I am glad of a rest.

Oct. 21st: Sunday the chaplain that came over with us on the boat is giving an address at church parade he is a fine speaker I landed a few letters from Ausie today. Also a letter from Allan to say he would call [ink blot] drat that blot I have no blotting paper either, he would call round on his way back from leave in London.

Oct. 22nd: I had a blood blister on the sole of my foot from the route march on Friday & so I paraded sick & got 2 days light duty. We got a job in the cook house cutting up apples for apple pie all the light duty men & my word it is the sweetest job I have had for a long while we cut up skin stems & all that & eat as many as we like as we have a fire in the huts now & a bit of toast we pinch as much of the dripping out of the cooks fat pans as we can to put on it. I got enough to do us for a week anyhow.

Oct. 23rd: Allan arrived this evening I was on the apple stunt & I got word to say I could leave my work at 3 and blow me if it was not Allan. Well by jove we did have a yarn it was good [to] be together for an afternoon again. We were able to walk over & have a look at an aeroplane which had come down in the field near the camp & then after we had a tea together go down to the station me by the way dodging any MP’s. Allan wrote back next day to say he had to walk 10 miles as he missed his last train.

Oct. 24th 25th: Just drill.

Oct. 27th: Emergency battalion mobilization & at headquarters marched 3 or 4 miles full pack blanket etc etc all sick of route marching.

Oct. 28th: The chaplain from the Miltiades took the church parade today (Sunday) & gave a good address. The Ausie bark is getting about colds being prevalent.
This is a description of Codford camp but as far as I’ve seen so far it is not as bad as this chap paints it in fact last winter it has the lowest death rate & sickness of any camp. You see here it is not flat as in places on Salisbury Plains but is really hilly and when we route march we go through country more hilly than Rifle Range of course all the roads are metalled. The fifth verse is about PT otherwise Physical Training. We get our raincoat, gloves scarf, sheepskin vest this week they say. We also get our web equipment issued with them. We did get a chilly snap this morning but although our pipes were frozen I never felt it colder than winter in Ausie anyway I have 12 st odd of condition to stick it out.

Vic Williams Codford 1917
Photograph: Photographer unknown, 12th Training Battalion Codford 1917

Reverse of photograph: "This is a photo an old chap took in front of our hut at Codford. It is not perfection but you will notice I have become a very tidy weight 12 st 8 lbs in uniform. Kneeling Roger McLean & I. Standing from Left to Right Cliff Amos with a part of his hat cut off then Bill Coterell & Alex Norris. You see the huts are wood & lined. The roads outside the huts where we are is asphalt or metal & cement & do you get the vegetables growing between the huts. I only got two of these as they are only a snap & we got 12 between us at 4d each." - Vic Williams [kneeling right], Codford 1917.

Service Record references for these soldiers provided in Appendix 2 - Sources.
Oct. 29th: Told off for guard the first blooming day we are out of isolation. Our company won a prize for P.T. second place also we won the company cleanliness cup.

Oct. 30th: Pretty cold last night doing our twist at guard. Our Sgt. made a mess of it this evening just at the critical time in changing of the guard he got mixed up & gave us the order arms from the present my word the Sgt. Major did roar him up.

Oct. 31st: We are doing a fatigue A.S.C. [Army Service Corps] work 2 miles to march to report to a job which is a mile in the opposite of our camp. Sound funny but that’s a fact. You march to the A.S.C. stables report turn around march past your camp on your way to work.

Nov. 1st: Same job we have a good thing on as we work out heads & get a ration from our camp & a hot dinner from the other which is everything here tucker as it is not to be had in any quantity.

Nov. 2nd: Same job we cut a bit of chaff today it was like old times cutting straw chaff for that pretty well all the hand cutting we did at home.

Nov. 3rd: Bit of work until dinner. The Sgts. had a big show big dinner & made a devil of a mess & we were detailed 10 of us to clean it up. Just picture me with a scrubbing brush but we haunted the pantry also we had a good dinner there.

Nov. 4th: Sunday round again. We had all the 4th T.B. shift down here last night [Note: The 4th Training Battalion was disbanded and moved to Codford on 3rd November] as we have a church parade which is just as strict if not stricter than any other parade. I applied for leave but all leave was cut this weekend on account of shifting & so I did not get over to see Allan.

Nov. 5th: Engagement fatigue today digging trenches. Since we came here we have made a miniture [sic] battlefield which is going to be used for practice in storming a modern trench. They have german dummies which they work with levers from dug-outs & the charging parties shoot at these with live ammunition from shell holes as they go forward.

Nov. 6th 7th 8th 9th: drilling & shooting on the miniture [sic] range. Put in isolation again 2 chaps with mumps & 1 with measles down to the hospital out of our hut so we are isolated again.

Nov. 10th: I have bought a bicycle for £2 & my name is up on the list of leave passes for 12 hrs Sat. I got dressed & got my pass onto my bike & off for Fovant to see Allan before they knew I was out of isolation had they know [sic] they would have never signed my pass. I got over 10 miles to Allan camp by half past three & after having a good time I left about 9PM to ride back.

It was dark & I took the wrong turn & made an extra 5 mils ride to get home about 12.

Nov. 11th: They went off at me a bit when I handed back my pass this morning but as I had the pass I had them beat.

Nov. 12th 13th 14th 15th: Chasing up & down hills on P.T. on B.F. & M.I. & B gas etc
Reminders of home

A Postcard from sister Lillian.

Photograph: Vic Williams.
Friend Allan Arthur lazing around in the English countryside.

Dear Vic

Just a line after church to say we are still in the same place. Has been miserable weather the last few days cloudy & windy & cold has rained a bit tonight. We have had hardly any summer this time. We have not had much rain but want a bit more now. Mother has packed a parcel but we did not want to send it on Friday & I saw in the papers that the mail is closed for this week still it will go in the next few days. They are really particular about parcels so you will be sure to get yours some time. Dad has told you all the news fondest love from Lillian

Lillian Williams 1917
Nov. 16th 17th: Sunday no church parade on account of being isolated. One chap in our lines has taken meningitis so they are isolated too. 1 hut on leave & 3 isolated.

Nov. 18th 19th 20th 21st 22nd: Bit of a change today they are having a route march taking iron rations & marching out all day so as about every week we get A.S.C. fatigue that means up at 4AM so as to go attend & unload quarters of beef we were all after it when we get the meat around we are finished about 10AM. Anyhow I was one of the 4 to go. We had the pick of the cook house (helped ourselves) & then on top of that a breakfast of as much steak as we could eat at the A.S.C. camp. They pinch the steak out of the T.B.’s rations.

Nov. 23rd 24th 25th: Sunday We are still isolated but as Sgt. Stucky was going over to Fovant I hopped on my bike & went with him & had a good time with Allan. We had a good trip of course it’s a wonder the M.P.’s didn’t catch me but I got through.

Nov. 26th: Shooting at the Range today. The meningitis hut was inspected & all except me who was a germ carrier were let out.

Nov. 27th 28th 29th 30th: Finished shooting on the range (ink splotch) pens a bit willing I suppose that represents a bulls eye. Its funny. I was writing near the fire & Burgess said he wanted a volunteer to put a dixie of water on the fire. I said I’ll do it providing you get me a bit of blotting paper so that blot makes 5 minutes work for me. I passed my shooting as 1st class 106 pts didn’t quite get 125 for a marksman.

Dec. 1st: We had to do Codford Station guard today. 6 of us take 24 hrs rations & cook our own stew & altogether it’s a good stunt we had a great stack of coal near us so we had a great fire in the shanty & another out on the sentry beat & as no heads were about we sat near it all the time on the 2 hr shift & then it was alright to doss around the fire inside even if we had to sleep in our clothes & a blanket.

Dec. 2nd: Sunday Relieved by another guard this evening about 4 oclock.

Dec. 3rd: Throwing live bombs the officer took my name for a bomber today.

Dec. 4th: A lot of our boys went through gas today & it was funny to see the tears running through the tear gas getting in their eyes.

Dec. 5th: On Codford Station guard today again today. Not a bad stall anyhow.

Dec. 6th: Relieved this afternoon off guard.

Dec. 7th 8th 9th: Sunday went over to Fovant.

Dec. 10th: Have to report to go to a week bombing school up at group.

Dec. 11th: Lectures & bombing practice.
Dec. 12th: Throwing live bombs I threw my third bomb 45 yards 5 yds short of the champion throw on the range.

Dec. 13th: Had to leave today or miss it for another week so am up to London rung Arch up & am going down to Dartford. Saw Arch and he is coming up to London having 2 days leave. Went to the hippodrome. Zigzags very funny when we went in we found that we had got in the bally Maid of the Mountains [Note: An operetta showing at Daly’s Theatre in Leicester Square] which was alongside soon got out of that joint when we found out done. Three bob sold one ticket to a N.Z. Soldier.

Dec. 14th: Had a bosker day getting round the sights of London went to the Carminetta [Note: a musical comedy showing at the Prince of Wales Theatre in Piccadilly Circus] & got us out late the Y.M. with my gear in it was closed so had a run for the 12 train to Cornwall had 4 minutes which was really a record for a Williams.

Dec. 15th: Arrived at Aunties unexpected at 12 today & was welcomed right royally had a good cobber in Arthur Tremethic who is Aunties' Daughter's son. Wandered round the old church where old grandfather was married & where Grandmother taught Sunday School.

Dec. 16th: Put in a day visiting all the relations who give me a hearty welcome went to the little chapel tonight (Sunday). Its turned out very rough the wind is blowing a treat the worst they have known for years. The fish boats down at St Ives are in a bad way they are going down by the 1st train in the morning.

Dec. 17th: Sleet & wind went down to St Ives with the fishermen & the boats were pretty right a patrol boat had broken away & was smashed up. I was in the old cabin & wouldn’t like to spend too many nights out in it. Its very comfy though. They have a fire & a stove in it to cook on.

Dec. 18th: Went down to Mt St Michael it is a castle old as the hills & is very interesting. We had to get special permission from Lady St. Levan to go over it.

Dec. 19th: Had to trundle back today. The Air Raid made the trains all out of order so I missed the train at Salisbury & didn’t get back until next morning at 8.30 but no one was any the wiser.

Dec. 20th: Feeling very lazy today.

Dec. 21st: On the Lewis gun today.

Dec. 22nd 23rd: Sunday went to big Xmas church parade down in No 5 camp marched through the village.

Dec. 24th: Had a great day at the sports had a go at a few items got a place in wheel barrow race 2 officers best us in the 3 legged race.

Dec. 25th: Ye old Xmas. Snow in the ground a bit but very mild weather. We had a very decent spread as much as we could eat. went over to Fovant & we had a special tea to celebrate the occasion & a bon bon to pull & a game of draughts just like old times when Allan used to stay up
Dec 27th 1917
Arthur Temethic I think that’s the way to spell it. It’s an old Cornish name he is Grandfather’s brother Jack daughter’s son & I taken together. Just a snap at a bloke called Stuckyaback (Stickyback) funny name taken as you sit down quick & lively it was done before I knew it they have been known to get a woman in the act of doing her hair to get posed.

Vic Williams 1917

Photograph: Studio Portrait. Arthur Temethic and Vic Williams, Cornwall 1917

We changed clothes here & as I couldn’t get on his shirt I just twisted my scarf round my neck & put on his cap & coat. He’d sooner be joining the Ausie’s when he’s called up on the 8th January instead of the Tommies.

Vic Williams 1917

Photograph: Studio Portrait. Vic Williams and Arthur Temethic, Cornwall 1917
The Rookery,  
Marazion, R.S.O.  
Cornwall.

Admit bearer to see  
the church and walk round  
the Mount.  

St Aubyn.

Reverse of card:  
Dec 27th 17

St Michael is a high peak of land rising out of the sea & at low tide one can walk across & visit the castle but now one can only see it by getting special permission from Lady or Lord St Aubyn or St Leven as he is known by title. As very few Ausie soldiers are down that way to see the old place I got this card to allow me over it & as Arthur Tremethic was with me I made Brater Bearers & we both saw it. The old guide put the card in his cap & when he came to show us through the castles cathedral when we tool off our hats on entering the card fluttered out & I got it in my pocket as a souvenir. It is a very old joint Queen Victoria visited it in 1844 Sept 6th & they have a brass plate where the Queen put her shoe leaving the boat to go up the steps on the wall so we put our feet where the Queen put hers I’m afraid only a part of my foot can claim to have hit the plate the remainder was to spare on the edges.

Vic Williams 1917

Entry card to Mt St Michael 1917
Photographs: Vic Williams - Williams family in Cornwall - 1917-1919

Uncle Jack and Aunty
Vic's Grandfathers Brother

Mrs W Williams and James

James Williams at Logan Rock

Uncle Jack and Aunty
Vic's Grandfathers Brother

Flo, Uncle Jack's Daughter

Uncle Jack's son Jack and Family

Newlyn Harbour
with me until 1 & 2 o'clock playing draughts. but it wasn't like riding the old horse home pushing the old bike home at 12 o'clock in the dark & slush.

_Dec. 26th:_ Back to the old Lewis gun a lot of our boys are off to France today. Spose I'll be going soon.

_Dec. 27th 28th 29th 30th:_ Sunday.

_Dec. 31st Jan. 1st 1918:_ New Year day had applied for a days leave but it didn't go through so I paraded to the O.C. got his approval & when I went in to the leave Sgt. the Adjutant who told the Sgt. to give me until 8 next morning so I spent the night over at Fovent over with Allan we went to the Pictures & turning in to the blankets was like Rifle Range in the old L.H. [Light Horse]

_Jan. 2nd:_ Saw Harry Barrett today again coming home from Fovent. Saw him again as we went up to Group when I got to camp we had to go through Gas. We marched along the road in our Gas helmets looks rummy a mob in helmets. The old gas is rotten stuff don't smell it with helmets on. They hardly use it now at the Front it is no good against the box respirator still its powerful stuff blackens everything silver or brass.

_Jan. 3rd:_ Put in for 4 days Good conduct leave so as to spend a few days on leave with Allan in London.

_Jan. 4th:_ Going through a few fancy butt strokes in bayonet fighting.

_Jan. 5th 6th. 7th. 8th:_ Warned for draft. G.C. leave is cut out. Am on guard & as the best dressed man gets a days leave. I out for it because I got a cable night fore last to say that £5 is cabled to C. Bank London. Also I have an overcoat & a bit of a kit in Aldwich Theatre YMCA. Mounted guard at 4 o'clock & got off. Going to London tomorrow. [Note: Competitions for best dressed guard appear regularly in the War Diary for the 12th Training Battalion]

_Jan. 9th:_ Up at 5.30 got my breakfast in the cook house & rode per bike to the station & got to London at 11.15 finished my business nicely got the gear & the money.

_Jan. 11th:_ Got a couple of lovely parcels today I'm being terribly envied by the unlucky lads who have had parcels sent & never got them.

_Jan. 12th:_ More parcels got about ½ doz now consider myself very lucky.

_Jan. 13th:_ Church parade they are very particular for the draft to have a prominent place in the parade. I going everywhere today with a lump of Xmas pudding in my paw.

_Dec. 14th:_ All packs ready everything squared up spare gear given in to A.M. sold my putties & bike. Did well with the bike it earned itself & never cost anything & I got my outlay back again. Think we go tomorrow must lose this epistle as I want to send it back to Ausie also I am in the wrestling competitions up at the YMCA tonight. We are having snow now its not cold but last night a foot of snow fell & today it was all snow fights such fun I never had. We were out in the range firing the Lewis gun & out there the YMCA supplies free hot soup or bovril we called in & had some about eleven o'clock & the signallers were down there too & they began the fight snowballs went all
over the place a few officers stopped-em to Lewis guns X sigs. The Y.M. chap was taking the crews (a photo) & I was starting up smoking with a junk on snow on my head & being a good target they wouldn’t leave the snow on my head but it was there in the snap trust me that way. Well I had only one competitor in the wrestling bout Sgt. Adams. He was the only one entered in the heavy weight both of us being about the same weight. It was funny the sports officer when he read out the name of the opponents he got it into his head I was a Sgt. & read out Sgt. Williams & Sgt. Adams. Adams had a terrible grip but I threw him 3 times in succession & was declared the winner. If we go tomorrow I suppose I’ll get nothing out of it however enjoyed putting him out the stagement.
Photograph: Russell Williams  Vic’s 1917 WW1 Dry Rations Biscuit
Decorated with Regimental Badges. Held at the Carbethon Folk Museum Crows Nest.
To War and Home Again
Photograph previous page: Studio portrait. Vic Williams Paris 1919. Reverse of photograph: “A man looks a rough soldier in this gear but coming out he’s considerably worse”
I have not found a diary for Vic's period of active service. I don't know if this diary ever existed.

The 1914 War section of Ron Pechey's oral history gives us very little information about what actually happened to Vic in the period between 16 January 1918 and 18 August 1919. There are a few amusing anecdotes and a few hints at some of the awful conditions. I have used his service record, the war diaries from the various units he served in or came into contact with, the Official War History, the surviving postcards he sent home and photographs he took, to piece together a picture of the time between Vic leaving the training camp in Codford in January 1918 to his embarkation for Australia in August 1919.

As far as I know Vic didn't do anything special as a soldier, at least not more special than any soldier had to do to face the enemy under fire and live in the horrendous conditions that were the Somme in World War 1. He wasn't awarded any special mentions for bravery. He was just an ordinary soldier. In fact he only spent somewhat over four months actually in active units. The rest of the time he was in hospital or at one of the Convalescent Depots. Unlike many of his mates Vic kept excellent health until he was wounded on 5 April at the 2nd Battle of Dernancourt. He recovered quite quickly from these wounds (gun shot wounds to both hands). However, Vic didn't even manage to re-join his Battalion after recovering from his wounds before he was struck down with influenza - presumably the Spanish Flu that was endemic at that time. Fortunately being April he would have caught the less virulent form of the flu. Still he was quite ill. By the time he recovered from the influenza the 47th Battalion had been disbanded. A month after joining his new Battalion - the 45th - and on the eve of that Battalion engaging in a major battle, Vic came down with a severe case of dysentery and did not rejoin the 45th until after Armistice day.

Craig Deayton's book "Battle Scarred" and the Official War History go into great detail about the battles Vic was involved in and who did what to whom and when. I have not attempted to summarise those details here, other than the general movement of his Battalion. There is no record of the exact part that Vic had to play in these battles. I have not been able to identify which company Vic was assigned to in the 45th Battalion. Knowing his company would provide further insight into his likely position during battle. Besides, I am sure Vic's daughters are more concerned to know he had clean socks every day and his Commanding Officer went to a great deal of trouble to make sure the men had a hot meal whenever possible, even in battle conditions.

Anyone wanting to know more detail about the rest is encouraged to consult Craig's excellent book and the original sources listed in Appendix 2.

After Armistice day Vic spent 8 months of 1919 travelling and studying in Europe and England. Part of Australia's demobilisation effort provided training to soldiers and Vic studied wool classing in France and in Sutton Veny at the Agricultural Training Depot there.

Numbers square parentheses [##] in the following text refer to the number of the corresponding Australian Imperial Force Unit War Diary in the Sources listing in Appendix 2.
From the Oral History by Ron Pechey:

In the Spring they went up to Zonnebeck in open trucks. [Note: Zonnebeke lies to the north of Holebeke - so is consistent with the location reported in the Battalion War Diaries]. Zonnebeck was a mere heap of rubble and they moved into their outposts in the main trench line at nights. It was necessary to avoid starting rifle fire which would bring down a barrage from the Germans. Rations and ammunition had to be carried by men across duck boards. After a few weeks they were pulled to the rear of the trenches and after another few weeks sent back to a village for rest in hay barns with cattle below. Vic was wounded at Dernancourt, and later transferred to the 45th Battalion.

The Belgians were not friendly to the Australians like the French were but their cafes and shops did well out of our men. Any girls about seemed to be shovelling manure in farms and our men never got to dance with the town girls - they couldn’t speak the language anyway.

Towards the end of the war they were sent down to the Somme to stop the last big push by the Germans. U.S. Troops were new appearing, but the AIF were regarded as “very seasoned troops” by both sides.

“So much Confusion” said Vic “How did we ever win?” - “The other side must have been worse”.

He saw German Machine gunners who had been chained to their guns.

"Those South Africans, had retreated about 20-30 miles and our companies had to go in broad daylight in 100x waves. You would dig in and the next company would leap frog. It was murder with shrapnel bursting 20 feet overhead. That encounter left less than 100 men in the 47th Battalion. At night you dug incessantly to complete the trench system in mud and water. In the rear lines burial parties worked all night."

Vic recalled in vivid detail an incident which occurred during a bitterly cold night. A woollen comforter which had come in a parcel from home blew off and Vic (forgetting how narrow the single file duckboards were) stepped aside and plunged into a huge ice covered shell hole. A mate who gave him a helping hand remarked “You’re a cool customer. I’d have melted that ice with my language!” “Not so mate,” replied Vic “The cold plunge through the ice completely took all the breath out of me.” The plunge was short & sharp but the night ahead in that icy, wet uniform was a very chilling experience.

When leaving the support trenches one night Vic was sent to pick up a tin containing tea. It turned out to be piss and Vic said “I was spitting for two hours.”

When Armistice was declared Vic got a leave pass to go into Brussels but with the help of some Tommy soldiers made a detour into Germany. Australian troops were not considered well enough disciplined for occupation. Inflation was rampant in Germany then and purchases with English pounds needed a sugar bag for the German change.

Vic mentioned that he had never seen a case of desertion in the face of the enemy in the AIF,
although he had heard of a man suspected of desertion - a sandbagger - being almost kicked to death and rescued by the provosts who promised he would get justice.

Later while waiting repatriation to Australia he visited the Royal Show at Cardiff and marvelled at the beautiful cattle and magnificent horses still bred for every purpose on the land.

Towards the end of the war Vic’s wrestling prowess won him the Brigade Championship. Later on in a Convalescent Camp after a bad bout of dysentery he met Billy Meeske a wrestling instructor who taught the “catch as catch can” type of wrestling. A few years later while threshing at Starke’s farm George Ludke challenged Vic to a scratch pull. Vic responded by challenging him to lift two buckets of skim milk above his head. He couldn’t get them up and clotted milk ran down over his shoulders. Vic remembered on another occasion beating a big hairy man at wrestling on the troop ship. “He seemed to have hair growing out of his toenails,” said Vic.
To War and Home Again

Studio Portrait Vic Williams and unidentified mates 1917-1919.

O. Williams - Vic Williams with baby sister Joyce at the Plainby farm 1919.


From the Vic's Service Record and the War Diaries:

Even without Vic's personal account, it is possible, using his service records and the war diaries of the various units that he passed through or had contact with, to develop a narrative for the time not covered by the two diaries.

Vic arrived at the 47th Battalion in France on 22 January 1918. Given his interest in food we can assume he enjoyed the Battalion's delayed Christmas lunch that was celebrated the next day. The Battalion was being rested from fighting at Parret Farm Camp at this time and occupied with working parties for the construction of defense lines. In early February the 47th Battalion relieved the 16th Battalion in the front line north of Hollebeke (Flemish Belgium) at the Ypres-Comines Canal. During this time the War Diary reports shelling, harassment by aircraft, patrols, line works, cold, wet, the establishment of a cocoa stand at the "White Chateau" using comfort funds dispensing free hot drinks, and lots of problems with information and communications. On 14 February the 47th Battalion was relieved by the 48th Battalion and moved to the support area known as the "Crater Dugouts". The Crater Dugouts were described as damp and lacking in satisfactory sanitation. [27] The 47th Battalion engaged in line works. The Crater Dugouts were exposed to heavy shelling. A couple of planes, English and German crashed near their lines. The Pilots were rescued and sent to the Casualty Station. On 19 February the 47th Battalion was relieved by the 16th Battalion and bussed to the De Jon Camp near Le Clytte. (Now De Klijte) close to the French Belgium border.

At this camp the men were employed in working and salvage parties as well as training in musketry, Lewis gun, and daily practice in the use of the small box respirator. They were also able to bathe, have a clean change of underclothing and time to clean up their kit. Entertainments were provided - concert parties, cinema and Y.M.C.A. facilities.

The medical officer reported that the general health of the Battalion during February was good. Some mild cases of Trench Fever were reported and no cases of Trench Foot due to preventative measures in place. Only 8 men were reported wounded during February.

The Quarter Master reported that the men's socks were being exchanged daily but there were problems with supply of trousers, jackets and putties.

The menu was pretty tedious but no serious problems were reported with food supplies apart from the quality of the milk substitute and the fragility of the cardboard packaging for the jam rations. Bacon (boiled or fried) and tea for breakfast, one meal a day of meat, onions and potatoes in various guises and the other meal of dried rations (bread, biscuits, butter, jam, cheese, figs) depending on the schedule. If there were a lot of work parties the main meal would be served in the evening, otherwise it was served in the middle of the day. Dessert (boiled rice, rice custard, biscuit pudding, fruit) would be served in the evening regardless.

At the end of February the 47th Battalion moved to Meteren in France. Meteren was another break from the front. The soldiers still worked hard. In the morning they trained at specialist military skills (close quarter skills, muskets, wiring, Lewis guns etc.). Recreational training and regular gas drills occupied the afternoons. Competitions were held in military skills, cleanliness and sport. Teams were selected for the Battalion Sports and we imagine Vic participated in the wrestling. Seven to ten mile route marches were held as were tactical exercises. The men were
billeted and helped with field work at their place of billet. A large team was sent to plant 10 acres of potatoes for a local farmer. There were regular opportunities to bathe and change clothes. Socks continued to be changed daily.

On 22 March heavy shelling of nearby Bailleul began to cause disturbances at the Meteren Camp and a steady stream of refugees started to arrive. The break from the front line was soon to be ended.

25 March saw the 47th Battalion loaded into buses at 10 am heading for the Basseox area. At 11.40 pm after a long tiring journey the Battalion arrives in Beaumetz. They learned that their billets were at Berles-au-Bois and their Commanding Officer Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Imlay decided the Battalion would march the rest of the way. Heavy shells fell nearby whilst they were forming up. They finally arrived at Berles-au-Bois at 12.15 am to find that the Germans were 'only 4 and 1/2 miles away and advancing.' [28]

There was no rest that night and little the next day. At 9.30 pm on 26 March orders were received to proceed to Senlis [Senlis-le-Sec]. At 10 pm the Battalion began the long overnight march to Senlis - 17 Miles - arriving at 6 am the next morning. Lieutenant Colonel Imlay reported that the troops were extremely tired before the march began 'March confirmed throughout the night which was exceptionally cold without casualties, hourly halts being observed & a steady pace being maintained throughout of 108 per minute which experience proved to be the maximum speed for long marches if troops are to be fit for anything at the completion.' [28] Perhaps all that route marching during the break from the front had been a really good idea.

After a short rest in Senlis during which Imlay made arrangements for hot food to be regularly available to the men in the lines, the Battalion moved towards the Dernancourt Railway Line. 27 and 28 March saw fierce fighting. At the same time as fighting the 47th Battalion were building defenses and digging trenches. Casualties were high on both sides. Those interested in the details of these battles and those in the following days should read the accounts in Craig Deayton's book Battle Scarred and the Official War History Volume 5 Chapters 6-8, 12.

29 March was wet and despite the men in the trenches being kept very busy with their rifles and Lewis guns the expected attack didn't happen that day. The 47th Battalion was relieved from the front line by the 45th Battalion and moved to a supporting position on open ground at 9 pm.

The day of 30 March was spent 'improving positions' [28] and salvaging equipment from the previous occupiers of the ground. Imlay said 'it speaks volumes for our discipline that when we leave a place or camp the value of the material left behind is practically about fourpence whereas it is our experience that English Bns leave behind enough material to equip a company as a rule. In this particular case Blankets rifles ground sheets food etc were littered about in a painful profusion and were salvaged by us.' [28]

By the 31st the total number of casualties from the engagement was 171 wounded, dead 35. At 5 pm the 47th Battalion moved to Lavienville-Millencourt completing the move at 9 pm finding the trenches there half filled with water. More work to be done digging trenches before the troops were able to rest. Amazingly Imlay reported the men were "in good health and ready for any emergency." [28] He reported also that during this period of 27-31 March "The men were constantly supplied with rations and hot meals." [28]. Vic would have appreciated that.
1 April was wet and the men spent the day building defenses around Lavenville under continuous shelling. That night the 47th Battalion relieved the 45th Battalion on the line. Imlay established headquarters in trenches near Amiens Road on 2 April after the Battalion having passed a quiet night. The rest of the day was spent on alert for an attack. That night the Battalion returned to the front line at Dernancourt. The attack came on the morning of the 3 April. Under cover of a smoke barrage the Germans attacked with machine guns, bombs and air support. In the evening the rifles and ammunition of the German dead were collected. Imlay says “these were used to supplement our defenses. One man being detailed as loader for say, five riflemen, each of whom has three or four rifles, ours and Germans, gives good results and allows a rifleman a cool rifle and to keep his mind on this target.” [29] Given Vic’s 1st class score at the rifle range he may well have been one of these riflemen.

4 April was relatively quiet “except for shelling and aircraft.” [29] 1 man died and 3 were wounded in a friendly fire incident supposedly caused by a problem with available maps.

The War Diary entry for 5 April starts with a single phrase: “5th 4.30 Attacked”. [29] What followed came to be known as the Second Battle of Dernancourt. By the end of the day another 26 men were dead, 65 wounded and 176 missing in the 47th Battalion alone. The 12th Brigade had a total of 88 men killed, 241 men wounded and 251 men missing. The 13th Brigade suffered similar losses. The Official War History (Volume V p411) estimates German losses at around 1,300-1,600. A bitter day of fighting. The two Australian Brigades won the day but not before facing what was has been claimed to be the most intensive day of fighting of any war. Two Australian Brigades faced and defeated two and a half German Divisions.

Four of the five men photographed outside the hut at the training camp in Codford (p39) joined the 47th Battalion. On this day two were wounded and the other two became prisoners of war, one of those also badly wounded.

Vic was one of the wounded. He had gun shot wounds in both hands and was taken by the 13th Australian Field Ambulance to the nearest Casualty Clearing Station. The 13th Australian Field Ambulance treated over 1000 cases that day. Because the day was so unusual & it was unclear how well the Casualty Clearing Station would handle the volume of casualties, cases were being “thoroughly dressed” [38] by the Ambulance staff before being transferred. The next day Vic passed through the 3rd Canadian Stationary Hospital, and the 18th General Hospital (run by the USA) before being admitted to the 6th Convalescent Depot at Etapes from 6 April to 12 April. He was then transferred to the 10th Convalescent Hospital at Ecault until 16 April.

Vic was discharged from the Australian Divisional Base Depot on 16 April but before he could be sent back to his unit he was again hospitalised - this time with the influenza that was pandemic in 1918-1919. Vic spent 3 days at the 2nd General Hospital (run by the UK) before being discharged to the 1st Australian Convalescent Depot, a new facility established 18 April 1918. Vic would have been one of the first men admitted there. The Depot had some hatted buildings, a large Y.M.C.A. gymnasium, 433 bell tents for accommodation, and permanent latrine and ablation blocks.

The role of the Convalescent Depot was as a half way house for those discharged from hospital but not yet fit enough to go back to their units.
The men were classified as:

D. Unfit for any duties
C. Fit for light fatigues and light physical training only
B. Fit for physical training, route marches etc

Vic remained at the 1st Australian Convalescent Depot for 2 months. During this time his whereabouts were queried but it was confirmed that he was still at the 1st Australian Convalescent Depot where the records said he should be. Vic was discharged back to the Division Base Depot on the 27 June.

Meanwhile his original unit, the 47th Battalion, had been disbanded. The toll of the fighting up to and including April had caused the Battalion numbers to be greatly reduced. At the end of April the strength was 38 Officers and 527 men. At full strength a Battalion averages around 1000 men.

There were also questions about the on the ground operations at the battle of Dernancourt. Although in the end the Australians won, the battle had been seriously in the balance at times. An inquiry was launched into a number of serious flaws in the decisions taken during the battle.

The decision to reconfigure the 12th Brigade with only three Battalions by disbanding the 47th was conveyed to Imlay on 5 May. The 47th Battalion continued fighting in the front line until 22 May. By the end of May the 47th Battalion had been dispersed with approximately 206 men assigned to the 45th Battalion, 163 to the 46th Battalion and 164 to the 48th Battalion.

On discharge from the 1st Australian Convalescent Depot after the influenza, Vic was transferred to the 45 Battalion and joined his new unit on 6 July 1918. The 45th Battalion had just returned to the frontline on the River Somme. Trenches and line improvements were undertaken under fire. The Battalion was relieved on 12 July and moved to LeNeuville for a hot breakfast, baths and clean clothes at Daours, and finally reaching Cardonette where the Battalion was billeted. The billets were not particularly satisfactory. Training, sports and recreation (including on one day an amazing show of stunt flying by the Australian Flying Corp), continued until the end of July.

On 31 July the Battalion moved to an orchard outside Cagny. On 4 August the Battalion moved out at night for Hamelet. The transport lines near Corbie were shelled on 6 August. Vic reported sick on 7 August and the 11th Australian Field Ambulance transported him to the 12th Casualty Clearing Station where he was diagnosed with dysentery on 9 August, and admitted to the 16th General Hospital at Le Treport (USA run) until 13 August. He was then sent to the 52nd Stationary Hospital also known as the Le Havre Isolation Hospital (UK run). On 3 September Vic returned to the 1st Australian Convalescent Depot where he remained for almost 3 months.

At the 1st Australian Convalescent Depot Vic was in training to return to the front. As well as a program of military training the Depot offered boxing and wrestling classes each day. Here Vic met Sergeant William Meeske, who later became Australian heavy weight wrestling champion three times. Vic was already a proponent of wrestling. His Grandfather was a keen wrestler. Sergeant Meeske was the wrestling instructor at the Y.M.C.A. gymnasium and he taught Vic a new style of wrestling - Catch as Catch Can. On Monday nights there were novice competitions held in
Photograph: Unknown Professional Photographer. 1918. *Wrestlers at 1st Australian Convalescent Depot in the Y.M.C.A. Gymnasium.* Vic Williams sitting second row, second from right. On Vic’s left is Sgt Billy Meeske the Depot’s wrestling coach who went on to become three time Australian heavyweight wrestling champion. Billy introduced Vic to the “catch as catch can” style of wrestling.

Photograph: Unknown Professional Photographer. 1918. *Wrestling classes were held daily in the Y.M.C.A. Gymnasium at the 1st Australian Convalescent Depot and novice bouts held on Monday nights were attended by over 1,000 troops.* Vic competed in the Monday night bouts as a middleweight and won several encounters. Sgt Meeske is standing on the mat in dark clothes.
the gymnasium and up to 1400 men attended.

By October Vic was fit enough to enter the competitions. The Depot War Diary records Vic competing in the following matches:

7 October Pte Williams C Coy Camp 2 (Won) Pte McHugh C Coy Camp 2 (Middle weights)
14 October Pte Williams C Coy Camp 2 Pte Geyer C Coy Camp 2 (Middle weights) (scratched)
28 October Pte Williams C Coy Camp 2 (Won) Pte Geyer C Coy Camp 2 (Middle weights)
18 November Pte Williams C Coy Camp 2 Sgt Erbauer (Won) (Middleweights)

Vic was in the 1st Australian Convalescent Depot when the Armistice is announced. The Commanding Officer of the Depot reports:

“A telegram was received today at 1000 hours with reference to the signing of the Armistice and a General Muster Parade of the whole Depot was called at which 1600 men attended. The announcement of the signing of the Armistice was then officially made and the hostilities would cease at 1100 hours. The news was received enthusiastically and the discipline of the parade was excellent, the march past afterward leaving nothing to be desired. At the request of the Base Commandant, the Band of the Depot proceeded to Havre in the afternoon and marched through the Streets of the City from 1700 to 2100 hours playing patriotic airs; they were received with great enthusiasm by the troops and civilian population and the presence of the band also did much towards preserving good order and discipline in the City as it kept the crowds of people continuously on the move. The behaviour of the Australian troops throughout the whole celebration was excellent, so much so that a special letter of congratulations was sent to each Australian Depot by the Base Commandant of Havre. It was first thought that the news of signing of the Armistice would unsettle the troops considerably but this did not prove to be the case and the men soon settled down again to the routine work of the Depot. ” [44]

Vic has survived the war. In fact he has survived three of the major killers of the war: wounding in battle, influenza and dysentery. We can't know his state of mind and how those months at the front have affected him mentally. However, having just spent three months at the Convalescent Depot he is probably in relatively good physical shape.

14 November found Vic released to the Australian Infantry Base Depot at Le Havre where he stayed (coming back to the Convalescent Depot for one last wrestling match) until he rejoined the 45th Battalion on 1 December 1918 at Avenelles. Hopefully he made it back in time to see the King who passed through a parade of the troops of the Battalion that day.

Life in the Battalion now consisted of training in the morning and recreational parades and sports competitions in the afternoon. Concert Parties are held in the evenings. On 13 December the Battalion started a 4 day march to Hastierre Levaux via Flaumont, Felleris, Clairfayts, Renlies, Vergnies, Erpion, Boussu les Waulcours, Silenrieux, Philippville, Heptiene, St Aubin, Florennes, Rosee and Anthee. As the Commanding Officer reported that not a man fell out by the wayside it seems Vic was as fit as we hoped he would be.

The Battalion spent 18 December settling in, cleaning equipment and billets. 19 December had a touch of excitement when H.R.H The Prince of Wales came to inspect the Battalion.
We had a dozen of these issued to us. I suppose they are intended for the people at home to read as well as ourselves.

Note by Vic Williams on front of Pamphlet issued to the Officers and men of the AIF 1918, by Lieutenant General Birdwood

To the Officers, Non-Commissioned Officers, and Men of the Australian Imperial Force.

It is now just four years that we have been serving together, often through days of hardship and peril, and often through times of well-deserved success.

During this time I hope and think we have come to know each other well, and I trust have realised how rightly we have confidence in each other.

No words of mine can possibly express all I feel for the magnificent work which has been done by the Australian soldier during these long four years. It is well known and recognised, not only throughout the British Empire, but throughout the world—and now we have peace in sight, and peace after a victory in which the Australian soldier has taken so large a share.

Even then, with peace there are still difficult times before us. Faith in our recent foe cannot quickly be established, and it may be that for some little time yet we shall be able to relax no precautions, until we are assured of the complete and honest fulfilment of our terms.

Then will come the difficult time of demobilisation, and it is regarding this that I wish to make.
Hastierre is an important place in the history of the 47th Battalion.

The introduction to Craig Deaton’s book shows a photo from the Australian War Memorial collection of a group of Australian soldiers taken at Hastierres titled the “47th Battalion Remnants”. According to the Australian War Memorial Catalogue, written on the back is “1100 soldiers in 47th Battalion Approx 73 left”. You can see the photo on the Australian War Memorial web site. Just search for “47th Battalion Remnants”. Is Vic there? According to the record he is in the right place at the right time to be in the photo. I can’t spot him but it’s hard to make out any individual. In the oral history Vic talks about there being less than 100 men left in the 47th battalion. Is this a clue that he was there the day this proud but tragic photograph was taken?

Life for the troops settles back into the peacetime regime of training in the morning and recreational parades and sport in the afternoon. Another Christmas comes and this time there was something to celebrate. There was no space large enough for the whole Battalion to gather so each Company had its own feast.

Vic spent most of January on leave in the UK. There is no evidence of where he spent this leave. However his recollections of time spent with family in Cornwall, and the chronology of his movements in the official record suggests that this is the only time he could have managed a long stay with the Cornwall branch of the family.

On his return to France Vic was detached to the 12th Brigade at Waulsort. One reason a soldier could be detached to Brigade Head Quarters was to attend education classes. Classes in Wool Classing commenced at Brigade Headquarters on 3 February. Soldiers were tested and recommended for further courses at Sutton Veny Agricultural Training Depot as a result of this course. Given that Vic moves from France to Sutton Veny to undertake a wool classing course it seems a safe assumption that this is the reason for his detachment.

The Brigade moved to Nalines on 25 February, Vic was taken ill again with Diarrhoea on 27 February. Fortunately this time his illness is short and he is back with the Brigade Head Quarters on 8 March, just in time to take 10 days leave from 9 March. Vic’s leave starts and ends in Brussels. In between he visits Antwerp, Leige, Laovain, Cologne, Bonn, Luxembourg & Paris seeing wonderful sights in every city. He promises to write his Mother and Father a book about his travels, perhaps he did, but all we have left are a few post cards and photographs.

The 12th Brigade and its Battalions are getting ready to go home. By early May the troops are on ships on their way back to Australia. But not Vic. There is still one more adventure to be had before going home, and this time he will have a camera to document it.

**Sutton Veny**

On 3 April Vic marched out of the 12th Brigade Head Quarters to the Australian Infantry Brigade Depot in Le Havre. He sailed from Le Havre on 9 April arriving at Southampton on 10 April and reported to the No. 6 Camp at Sutton Veny. This would be his home until he departed for
Australia. The AIF Education Service designed to provide intensive training during demobilisation included an Agricultural Training Depot at Sutton Veny.

Vic attended wool classing instruction at Sutton Veny from 30 April until 7 July 1919. As part of this class he visited the Royal Cardiff Show along with 1000 officers and men under the auspices of the Imperial Education Department of the War Office. Given the subject of some of the photographs it is also possible that he joined the A.I.F. Cattle and Sheep Tour of Scotland which took place from 10 to 29 July to look at shorthorn, black angus, clydesdale and cheviot sheep properties in Scotland. Four places on the tour were allocated to Sutton Veny. Railway warrants were issued for the tour for Depot - Edinburgh, Edinburgh - Inverness, Inverness-Wick, Wick-Depot.

Before departing for Australia Vic takes as many trips as he can including a trip to Lincoln and York in June, Whitby and the North York Moors in August, Plymouth, Bath and Portishead.

Vic departed England for Australia on 19 August 1919 aboard the Ajana.
The postcards collected on leave in Europe a stark contrast to the photographs. Is the German Officer’s helmet the one we grandchildren used to take to school for show and tell?

Commercial Postcards, Photographs Vic Williams. 1919
On reverse: Paris 17.3.19
Dear Mother & Father
Just a scribble to let you know I am well & my 10 days leave came through just as I got back out of hospital. Another chap I have been through and over this little lot, 2 days in Brussels 1 in Antwerp through Leige & Leuvin & Cologne in Germany and afternoon in Bonn & 2 days in Cologne then down to Paris through Trier Metz & Nancy, Luxemburg also. 25 hrs of travelling & this afternoon we were up on this huge wheel in Paris. We are going back to Brussels tomorrow night as our leave finishes there on the 20th. It will be the most interesting 10 days ever 2 Australians put in I’ll guarantee as we’ve seen Rubens & Van Dyck’s master paintings in Antwerp & such wonderful sights in every city. Now this pen isn’t fit to write with but as soon as I get back I’ll write you a book on my travels love from Victor. XXX
Victor Williams 1919

Commercial Postcard
To War and Home Again

Vic Williams and unknown friends *possibly at Sutton Veny*

AIF Agricultural Depot Sutton Veny

Break time - *possibly Sutton Veny*

Sutton Veny  St John the Evangelist Churchyard War Cemetery

Annotated - The House and diggers - *possibly Sutton Veny*

Boxing tournament *possibly Sutton Veny*

*Photographs: Vic Williams 1919*

Camp *either Sutton Veny or Codford*
Some of the cattle, sheep, horse and pig photographs by Vic Williams 1919. Vic studied wool classing at the AIF Agricultural Depot at Sutton Veny and went on study tours to the Royal Show at Cardiff and through Scotland.
This is to certify that No. 3158 Rank Mr. Name Williams T. O. Unit 45th Bn. ART attended a systematic course of instruction at A.I.F. Sutton Veyry Wits in the following subject: Woolclassing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>From</th>
<th>To</th>
<th>Standard reached or other remarks</th>
<th>Signature of Instructor</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Woolclassing</td>
<td>30.4.19</td>
<td>7.7.19</td>
<td>Elementary Training</td>
<td>R.O. von Ludwig, C.S.O.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Date 7th July, 1919

Education Officer

Director of Education
"A PEACE OF MERCY. Mr. Hughes [Prime Minister of Australia] addressed troops at Sutton Veney, en route for Plymouth. Referring to the peace terms, he said it was not a peace of Justice. It was a peace of mercy. Some said the terms were severe. In his opinion, they were the mildest ever imposed on conquered nations." Sydney Morning Herald 10 July 1919.

These photographs appear to be of the Prime Minister at Sutton Veney on 8 July 1919. The Officer in the lower left may be Major General Charles Rosenthal who met Mr Hughes at Sutton Veney: "8 July... Leaving London at 12.30, he proceeded to Sutton Veney by Car where he met the Right Hon. Wm. Hughes and Party. The Prime Minister then inspected the 1st A.G.H. [Australian General Hospital], where the party had tea." [#3]

Vic completed his Wool Classing training the day before and not leaving for Scotland until 10 July would probably have been in camp for the event.
Photographs: Vic Williams 1919
Triumphal March of the Dominion Troops through London
May 3rd 1919

Souvenir Programme. March to celebrate the participation of the Dominion Troops in the Victory, World War 1, May 3rd 1919. Continues next two pages.
2nd Canadian Division.


Representative Detachments of the following:

2nd Canadian Divisional Artillery.
2nd Brigade Canadian Engineers.
4th Canadian Infantry Brigade.
5th Canadian Infantry Brigade.
56th Canadian Infantry Brigade.
2nd Canadian Divisional Machine Gun Battalion.
2nd Canadian Divisional Tram.
2nd Canadian Divisional Field Ambulances.

Commonwealth of Australia.


 Mounted Troops.


Representatives of ANZAC Mounted Division and Australian Mounted Division, and Australian Corps Mounted Troops.

A Battery of Australian Artillery.
Representatives of Australian Corps Artillery and Siege Artillery.

1st Australian Division.


One Battalion representative of all Arms of Division and affiliated Troops.

2nd Australian Division.


One Battalion representative of all Arms of Division and affiliated Troops.

3rd Australian Division.


One Battalion representative of all Arms of Division and affiliated Troops.
4th Australian Division.
Major Gen. E. G. Unclaire Macclagan, C.B.,
D.S.O., and Staff.
One Battalion representative of all Arms of Division
and affiliated Troops.

5th Australian Division.
Brig. Gen. J. C. Stewart, C.M.G., D.S.O.,
and Staff.
One Battalion representative of all Arms of Division
and affiliated Troops.

Dominion of New Zealand.
Brig.-Gen. R. Young, C.M.G., D.S.O.,
and Staff.
One Battalion representing the NEW ZEALAND
DIVISION.

Union of South Africa.
Lt.-Col. E. F. Thackeray, C.M.G., D.S.O.,
and Staff.
Representatives of the SOUTH AFRICAN SIGNAL
COMPANY.
Detachments of the 1st, 2nd and 4th Regiments of
South African Infantry, representing the SOUTH
AFRICAN INFANTRY REGIMENT.

Dominion of Newfoundland.
Lt.-Col. A. E. Bernard, M.C., and Staff.
A Battalion representing the ROYAL NEWFOUNDLAND
REGIMENT.

Route.
Stanhope Gate (Hyde Park) ...... 1.48 p.m.
Hyde Park Corner ...... 2.01 p.m.
Constitution Hill ...... 2.06 p.m.
Buckingham Palace ...... 2.10 p.m.
His Majesty the King will take the salute.
Buckingham Palace Road ...... 2.15 p.m.
Victoria Street ...... 2.17 p.m.
Parliament Street ...... 2.19 p.m.
Whitehall ...... 2.26 p.m.
Charing Cross ...... 2.27 p.m.
Strand ...... 2.36 p.m.
Rand Australia House ...... 2.46 p.m.
Althorp ...... 2.51 p.m.
Kingsway ...... 2.53 p.m.
High Holborn ...... 2.57 p.m.
New Oxford Street ...... 3.01 p.m.
Oxford Street ...... 3.11 p.m.
Morris Arch ...... 3.17 p.m.
Hyde Park ...... 3.30 p.m.

There will be a short halt at 3 p.m.
Wounded Officers and men of the Dominion Forces
will be accompanied by the Queen Victoria Memorial.
March held London 3 May 1919 to celebrate the contribution of the Dominion forces to Victory
Photographs: Vic Williams 1919

The Cenotaph. Whitehall, 1919
Chronology - Summary of Service Record - Victor Owen Williams -

Enlisted
Light Horse (L.H.D.R.)
8th Reinforcements 41st Battalion
10th Reinforcements 47th Battalion
Embarked at Sydney A28 Miltiades
Disembarked
Private Marched In to 12th Training Brigade from Australia ex His Majesty's Australian Transport
Ex 12th Training Brigade Codford via 4th Australian Divisional Base Depot -
Joined Depot from England
4th Australian Divisional Base Depot
Marched Out to Unit
Private Taken on Strength of 47th Battalion from 10th Reinforcements 47th Battalion
Private wounded in Action
13th Australian Field Ambulance Private Gunshot Wounds to both Hands; admitted to Casualty Clearing Station
3rd Canadian Stationary Hospital, Private Gunshot Wounds to both Hands; Admitted to Base
18th USA General Hospital Private Gunshot Wounds to both Hands; admitted to 6th Convalescent Depot
6th Convalescent Depot (UK) Private Gunshot Wounds to both Hands; admitted to 10th Convalescent Depot
10th Convalescent Depot (UK) Private Gunshot Wounds to both Hands; admitted to Base Depot
Private Discharged to Australian Divisional Base Depot from Line of Communication Hospital ex Wounded
Australian Divisional Base Depot Joined Depot from Hospital
4th Australian Divisional Base Depot to Hospital sick

Toowoomba 18.4.17
Rifle Range Camp 30.5.17-9.6.17
Rifle Range Camp 10.6.17-11.6.17
Rifle Range Camp 12.6.17
Sydney 1.8.17-2.8.17
Glasgow 2.10.17
Codford 3.10.17
Southampton 16.1.18
Le Havre 17.1.18
Le Havre 19.1.18
France 23.1.18
France 23.1.18
France 5.4.18
France 5.4.18
Doullens 6.4.18
Camiers 6.4.18-12.4.18
Etapes 12.4.18-13.4.18
Ecault 14.4.18-16.4.18
France 16.4.18
France 21.4.18
France 24.4.18
Chronology - Summary of Service Record - Victor Owen Williams (Cont.)

2nd General Hospital (UK) Private Influenza Admitted
Le Havre 24.4.18

2nd General Hospital (UK) Private Influenza to Convalescent Depot
Le Havre 27.4.18

1st Australian Convalescent Depot Private Influenza
Le Havre 28.4.18

Hospital queried re whereabouts
5.6.18

1st Australian Convalescent Depot (Memo) Private still in depot
Le Havre 18.6.18

1st Australian Convalescent Depot discharge to Base Depot
Le Havre 27.6.18

Australian Divisional Base Depot Joined from Hospital
France 27.6.18

Australian Divisional Base Depot Marched out to Unit
France 3.7.18

47th Battalion Transferred
France 5.7.18

C.O. 45th Battalion. Private transferred to 45th Battalion from 47th Battalion ex Base Depot
France 6.7.18

C.O. 45th Battalion. Private Taken on Strength 45th Battalion A.I.F from 47th Battalion A.I.F.
France 6.7.18

Private To Hospital sick
France 7.8.18

11th Australian Field Ambulance Dysentery Admitted & Transferred
France 7.8.18

12th Casualty Clearing Station Not Yet Diagnosed Admitted
France 7.8.18

12th Casualty Clearing Station Dysentery Transferred
France 9.8.18

16th General Hospital (USA) Private Dysentery Cynical admitted
Le Treport 9.8.18

16th General Hospital (USA) Private Dysentery Cynical Transferred
Le Treport 13.8.18

52nd Stationary Hospital (Le Havre Isolation Hospital UK) Dysentery Cynical Admitted
France 14.8.18

52nd Stationary Hospital (Le Havre Isolation Hospital UK) Dysentery Cynical to 1 Australian Convalescent Depot
France 3.9.18

1st Australian Convalescent Depot Admitted
Le Havre 3.9.18

1st Australian Convalescent Depot queried if still a patient
Le Havre

1st Australian Convalescent Depot replied still a patient
Le Havre 25.10.18
Chronology - Summary of Service Record - Victor Owen Williams (Cont.)

Australian Infantry Base Depot - Marched In from 1st Australian Convalescent Depot  
Le Havre 14.11.18

Australian Infantry Base Depot Marched Out to Unit  
Le Havre 26.11.18

Rejected from Australian Infantry Brigade Depot ex sick  
1.12.18

C.O. 45th Battalion Private rejoined Battalion  
France 1.12.18

C.O. 45th Battalion Granted leave to U.K.  
France 2.1.19

C.O. 45th Battalion Leave in U.K.  
6.1.19-20.1.19

C.O. 45th Battalion Rejoined from leave  
France 24.1.19

C.O. 45th Battalion Detached with 12th Al Brigade  
France 26.1.19

C.O. 45th Battalion To Hospital Sick  
France 27.2.19

12th Australian Field Ambulance Private Diarrhoea admitted  
Field 27.2.19

12th Australian Field Ambulance Private Diarrhoea transferred  
Field 28.2.19

55th Casualty Clearing Station Private Diarrhoea Admitted  
Field 29.2.19

Private Diarrhoea Discharged to Unit  
Field 8.3.19...

C.O. 45th Battalion Private rejoined Battalion ex sick to remain detached with Brigade Head Quarters  
Field 8.3.19...

C.O. 45th Battalion Granted Leave to Brussels  
Field 9.3.19...

C.O. 45th Battalion Rejoined from leave  
Field 18.3.19...

C.O. 45th Battalion Marched Out to Sutton Veny Agricultural class  
Field 3.4.19

Australian Infantry Brigade Depot Marched Out to England  
Le Havre 9.4.19

Private disembarked at Southampton from France & reported to No 6. Camp Sutton Veny  
Southampton 10.4.19

B213 No 2 Group Private Marched ex France  
Sutton Veny 10.4.19

Began Woolclassing instruction Australian Training Depot  
Sutton Veny 30.4.19

B213 No 2 Marched Out to demobilisation Depot  
44 St Georges Square London  
Sutton Veny 29.5.19

Completed Woolclassing instruction Agricultural Training Depot Sutton Veny  
7.7.19

Private returned to Australia Per Ajana  
England 19.8.19

45th Battalion Discharges 1 MD  
Brisbane 10.11.19
Photograph previous page: Photographer unknown. Vic Williams (on right) and mate, after the flour fatigue on the Ajana, 1919. Taken with Vic’s camera.
Vic left Sutton Veny on 18 August 1919 for Liverpool and again travelled the western route - across the Atlantic Ocean, through the Panama Canal and across the Pacific to Sydney arriving on 9 October. On the way the ship stopped in Norfolk, Virginia and the troops took day trips off the ship. Some tours were arranged by the Y.M.C.A.

The trip through the Panama Canal was not documented so well with words but this time Vic took photographs that are easily identifiable from contemporary photographs of the Canal locks. The ship stopped in the Pitcairn Islands this time, and didn't just saill past. The troops didn't leave the ship but the locals paid a visit.

On board there were activities to keep the troops amused. Vic of course was interested in the wrestling and the tug-o-war, and turns out to be a dab hand at limericks as well. It is more subdued crowd on the ship this time - not so much of the larrikin soldier in evidence. There is even some poignancy from the battle hardened troops. The night after the ship crosses the equator Vic records 'We can see the Southern Cross down low on the horizon tonight. It would seem strange for people at home to see all the digs looking at it over the rail as though it was the entrance to the promised land.'

The photographs recording the arrival in Sydney are wonderful. Sydney Heads, up the harbour, troops lining the decks.

The last entry in Vic's diary provides another note of poignancy. It is a quote from Hugo Bassi's Poem “Sermon in a Hospital”.

Vic received his discharge papers in Brisbane on 10 November 1919.
Diary Number 2 - V.O. Williams
August 20 1919 - October 9 1919

-1919-

Homeward Bound Aug 19

Leaving Sutton Veny on 63 quota at 11 oclock on the night of the 18th we marched to Warminster or “Warburg” as commonly called by the A.I.F. Entrained there after a drink of cocoa & a bun leaving these never to be forgotten Plains? at 1.30AM on the 19th. Travelling via Bristol & Crewe we arrive in Liverpool at 11 AM & went aboard the Ajana. 3PM tugs towed us into the channel & we proceed down the Mersey. The Pilot went ashore at Holyhead about 7PM & with MT. Snowden & the Welsh coast on our left we continued on our course down the Irish Channel.

Aug. 20th: the Irish coast in sight and on our right until night when we were beginning to leave the coast directly behind instead of sailing beside it.


Aug. 22nd: A beautiful day & the sea very smooth at 10AM Cloud bank on Horison [sic] at Sun down.

Aug. 23rd: On guard heavy rain in the morning but sea quite smooth. Clear again after dinner.

Aug. 24th: Sunday - beautiful day slightly hotter. Life boat parade to allot boats at 10PM. The Y.M. ran a sing song on the well deck. Guising stunts at 2.30. [Note: guising - to dress up in disguise.]

Aug. 25th: Slept on deck last night & rain & heavy wind rose at 4AM & cleared the deck at the trot. We rushed down below wet & cold. Think I’ll sleep below next burl. Gonzola tells me the troops on the upper deck today saw a whale. I suppose it is true as Rasputan backs his statements signed “Pongalo”
The Irish Poet.
ALIAS
“Rasputan” the Russian Jew

Tonight we pass over or near the spot where the Titanic went down.

Aug. 26th to 28th: Nothing doing of any note with the exception of a few squalls am doing a bit of elementary survey work in one of the educational classes.

Aug. 29th: Walked out of wash house after shaving & washing & forgot my razor. Notices as to reward produced no result as yet.
Front cover of Vic’s diary for the voyage home on the Ajana
First Page of Vic's diary of the voyage home on the Ajana

1919

Homeward Bound. Aug 12
Leaving Lutton Vey on 6:30am and 11th look on the night of the 18th we marched to Warninster or Warburg as commonly called by the N.W.F. Entained there after a drink of cocoa or a bun

Leaving there next to be forgotten Plains at 1-30am on the 19th

Traveling via Brittany we arrived at troop at 10am

I went aboard the Ajana 3pm
took toward us into the channel
I proceeded down the river
The pilot went ashore at Little Head about 7pm + we went into
Snowdon or the Welsh coast or
If we continued our course
Dear Madam,

I am in receipt of advice to the effect that No. 3756, Private V. O. Williams, 45th Battalion, "AJANA" which left Australia per transport on the 19th August, 1919, is returning to England on the 10th October, 1919. Further information as to the exact date of arrival and time of disembarkation will be published in the press when available.

It should be noted, however, that owing to possible mutilations in the cabled advice, and other causes, this notification may not be correct pending verification from the roll after the arrival of the troopship.

Any further inquiries should be made to the Staff Officer Returned Soldiers, Military Head-quarters, Brisbane, QLD.

Yours faithfully,

[Signature]

Major
Officer in Charge, Base Records.

O. H. M. S.

[Postmark]

Mrs. B. Williams,
Plaincy,
Via CROWS NEST, QLD.

[Postmark]

If not delivered within 7 Days please return to Officer in Charge, Base Records, Victoria Barracks, Melbourne.
Photographs: Vic Williams. *The Ajana made a stop over in Newport News, Norfolk Virginia on the way home to Australia.* The *Y.M.C.A.* arranged tours including the Newport News Shipping Yards.

- Ship building
- Large crane - U.S. Hercules
- Naval Ships
- Naval Ship with sighting gun
- Tram with Australian Soldiers
- Norfolk Victory Arch built 1919
Aug. 30th: Expect to be in Norfolk tomorrow morning am on guard again tonight.

Aug. 31st: As the guard is per a farce I was fast asleep in my hammock at the post of duty this morning. The other sentry came on at 5-30 but showed tact by not waking me. Land in sight at daylight. 8AM the pilot came aboard & we are off down the Chesapeake Bay what-oh, sailing down the Chesapeake Bay. Alongside the coaling pier at midday & the mob went ashore at 3.

We changed guard at 5.30 then went ashore. This is Newport News. Norfolk is across the ferry. This place seems to be thrown together & has a darkies town attached. Things are dear but fruit, melons are plentiful.

Sept. 1st: Went ashore at 10AM & went to Norfolk with a Y.M.C.A. trip. The Y.M. on the Norfolk side gave us a drink of tea & some sandwiches & then we had a look at the town & dinner. After dinner we had a run in the tram down to Ocean View which is a fashionable seaside resort. Quite a lot of swimming & hurdy gardens etc there. We came back to the boat via Pine Beach.

Sept. 2nd: Didn’t go ashore until after dinner today. Helped the Y.M. chap up with a lot of cases of cigs candy etc the Yanks brought down & then went & visited the Newport News ship building yards & dry docks, these are about the best in the U.S.A. but do not compare with the Clyde as the Yanks seem to think. They are all windbags here of course they fancy they won the war. Our concert party gave us a turn ashore & after we had pictures.

Sept. 3rd: Left Newport News at midday & are now heading for Panama.

Sept. 4th: Slept on deck last night & Gonzola Rasputin & I came down covered with cinders as they are making up time now doing about 14 knots.

Sept. 5th: Lovely day, getting very hot now so they are putting up the awnings. Spoilt 2 films today. Woodrow Wilson & I got the darkroom for an hr & developed 4 films nicely when to our surprise the water they were washing in turned black & we found the film melting so much that they were useless. Misfortunes do not come alone. We have a light box on deck every night & I was having a twist with the ships cook & he claims to be a Bristol pro. Well all went well until I bursted my shoe & then I had the bad luck to tread on something & rip the skin off the ball of my foot. However it may heal before our tug of war comes off. It’s an ill wind that blows nobody good & this will get me off guard next time.

Sept. 6th: Last night a storm blew up & all deck hands were turned out & hatches battened down & it looked as though all the awnings would have to be taken down but after a tremendous downpour of rain is eased off but today is the roughest we’ve struck. The sea is coming over the deck & we’re getting drenched at times moving along the side cups & plates slide off the table like magic, we must be about opposite Cape Florida now.

Sept. 7th: Sea went smooth passed through the strait of Cuba & Haiti this morning also later in the afternoon we passed another small Is.
**Sept. 8th:** On guard mounted yesterday very hot day & sea smooth expect to be at Panama tomorrow morning at 8 oclock or rather Colon.

**Sept. 9th:** No chance of being in Colon before 8 oclock tonight they say now. We have a mat rigged up for wrestling & have had a few practice flutters. We reached Colon harbour about 7.3PM & pulled into the coaling station right away & got that big shoot aboard in no time. It soon shot the port bunkers full & the barges coal into the starboard bunkers we will be away at 6 in the morning.

**Sept. 10th:** I woke up this morning as the Ajana was pulling away from the coaling joint about 6AM & we went up the stream right away to the Gatun locks. At 10 oclock we are nearly half way through the Gatun lakes. We can get a fresh water shower now as the baths aboard are salt when at sea, the water just being pumped up as they move along. 2.30PM. We are right through the canal & almost outside the breakwater which heads out into the Pacific. Looking back we get a good view of Panama City & Balboa by the way which we could plainly see 2 crocodiles on the bank of that arm of the sea that stretches up to Balboa & the Pacific locks. The Yank Red Cross sent a tug boat load of fruit aboard unloading tied to the Ajana as we steamed oceanward.

**Sept. 11th:** We are well out to sea now & although we are approaching the Equator it is strangely cool.

**Sept. 12th:** Still the weather is cloudy & cool almost too chilly to sleep above. We had an evening sewing out blanket mat more securely for wrestling, cock fighting etc cetera.

**Sept. 13th:** Passed the Galapagos Is today, quite close at one or 2 of the group. We had a tug of war between boys a light 11-8 team & a heavy team. We weighted in & I weighed in at 11-2 thus being puller for the lights. **[Note: Vic has lost 1st 6lb since the Codford training camp and he thought he had lost a tidy amount of weight then.]** The pull was done with pulleys which are a bit of a failure as we lost a few inches in the 1st pull & were getting it back nicely when the time whistle blew & it was no test at all. The heavy team also lost in the same fashion but neither team are satisfied.

**Sept. 14th:** We passed the Equatorial line last night or early this morning & strange to say it was too chilly to sleep on deck last night. Someone started a rumour that a wireless has been received that the earth has parted another 2 million miles from the Sun hence the coolness on the Equator.

**Sept. 15th:** We can see the Southern Cross down low on the horizon **[sic]** tonight. It would seem strange for people at home to see all the digs looking at it over the rail as though it was the entrance to the promised land. They have begun a parliament aboard called the Diggers Parliament & the members are duly elected. The names of the electorates they represent are wild & woolly no mistake. They are divided into Gov. & Op. parties & the same rules of speaking etc in a real parliament house are observed. The discussion on a bill about to be introduced is very amusing & good debates ensue too. The bill is finally carried or ejected by the audience. Proabition & Tax on batchelors **[sic]** have been brought up, the 1st beaten by a small majority & the latter easily carried.

**Sept. 16th:** Warm today but the old ship seems to roll a treat the sea must be rougher than it look a bit of a swell in fact.
Said the Kaiser the Allies are pawns
I’ll crush them like so many prawns
But he came a rude crash
In his early spring smash
And now he Brassoes his horns

There was an MP at Bologne
Who said he was go to Colon(e)
But as the way lay then the trucks
He forgot to stay out of the wrecks
So by to that MP of Bologne

Oh the Ajana’s the ship for the digger
She is “it” among troopships they say
But had he been just slightly bigger
I should not have been so sick today.

(Limericks by Vic Williams found in the diary)

Aboard the Ajana. Clockwise from top left:
Vic the sailor (on right); The tug-o-war set up
on board; Vic seated in front of some mates;
Wrestling competition; there were some rough
seas.

Photographs: Vic Williams or with Vic’s
camera, 1919.
Sept. 17th: They have a sports list out for the next mth & this evening they pull off the scratch pull. The weight was 11-8 & under & heavy weight I scaled at 11-6 but I slipped in the pull through letting go the stick - however I challenged the winner & pulled him 3 or 4 times in succession just to satisfy myself I could to it.

Sept. 18th: The draught tournament was payed off this afternoon but only one game for a decision & so chaps lost to fellows they often play on the deck & beat in a no. of games. The chap who beat me won the tournament in the next round & beat his cobber who usually beat him easily.

Sept. 19th: Blind fold boxing today which caused great sport.

Sept. 20th: Proper boxing this afternoon but very poor displays.

Sept. 21st: Sunday, service in the morning and the Y.M. had stunts in the afternoon. During last week we had the key given us for limericks & after a few hrs attempting limericks. One on an M.P. one on the Kaiser & one on Life on the Ajana. I thought of one accidentally almost & I’m blowed if it didn’t win the prize.

Sept. 22nd: the sports officer asked me to instruct in wrestling every morning so that the competitions to be run later will be more interesting - well I have a very enthusiastic class & it makes an interesting morning.

Sept. 23rd: We anchored just off Pitcairn Is this morning about 6.30 & immediately three or four boats came off to us loaded with inhabitants & their wares to trade, bananas, oranges, lemons, paw paws, souvenirs in the way of shells, panels, beads etc. This is very very interesting its history is even more interesting. This is where the mutineers of the Bounty came & settled. After putting Captain Bligh off in an open boat just off Tahiti during that expedition to take bread fruit plant from the society Is to the West Indies in 1794 or thereabout, the mutineers put back to Tahiti & took 3 or 4 wives each from the native population they sailed to Pitcairn Is. Bligh went right on to Timor Laut nearly 6000 miles in that open boat, going that far under awful conditions chiefly with the object of getting revenge - but the mutineers where never found & Pitcairn Is was thought to be uninhabitable until 22 years after when a ship off there was surprised to find the place habitated to upon search the people were found to be speaking Eng & they were the descendants of the Mutineers. Names of some of them even today are the same - such as Christian Young Warren & McCoy. The old Mutineers were taken & punished but today the descendants appear very moral people. The population is about 170 - & about 60 of these are children attending school under a teacher from Ausie or New Zealand. They do not drink & but 2 of them smoke on the whole of the Island. They have practically no use for money & just use it to procure dress material from Tahiti where they go in a cutter periodically. When a ship is sighted off the Is. which occurs every 3 or 4 months they pick baskets of fruit & get together a collection of prepared souvenirs & put out to meet the vessel, climb aboard on ropes like monkeys & sell or trade their stuff. They get flour potatoes & jam from the boats usually in our case they also got the Y.M. organ & gramaphone. All the money they take is pooled for trade purposes & it is not used at all on the island. We could see the island after dinner 40 miles out by the log.

Sept. 24th: Cock fighting this evening my rider & I had a couple of victories but we lost to big
Fleck an 18 stone 6 ft horse, still we threw him & his rider to the mat but they pulled us down also & my rider was too winded to rise quickly.

**Sept. 25th to 27th:** Nothing much doing.

**Sept. 28th:** General election for members of parliament. The old government was put out & the Op. took the reins [sic]. Dad Cousins was elected after his speech on his independant [sic] policy as an independant [sic] rep.

**Sept. 29th:** The wrestling bouts are to come off on the 1st. Another tug of war is being arranged for heavies, middle & light weight teams we are practicing today. We had great sport this afternoon pillow fighting. They put a pole across the well deck & the mat underneath & there must have been 50 bouts on it.

**Sept. 30th:** When I got up this morning my knee was swelled so I’ve had to go into hospital it may be rheumatism or I may have strained it in the tug-o-war the quack doesn’t seem to know.

**Oct. 1st:** Its very slow lying here but my cobbers are tip top they come up & play games with me by the hrs & I’ve scarcely a hr without someone in to see how things are going & if they make a drink of tea or cocoa they bring me up a bit. I think the swelling is going down a bit.

**Oct. 2nd:** They’ve had to postpone the wrestling as the sports office is relying on me for a referee & he’s afraid now that it won’t be possible to run it as by the time I’m fit again we’ll be too near Sydney to allow for semi final and finals. Tomorrow we miss out or rather we have no Friday so Sat is tomorrow & it will be the 4th.

**Oct. 4th:** Our tug-o-war team had their preliminary finals this afternoon & am doing well so far. Parliament met tonight & I believe there was nearly a riot as a result. A dance was in progress on one side of the deck & as the wind was too strong on the other The Parliament was to meet on the dancers side. Now the mob that were dancing were mostly the birds out of the clink in Loos **[Note: Loos is a village on the edge of Lens in France, site of the 1915 battle of Loos and War Cemetery. The inspection report for the Ajana reported that it was not a suitable ship to transport nurses, and no wives or fiancées are listed on the transport. The embarkation orders for the Ajana include 3 disciplinary cases plus escort but no mention of gender. A small dance with three women?]** shanhied [sic] aboard & they began to pelt the speaker with spuds Officers came & were abused so they went for revolvers & the situation seemed critical However I’m told by shoving a couple of them in the clink the rest quietened down & the Parliament went ahead on discussion of a bill to abolish State Parliament. It was carried. I’m anxious to get out of hospital as they expect to reach Sydney on the 8th & that’s only 4 more days. The quack let me walk a few steps on it today & tomorrow I may be able to get up for an hr or so.

**Oct. 5th:** I am up walking about a bit today if the swelling keeps down I will be able to go out tomorrow. There is a very heavy swell rising.

**Oct. 6th:** The roughest sea we’ve had since leaving England. The propeller is out of the water half the time. I have left the hospital & gone back to the mess deck.

**Oct. 7th:** Its so rough still that the tug-o-war team can’t put off the finals & all sport are held up.
Home again - Sydney Heads - 1919

Home again - Coming up Sydney Harbour - 1919

Home again - The troops line the decks as they pass the naval yards - 1919
Photographs: Vic Williams 1919
We have all our kits up & a full dress parade has been held.

Oct. 8th: Smoother today. The finals for the tug were pulled & I was coaching the middle as I couldn’t pull with them. They won just comfortably, also the Coy light team won. Everybody is up above the troop deck this morning & we have to clean it all out as we expect to be inside Sydney Heads tomorrow evening. Some of the chaps can’t sleep tonight. They are getting a bit excited but most of them take things as a matter of course.

Oct. 9th: All our Blankets are handed in. Land in sight at 1-30PM will be in by 4 o’clock they say. Came through the heads at 3-45PM exactly. A wk ago they ran a sweep prize money £10 for the nearest guess to actual time & it was guessed correctly or rather within 3 minutes Lt Cay. We are lying in tonight the civic Dr has inspected the ship & we get off tomorrow morning at 9AM. No blanket tonight.

Measure the life by loss instead of gain
Not by the wine drunk, but the wine poured forth
For love’s strength stands in love’s sacrifice
And whose suffers most hath most to give

[Note: From Fra Hugo Bassi’s Poem “Sermon in a Hospital”, by Harriet Eleanor Hamilton King]

The Brisbane Courier Saturday October 11 1919

SOLDIERS RETURNING.
PARTY BY THE AJANA

Returned soldiers by the Ajana are expected to arrive by special train from Sydney today at 5.40 p.m., at No 5 platform Central Station. Two passes only will be issued by the military authorities to enable the next of kin (as laid down by the soldier) to gain access to the railway platform upon arrival of the train. Next of kin are, requested to call for their platform tickets at the Staff Office for Returned Soldiers, Victoria Barracks. Only those motor cars authorised by the Defence Department through the Returned Soldiers’ Transport Corps will be allowed within the enclosure. Relatives and friends of members of the Australian Imperial Force will not be allowed in these cars.
MADELMON

For all the soldiers, on their holidays,
There is a place, just tucked in by the woods,
A house with ivy growing on the walls
A cabaret "Aux Toulourous" the goods!
The girl who serves is young and sweet as love,
She's light as any butterfly in Spring,
Her eyes have got a sparkle like her wine.
We call her Madelon—it's got a swing
The soldiers' girl! She leads us all a dance
She's only Madelon, but she's Romance!

When Madelon comes out to serve us drinks,
We know she's coming by her song
And every man he tells his little tale,
And Madelon she listens all day long.
Our Madelon is never too severe
A kiss or two is nothing much to her
She laughs us up to love and life and God
Madelon Madelon Madelon

We all have for keeps that wait at home
Who'll marry us when fighting time is done;
But they are far away—too far to tell
What happens in these days of cut-and-run.
We sigh away such days as best we can,
And pray for time to bring us nearer home,
But tales like ours won't wait till then to tell
We have to run and boast to Madelon.
We steal a kiss—she takes it all in play;
We dream she is that other—far away.

A corp'ral with a feather in his cap
Went court ing Madelon one summer's day,
And, mad with love, he swore she was superb,
And he would wed her any day she'd say.
But Madelon was not for any such—
She danced away and laughed: "My stars above
Why, how could I consent to marry you,
When I have my whole regiment to love?
I could not choose just one and leave the rest.
I am the soldiers' girl—I like that best!"

French marching song found in Vic's Ajana diary
Photograph: Vic Williams 1919
Certificate of Discharge of No. 3756 (Rank) Private

(Name) Willingham Victor Owen

(Regiment or Corps) 1st Battalion A. I. F.

born at or near the Town of Townsville, Qld.

in the State or County of Queensland

Attested at Townsville, Qld. on the 1st April 1917 for the Australian Imperial Force.

Regiment or Corps at the age of 18 years.

He is discharged in consequence of the termination of his period of enlistment.

Service towards completion of engagement Two years 268 days.

Medals and

Service Abroad Two years 71 days. Decorations

Signature of Officer Commanding Regiment or Corps.

Place Brisbane

Date 10th November 1919

Issued with Badge—Discharged

Returned Soldier No. 38742

Discharge confirmed at Brisbane, Queensland.

Signature

Date 10th November 1919

NOTICE TO EMPLOYERS.—This certificate has been issued without any interlinearisation or erasure of any kind, and with all particulars entered in handwriting, and not typewritten. All signatures have been written, and rubber stamp signatures are not genuine.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of the above-named Soldier on discharge:</th>
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<td>Age</td>
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<td>Complexion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trade as stated by him on enlistment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marks or scars, whether on face or other parts of body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intended place of Residence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specimen Signature of Soldier</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All blank spaces provided for entry of particulars and not filled in are to be ruled through.

NOTICE TO EMPLOYERS — In the event of any doubt arising as to the bona fides of the bearer, the above description and signature should be carefully compared with present appearance and handwriting.

K.B.—ANY PERSON FINDING THIS CERTIFICATE IS REQUESTED TO FORWARD IT IN AN UNSTAMPED ENVELOPE TO:

THE MILITARY COMMANDANT, DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS

D.154/18.—C.1814.—10/18.
To War and Home Again
Photograph previous page: Vic Williams wearing his RSSILA Badge at the Plainby Farm. Photographer unknown probably a family member, taken with Vic's camera.
Vic returned home. He married Ruth Chapman. Together they raised four children who went on to provide him with many grandchildren and great grandchildren. He wasn’t what you would call a really cuddly grandfather. He was much more interested in you once you turned into a person that could talk with him about interesting things. He liked achievement and interestingly for his age didn’t discriminate. I remember him telling me one weekend while I was at University to go back to Brisbane and beat those boys.’ He was a great sportsman, a champion wrestler, a tennis player and in later life a bowler. He liked to win - that is clear from the diaries. Ron Pechey comments that Vic displayed a good deal of that quality known as obstinacy in a bad cause and perseverance in a good one’. His family might less diplomatically call him single minded or even stubborn.

He was both a farmer and a businessman. In the 1920’s he began making and selling kit wirelesse to his neighbours and friends. He became so good at it that in World War II he was granted one of 200 exemption licenses in Queensland to practice as a radio technician and be kept from the Fighting Forces. Because of the war he moved his business from the farm at Plainby to the nearby town of Crows Nest. His work with radios and a collection of old radios has been documented and loaned by the family to the Carbethon Folk Museum managed by the Crows Nest Historical Society.

Vic was a staunch member of the RSL after his return home from World War I and was Treasurer and three times President of his local sub branch. During his second time as President the John French V.C. Memorial Library was built extending the RSL hall. Visits were made by the Governor General, Field Marshal Sir William (Viscount) Slim (18 April 1958, to lay the foundation stone) and the Queensland Governors, Lt. General Sir John Laverack (4 February and 1956, to open the extensions) and Sir Henry Abel Smith (20 November 1959, to unveil the memorial plaque honouring men of the shire who served in World War II).

During World War II Vic was an active member of the Volunteer Defence Corp and contributed his bushman’s skills, penchant for inventions and gadgets, as well as his military expertise.

Vic was active in the Community and involved in many community bodies. At Plainby he held terms as Secretary of the Farmers Union and was President of the Plainby School Committee from 1927-1942. Councillor for Division No.1 of the Crows Nest Shire Council for 21 years, for part of that time Deputy Chairman, and Chairman of the Finance Committee, he chaired the committee to arrange town decorations for the visit of Sir William and Lady Slim and the committee to raise funds for the town swimming pool, made possible by the arrival in the town of reticulated water.

Vic was the Chairman of the committee to form a Bowls Club, Foundation President of the club and Chairman of the mid week bowlers. Vic also held terms as President of the Crow’s Nest Tourist Association and the Crows Nest Historical Society.

In 1973 Vic and Ruth travelled to the UK and Europe and retraced some of Vic’s previous steps.

Vic was lucky to return from his War - and he didn’t waste his good fortune. Vic died on 15 April 1985 at the age of 86. Although his body just wore out his mind was still vital and interested in what was happening in the world.
From the Oral History by Ron Pechey:

Returning him to the great 1918-20 drought (17-15 inches of rain) Vic recalled the cattle got so used to the sound of axes felling edible trees in the scrub that the sound of anyone chopping firewood brought them bellowing. These two years were the worst ever for farmers in the district. They had a well in a gully and the practice was to windlass water out in a bucket for one mob then wait for the well to make-up and start on the next mob. [Note: The Australian Emergency Management hub http://www.emknowledge.gov.au claims this drought was one of the worst in recorded history and that the Darling Downs was the worst hit area of Queensland.]

With the drought over and cattle prices improving he and a returned soldier partner (Alan Arthur - “a maniac on horse breaking” according to Vic. They bought saddle horses in Toowoomba and had great fun breaking them in) and invested their war savings in a paddock in East Cooyar. Then the bottom fell out of cattle and they had to be sold after two years for less than the purchase price. His partner took the cattle to a newly opened block at Jandowae and Vic in desperation assumed responsibility for the mortgages. He tried to market the hardwood with a teamster who contracted to cart the logs with a horse team. Bob Hurley (the Cooyar butcher) had hired a two shaft horse wagon at 4 shillings a week. The whole of Cooyar turned out to see them across the bridge which made a rattling noise and scared the daylights out of the horses. They were fed corn and chaff twice a day - a practice at which the professionals laughed - but it meant they could continue in spite of the drought. The timber was sold to the Broadfoots. The corn was one pound per bag. They chaffed the hay (a mixture of lucerne and barley straw) at home. They would cart a load of poles for people at Pinelands and bring the hay, after chaffing, back to Cooyar.

Timber prices were:-
1st class 27/-6 per 100; 2nd class 21/- per 100; Firewood class 15/- per 100

During this period they lived in a slab hut and did their cooking in big iron pots. Vic recalled that about this time Gus Mitchell got himself on the Council with one objective - to sand a terrible hill between Bum Bum and Emu Creek. He had once taken three days to get a load of logs up that hill - they snigged them up one at a time and reloaded at the top!

When this failed he and his brother undertook the carting with a team of eight plow horses - with excellent results and contrary to the expectations of the professionals. The ironbark logs had to be barked and drawn singly to a loading site. With corn fed horses it was necessary to deliver a load of logs a day to make it pay. Good rain fell as the last of the logs was loaded. Later the land was sold on a falling market and the sale of timber failed to compensate for the fall in land values.

During his courting days (When the Chapman’s were at Cabarlah) Vic thought nothing of riding up to 90 miles on a Sunday. (This must have been from near Mt Binga via Cooyar to Cabarlah - 2 horses were used in relay). Unbroken horses were then 2.10.0 pounds to 3 pounds each. Chapman’s had leased the Hampton shop and went to Coolangatta. Later they took the Cabarlah store until the Hampton lease expired. Once a fortnight Vic rode over for tea at Chapman’s and left to return about 10pm. Once the horse got lost in a fog and fell down a steep bank. “I don’t think horses see any better at night than we do.”

Once he drove cattle over to Tom Kynoch’s and recalled that he lost the horses until after dark. Those horses apparently knew the way back to Kynoch’s and got the riders back.
Vic Williams in civvies, possibly on the day of his discharge in Brisbane 1919

Allan Arthur and Vic Williams washing up inside the slab hut at Cooyar early 1920's

Ruth Chapman and Vic Williams 192?

Photographs: Vic Williams collection. Photographer unknown, probably taken with Vic's camera.

Vic Williams in Voluntary Defence Corp Uniform 1941
Vic married Ruth Chapman, daughter of Tom and Lou Chapman of Hampton on 16th January 1924 and in the following years they had three daughters and one son. Hilary, Owena, Russell and Narelle.

Repeated applications to the Agricultural Bank eventually succeeded and Vic purchased a small dairy farm. Here again the timing was bad. At the time of purchase butter was 1/3 per pound and bacon 11 pence per pound but before scarcely anything could be sold butter fell to 6 pence per pound and bacon to 4 pence. A special effort to break up a new ground for potatoes fared little better. Seed cost 16 pounds a ton and the crop realised a meagre 2/10/0 per ton.

Vic then turned to the study of the new invention of wireless and eventually acquired enough skill to build and service receivers, thus supplementing the farm income (1926). Long hours of night work under a low voltage lamp caused streams of coloured lights to flood the eyes even with the lids tightly closed. An optician ordered glasses to be worn for at least a year but Vic took up the offer of a good agency at that time and forgot to wear the specs. Some years later he was called for an eye exam and hastily dusted off the glasses. The optician examined his eyes and Vic said “it would have been heartless to tell him they hadn’t been worn.”

One of the early problems was fleas. Vic remembered calling on Steve Marshall at Anduramba. He tried hard to sell him a radio but Steve said “Stay the night and I’ll tell you in the morning”. Vic never slept a wink but Steve must have been used to them - he snored his head off. Boiling water was highly regarded for dealing with fleas on the ground. Slag piggeries were notorious in dry times and Vic recalled a crop of pumpkins that were heavily infected. “Insectabane” came in fairly early - a yellow pyrethrum powder. I was once putting in a Cement tank for old Gerard” said Vic - he had a cunning idea - “ you fellas sleep in the hut - may be a few fleas but I’ll turn a couple of paddies in there today.”

Another problem was the marketing of produce - farmers always seemed to get a raw deal. Factory reps would come around to buy pigs. “Take it or leave it” they said. When the Darling Downs Bacon Factory got going the reps tried to wreck things by offering slightly more.

World War 2 and the VDC

The war brought a man-power assignment to repair radios. Terry Askin had knocked up a lean-to on Jack Maddern’s place where Vic worked on radios going home weekends. He said it was so cramped you had to go outside to change your mind. After the war he bought an Army building and re-erected it on the shop site in William Street.

During WW2 a VDC was raised in Crow’s Nest and Vic and Don Andrews were active in it. Vic joined the VDC during the war and spent a fair bit of time marching about with sticks cut from the bush. Their task was to harass the Japs if they tried to get up the Bluff Road. It was seriously thought they might land at Caloundra. Vic and Don Andrew spend a week at Pinecliffs finding a hideout. In the event of having to leave Crow’s Nest they were to seize all the tinned stuff they could in the grocery store. Don and Vic lived mainly on wonga pigeons down Cressbrook Ck during the reconnaissance. Lantana was bad down there and made the going tough but Don was in charge and they were his horses so Vic wasn’t allowed to take it as easy as he would have liked, take a spill or camp at nights.
The VDC had rifles but no LMGs or grenades. The rifles were single shot 310’s at first and later 303s turned up and a few grenades. Vic however armed himself with a .22 trombone and hundreds of rounds. Lacking any artillery Vic invented a sort of weapon which was to be fired like a bow and arrow. The bow was constructed from old car springs and the arrow consisted of a 1” pipe loaded with gelignite. He gave it a few trial shots.

Vic bought his first tractor (a Caterpillar) in 1945 for $500. It was sold in 1985 for $700.

After the war he became interested in the progress of the town and was elected president of the RSSAILA. In 1947 the building of the War Memorial in Memory of Corporal John French V.C. became Vic’s object. This project involved purchase and dismantling of buildings bought at a disposal sale at Borneo Barracks. Vic found a lot of the money out of his own pocket. The timber at one stage was considered for use in the construction of a local hospital - a cause which found other sponsors eventually (although Vic was one of the original sponsors there too).

After the War

About 1945 they sold the farm and moved into Crow’s Nest and later had two houses moved into Crow’s Nest and rebuilt in Albert Street. Les Kanowski had been doing the milking on a share basis at the end, but one day (about 1943), he let the cows into the sorghum with disastrous results as 10 died. Vic got disgusted and put the place on the market.

One night while Vic was at work on a radio someone drove his old Willys Utility away. He rang the police and they apprehended 2 soldiers near the Oddfellows hall where she had conked out. “They just didn’t understand the choke.”

Vic made an application to have the phone moved to the new premises. Nothing much happened so Vic erected a temporary line himself, having obtained consent of intervening owners. The phone was installed and worked very well but months later an official arrived and threatened legal action for interfering with government property. Six weeks later permanent installation and Vic heard no more of litigation. (1947)

Vic had a characteristic deliberate slow manner of address and my Mother used to say that if Vic rang her on the phone she could find time to check what was going on in the oven occasionally without losing the drift of Vic’s remarks. However I do recall one time when he reacted with great alacrity. I had rung about something or other and when he answered the conversation went as follows:- “This is the Head Office of the Golden Casket, could I speak with Mr Williams?” “Speaking” said Vic calmly. “Did you have a ticket in the last casket?” “Hang on a minute” he shouted and left the phone at the speed of light.

Vic seems to have displayed a good deal of that quality known as obstinacy in a bad cause and perseverance in a good one - just what one might expect of a good wrestler. He was of the opinion that tenacity was the essential thing in business and especially on a farm. He displayed a good deal of it in public life and never let up on a project once he had embarked on it. His father had been very keen on the early Farmers Union and Vic was active in an amazing number of public bodies.
Address by Vic Williams to the Crows Nest Sub Branch of the RSL (195?)

*(found in Vic’s papers)*

Thank you for your kind words & for the way the toast to our Sub Branch was honoured. We may be a small branch of the returned soldiers organisation but we have the faithful few who keep the Sub Branch alive & active & are ready to throw our full weight behind any call for action from our headquarters.

It was this Sub Branch who began the activities of what turned out to be a splendid group of home defense volunteers & who went to great length to plan action against any invaders who came into our area. We even could have been the first to use a deadly missile only in our case it had to be propelled by a silent power so that we used a cross bow & the arrow a tube of high explosives that could be used to harass the enemy attempting to come up our range roads. We became very proficient in the use of flour bombs & very successfully competed with army units in rifle range matches.

Maybe nations will hesitate to begin wars now that weapons have become so deadly but recent history has shown that war can never be far away.

We feel that England did the right thing to challenge an invasion of a peaceful & contented country & how many places would be invaded if such a thing became a free for all. New South Wales might even want Queensland back & we’d stage an all in fight over that.

In conclusion I want to appeal to all diggers in the district to renew their membership so as to give the RSL all the support they can.
Photograph previous page: Studio portrait. Vic Williams in Light Horse uniform 1917
This section contains excerpts from Vic's official Service Record. Duplicate pages and blank pages have been excluded. The complete record is available digitally from the National Archives of Australia.

National Archives of Australia:B2455, Williams V O

Reproduced with permission.

A chronological summary of this Service Record combining the information from all sources is found on pages 78-80.
To War and Home Again
CERTIFICATE OF ATTESTING OFFICER.

The foregoing questions were read to the person enlisted in my presence.

I have taken care that he understands each question, and that his answer to each question has been duly entered as replied to by him.

I have examined his naturalization papers and am of opinion that they are correct.

This to be struck out except in the case of persons who are naturalized British Subjects.

Date 17th Apr 1917

[Signature of Attesting Officer]

OATH TO BE TAKEN BY PERSON BEING ENLISTED.*

[Signature of Enrolment Officer]

Taken and subscribed at ___________ in
the State of ________________
this __ day __________ of
1917, before me——

[Signature of Attesting Officer]

* A person enlisting who objects to taking an oath may make an affirmation in accordance with the Third Schedule of the Act, and the above form must be altered accordingly. All inspection must be directed by the Attesting Officer.
Description of Victor Owen Williams on Enlistment.

| Age        | 19 years 1' months. |
| Height     | 5' 5' 5' inches. |
| Weight     | 135' 4' lbs. |
| Chest Measurement | 34' 1/2' inches. |
| Complexion | Fair. |
| Eyes       | Blue. |
| Hair       | Fair. |
| Religious Denomination | Methodist. |

CERTIFICATE OF MEDICAL EXAMINATION.

I have examined the above-named person, and find that he does not present any of the following conditions, viz.:

Scrofula; phthisis; syphilis; impaired constitution; defective intelligence; defects of vision, voice, or hearing; hernia; hemmoroids; varicose veins, beyond a limited extent; marked varicosities with unusually pendent testicles; introversus uterine disease; chronic ulcers; traces of corporal punishment; contracted or deformed chest; abnormal curvature of spine; or any other disease or physical defect calculated to unfit him for the duties of a soldier.

He can see the required distance with either eye; his heart and lungs are healthy; he has the free use of his joints and limbs; and he declares he is not subject to fits of any description.

I consider him fit for active service.

Date: April 9, 1917
Place: Trenchtown

Signature of Examining Medical Officer.

CERTIFICATE OF COMMANDING OFFICER.

I certify that this Attestation of the above-named person is correct, and that the required forms have been complied with. I accordingly approve, and appoint him to 10/14 E.

Date: 23-4-14
Place: Ripon Range
Commanding 10/14 E.
INSTRUCTIONS.

(1) Application forms received by Recruiting Officers will not be handed back again to applicants, but will be passed direct to the Medical Practitioner, who will similarly return them to the Recruiting Officer, who will then forward them by post to the Officer in Charge of the Central Recruiting Depot, to which recruits are instructed by them to report.

(2) If an Applicant who has been rejected delivers a copy of this certificate, a must be completed in duplicate at the time of Medical Examination, and the word “original” or “duplicate,” as the case may be, will appear on top of the respective forms. Each copy will be forwarded to the Officer in Charge of the Central Recruiting Depot, who will impress the word “duplicate” on the official copy and then returned to the Applicant.

(3) Copies will NOT be made of any certificate of acceptance. The word “Duplicate” will be struck out of such certificates, and they will be sent to the Officer in Charge of the Central Recruiting Depot by post.

(4) Names of accepted applicants who do not report at Central Recruiting Depot within the prescribed time will be forwarded to the local Recruiting Officer for information.

(5) When alternatives are shown on the front of the form such as — Etc. [Etc.], [Name], [Address], [Habitation], etc., strike out the words which are not applicable.

(6) Only those persons who fulfill the requirements in all other respects will be examined regarding medical fitness. These requirements may be ascertain by reference to daily newspapers and official posters.

(7) The Central Recruiting Depot to which accepted applicants from various places will be sent for final medical examination will be determined by District Commandants. Recruiting Officers at outlying places will require to issue clear instructions to such applicants informing them where and when to report, and will forward the application forms in time to ensure that they will be in the hands of the Officer in Charge of the Central Recruiting Depot when the recruits report for enlistment.
<table>
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<th>Unit in which served.</th>
<th>Promotions, Reductions, Transfers, &amp;c.</th>
<th>Period of service in each rank.</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
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<td>To:</td>
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<td>Transferred to Service</td>
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- Embarked Sydney 2/6/17 Disembarked Glasgow 2/10/17

- From 1st Sep. 10th Bn. to 1/4th Bn. 2/10/17
- From 1/4th Bn. to 1st Sep. 10th Bn. 2/10/17

- Wounded in Field Service 5/4/18

- From 1st Sep. 10th Bn. to 1st Sep. 10th Bn. 2/10/17

- From 1st Sep. 10th Bn. to 1st Sep. 10th Bn. 2/10/17

- From 1st Sep. 10th Bn. to 1st Sep. 10th Bn. 2/10/17

- From 1st Sep. 10th Bn. to 1st Sep. 10th Bn. 2/10/17

- From 1st Sep. 10th Bn. to 1st Sep. 10th Bn. 2/10/17

- From 1st Sep. 10th Bn. to 1st Sep. 10th Bn. 2/10/17

- From 1st Sep. 10th Bn. to 1st Sep. 10th Bn. 2/10/17

- From 1st Sep. 10th Bn. to 1st Sep. 10th Bn. 2/10/17

- From 1st Sep. 10th Bn. to 1st Sep. 10th Bn. 2/10/17

I have examined the above details and find them correct in every respect.
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<th>Place</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
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<td>39th Infantry, 1st Battalion</td>
<td>21/12</td>
<td>Returned to duty</td>
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<td>39th Infantry, 1st Battalion</td>
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<td>21/12</td>
<td>Returned to duty</td>
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**Army Form B, 103**

**Casualty Form—Active Service**

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**Place of Casualty: 39th Infantry, 1st Battalion**

**Date of Casualty: 21/12/1918**

**Remarks: Returned to duty**
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<th>Date of Casualty</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
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</table>
Dear Madam,

I regret to advise you that Private V.O. Williams, has been reported wounded.

His postal address will be—
No 3756, Private V.O. Williams,
47th Battalion,

Australian Imperial Force,
Abroad.

In the absence of further reports it is to be assumed that satisfactory progress is being maintained, but anything later received will be promptly transmitted, it being clearly understood that if no further advice is forwarded this department has no more information to supply.

Yours faithfully,

[Signature]

Major,
Officer in Charge, Base Records.

Mrs E. Williams,
Plainly:
Via Crows Nest, Qld.
Transferred to

AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE.

No. 3756

Rank

Name: WILLIAMS, V.O.

Unit: 11th Battalion

Casualty

Died of Wounds, 24th January 1919

Returned to Australia, 9th October 1919

DATE

PURPOSE

1-9-19

R.O.K. Advised returning to Australia, Form X.

Discharged, 1 M.D.

WAR HISTORY INDEX

[Stamps and signatures]
I wanted to understand how the stories in the diaries, oral history, postcards and inferred from the photographs related to the official War Records. What happened to the other soldiers mentioned? How did the details fit together?

The Australian War Memorial website has a wealth of information. The National Archives of Australia holds digitised copies of service records from the First World War. Vic’s Service record has been digitised - I sat with Dad while he worked out how to make that request years ago. I didn’t ever really read it properly - just skimmed it. Now its like an old friend. All the other soldiers I came across also had their records digitised.

Most of the units that he served with, or came in contact with, have their War diaries digitised. Unfortunately the ships’ records seem to only be available at the reading rooms.

This is Vic’s story. I haven’t presented all those other details in this book except where they relate to Vic. If you want to know more the original sources make fascinating reading.
Transcribed Material:

In producing transcripts, original spellings and punctuation have been retained as far as possible. Included in this book are transcriptions from the following original material:

Ron Pechey - Oral history taken with Victor Owen Williams.: This document records conversations between Ron and Vic, pieces of text written by Vic and passed along to Ron and pieces of text written by Vic. The 'history' existed as hand written notes (more than one version each) sourced from Ron and Vic found after both of these gentlemen's deaths. A typescript version was prepared by Vic's daughter Narelle Brown from notes given to her by Vic's son Russell presumably prepared by Ron. There is significant overlap between all sets of notes. This version is a compilation of all sources. I have corrected some confusions of fact that are evident in the notes between recollection and documentary evidence and added some clarifying information in parentheses, but have not attempted to edit the oral history in any way. I have separated the oral history into its sections and placed them where appropriate in this book. In this way the complete oral history is included.

Lillian Williams - Postcard sent to Victor Owen Williams from Crows Nest

Victor Owen Williams, 1917-1918 - Hand written diary from 31 July 1917 to 14 January 1918

Victor Owen Williams, 1919 - Hand Written diary from 20 August to 19 October 1919

Victor Owen Williams - Postcards and Photos sent home from England and France

Victor Owen Williams - Speech notes to the RSL post WWII

Service Records - National Archives of Australia:

NAA:B2455, Amos C P Service No 2862 (Clifton Percival)

NAA:B2455, Arthur A V Service No 3259 (Allan Victor)

NAA:B2455, Arthur L R Service No 292 (Leslie Raymond)

NAA:B2455, Cottell W H Service No 3602 (William Harold)

NAA:B2455, McLean R W Service No 3645 (Roger Warwick)

NAA:B2455, Meeske William Service No 596

NAA:B2455, Norris Donald Alexander Service No 3648

NAA:B2455, Ward William Louis Service No 2490

NAA:B2455, Williams V O Service No 3756 (Victor Owen)
Australian War Memorial:

Role of Honour

Australian Imperial Force unit war diaries, 1914-18 War, Australian War Memorial:

General Officer Commanding, AIF Depots in the UK

A Staff, Headquarters AIF Depots in the UK

Q Staff, Headquarters AIF Depots in the UK

12th Infantry Brigade
Australian Imperial Force unit war diaries, 1914-18 War, Australian War Memorial (cont.)

45th Battalion

47th Battalion

4th Training Battalion

12th Training Battalion
Australian Imperial Force unit war diaries, 1914-18 War, Australian War Memorial (cont.)

12th Training Battalion (cont.)

13th Australian Field Ambulance

1st Australian Convalescent Depot, Le Havre

Embarkation Staff Officer, AIF, Le Havre

Repatriation and Demobilisation, AIF.

Australian Imperial Force Unit Summaries, 1914-18 War, Australian War Memorial:

Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918, Charles W. Bean

Volume V - The Australian Imperial Force in France during the Main German Offensive, 1918

Volume VI - The Australian Imperial Force in France during the Allied Offensive, 1918

Unit History:


Family History Dates:

A Tribute to our Pioneering Ancestors Who Immigrated to Australia 1841 - 1883 - They Came, They Stayed & They Prospered. http://theycametheystayed.com/index.htm

Troop Ship Information - Australian and New Zealand:

Flotilla Australia http://www.flotilla-australia.com
Cover photograph: Studio portrait of Vic Williams in Light Horse uniform 1917