

WILLIAM MARTIN WILKIN, 426

William Wilkin was born in Witchford, Isle of Eley, England On 17 July 1885. The son of Martin and Sarah Jane, nee Langford. He had two older sisters, Emily and Matilda and an older brother Thomas Edward.

William, his sister Matilda, her husband and their son all migrated to Australia in 1911, aboard the Geelong which sailed from London on 28/12 1911.

He enlisted in the AN&MEF on 11th August 1914 and on his Attestation papers he listed himself as a farmer and that he had previously served in the Bedfordshire Imperial Yeomanry and served for 4 years. (The B I Y had been re-raised in 1901 for the Second Boer War.). He is listed as being 6 foot in height, weighing 180lbs, of dark complexion, hazel eyes and dark hair. He listed his mother, Jane Wilkin of Stirtloe Farm, Hants, England, as his next of kin.

William Wilkin was attached to C Coy and served from 11/8/1914 to 4/3/1915 a total of 206 days.

On 25 June 1915 he enlisted in the AIF was assigned a new service number, 1115, and attached to 12 company, 3rd ANZAC Battalion, Imperial Camel Corp. He was later transferred to the 15th Light Horse on the disbandment of the Camel Corps.

He served in the Middle East for the duration of the war, rising through the ranks. On 25 February 1918 he was appointed Company Sergeant Major (CSM) (Warrant Officer Class 2) and on 30th June of the same year promoted to Staff Sergeant Major (SSM). SSM was a fairly unusual rank used where a NCO was promoted to a Warrant Officer Class 1, but was not a Regimental Sergeant Major, as was usual for a person with this rank.

In 1918 he was awarded a Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM). The recommendation for the DCM reads:

"No. 1115 Sergeant (acting Company Sergeant-Major) William Martin Wilkin, 3rd (Anzac Battalion, Imperial Camel Brigade.

This non-commissioned officer, since the formation of this unit has never failed both in the Field and in Camp to show great devotion to duty and quiet bravery on all occasions. His example at the actions of MAGHARA, MAGDABA, RAFA, GAZA and KHUWEILFEH, (November 6th and 7th) of bravery and devotion to duty was of the highest order. His loyalty in action and under fire in backing up his company Commander has always been very valuable."

He returned to Australia aboard the Port Sydney and was discharged on 13 June 1919.

On 24 September 1920 he re-enlisted in the AN&MEF, service number 1449, and sailed for Rabaul aboard the MELUSIA, departing Sydney on 6 October 1920. He was given the rank of Honorary Corporal and appointed Policemaster in Rabaul.

On 9 May 1921, the Military transferred control to the Civil Administration where upon William was discharged from the Army and became a Patrol Office within the Civil Administration.

His time with the Civil Administration was colourful. In 1924, whilst at Aitape in the Sepik he was charged with having been guilty of disgraceful and improper conduct, in that he did,

“(1) during the month of September 1923, order certain native women to be brought to him for immoral purposes, and,

(2) between the 9th May 1921 and the 31st July 1923, traffic in Birds of Paradise, well knowing same to be contrary to the Birds and Animal Protection Ordinance 1922-23, and,

(3) inflict corporal punishment on the native police boys Nari and Tigon, well knowing same to be contrary to Section 72 of the Native Labour Ordinance 1922-23.”

He was found guilty of charges (2) and (3) and dismissed from the Public Service.

After the war, William Wilkin had purchased Lungatan Plantation, New Hanover, from the Custodian of Expropriated Properties. Property belonging to the German Government was expropriated under the terms of the Mandate granted by the League of Nations to Australia in respect of the administration of New Guinea. Such properties were offered for sale under very reasonable terms and William Wilkin took advantage of this to purchase Lungatan.

On 1 Jan 1928, the Commonwealth Government listed all the properties in New Guinea sold by The Custodian of Expropriated Properties. Lungatan was sold to William Wilkin for 5,000 pounds and was listed as having 52 hectares unplanted, 150 hectares planted with some 18,00 Palms with an official valuation of 1,600 pounds. Australian soldiers who purchased expropriated properties were able to pay 15% deposit with the remainder at 5% pa over 80 months.

After his dismissal from the Public Service, William set up camp on Lungatan to develop the property. He was never far away from controversy. In 1924 he applied for a licence to recruit labour for a mining operation on his plantation. In order “...not to debar Wikin from an opportunity of earning a livelihood the Commissioner of Native Affairs authorised the issue of a recruiting licence to him, but intended it should be operative only for a period of six weeks ending on 30th June 1924”.

However, the licence was mistakenly issued to cover the period up to 30th June 1925. The issue was raised in the Federal Parliament when Mr Forde, M.P, asked the Prime Minister

“(1) Is it a fact that ex-Patrol Officers W. M. Wilkin and Walter John Hook, who were dismissed from the New Guinea Public Service, have been granted recruiting licences.

(2) Why were these men dismissed from the service

(3) Is it usual practice to grant recruiting licences to such ex-officers who have been dismissed for serious offences.”

As an aside, his co-accused, Walter John Hook also served in the AN&MEF, arriving in New Guinea in November 1919 and remaining until the AN&MEF was disbanded. Like William he became a Patrol Officer and was dismissed for trafficking Birds of Paradise. He set up a trading post in Aitape and in 1942 was recruited into ANGAU (P507). In 1943 he was murdered by a group of locals in the Musemgilem Urat area, Aitape. He was originally buried in Wewak but exhumed after the war and reburied at Lae.

It was not long after this that William Wilkin was again in trouble with the law.

On 27th August 1929, William Wilkin was found guilty in the Rabaul Central Court of having murdered “...a native, one MALAY, who died at the accused’s plantation in the District of New Ireland on 23rd June 1929.” William Wilkin’s Counsel at the trial in mitigation of punishment “...informed the Court of the prisoner’s meritorious war service.” Because of this a lenient sentence of 2 years imprisonment with hard labour was imposed.

He served the majority of this sentence in Goulburn Gaol and returned to Rabaul at the completion of the sentence aboard the MONTORO, departing Sydney 22 November 1930.

Earlier in 1930, William Wilkins applied to the Premier of New South Wales for special remission of his sentence on the grounds that his property, Lungatan Plantation was,

- subject to waste owing to lack of personal supervision and work.
- Indentured labour contracts were maturing without means of replenishment, and
- He was innocent of the charges on which he was convicted.

The matter was referred to the Administrator of the Territory of New Guinea. He sought advice from the Stipendiary Magistrate in Rabaul, Mr S J Shillington, who, acting as a Judge, originally tried and sentenced William Wilkin. Shillington advised that that "...there was abundant proof of the prisoner's guilt and that the crime of which he was convicted was committed callously and brutally. He went on to advise that the "...prisoner was liable to imprisonment with hard labour for life, with or without solitary confinement, and with or without whipping"

The request for remission was declined.

In December 1930, by notice in the New Guinea Gazette, the Administrator at the time, Evan Wisdom, ordered that William Martin Wilkin "be prohibited from taking charge of or employing native labourers." This prohibition was cancelled in early 1931.

William Wilkin died on 1 July 1942 aboard the Montevideo Maru. The *Montevideo Maru*, a freighter requisitioned by the Japanese navy, to carry New Guinea Prisoners of War, both military and civilian, sailed for Hainan, off the southern coast of China. On 1 July this vessel, which was not marked as a POW carrier, was torpedoed and sunk by the submarine USS Sturgeon close to Luzon, resulting in the deaths of all prisoners and internees on board.

William Wilkin died intestate and by notice in the Territory of Papua and New Guinea Gazette, dated 4 October 1951, the Curator of Intestate Properties was ordered to administer his estate. In the Gazette of 25/10/1951 tenders were called for the sale of Lungatan Plantation as part of Williams Wilkin's estate.