

## **Eric Hamilton fighting at Bapaume, France during World War 1.**

The Somme Offensive took place in Northern France between July and November 1916, followed by a miserable winter. After four and a half months at the cost of horrendous casualties on both sides, the Allies had penetrated 10km into German held territory. One of their objectives was the town of Bapaume, but the advance faltered 3 kms before it.

From March 1917 the Germans began a fighting retreat from their lines, including Bapaume, to the heavily fortified Hindenburg line (built by the slave labour of Russian and French prisoners) a bit further to the rear. At this time Eric's battery was resting behind the lines at Bèhencourt.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> March Bapaume was occupied by Australian troops.

On April 5<sup>th</sup> the 11<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Brigade, including Eric's battery, was brought up to Bapaume to take part in pressing the Germans as they retreated to the Hindenburg line. For the first time, they experimented with hitching the guns to motor lorries to pull them along the Albert-Bapaume road. It was a success.

On April 7<sup>th</sup> the brigade of guns moved forward into position to support the advance beyond Bapaume.

On April 8<sup>th</sup> while the batteries were registering on their new zones, they came under enemy shellfire. Eric, along with 10 other men and an officer, was wounded. He was hit in the thigh, hip and back, and the wound was described as severe.

In a way he was lucky. Five days later in the fighting round Lagnicourt one of the batteries had to go out into the open to fire on German troops advancing through the line. The battery was spotted and shelled – fourteen men were killed, the major in command, the lieutenant and twelve gunners. Six other men were wounded.