



Club member who made the supreme sacrifice 1914-1919

# The Story Behind the Name



**Driver Ernest Sydney PILCHER**

**28 December 1889 - 25 June 1918**



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### **THE PILCHERS OF PENTLAND**

- Richard and Lydia Pilcher and their two baby sons embarked from England on the sailing ship *Stirlingshire* in 1882, via the Cape of Good Hope to the port of Townsville where Richard soon owned a small business as a general blacksmith and built and invented an efficient scarifier which was exhibited in the Townsville annual show. Richard was enterprising and industrious. After establishing a successful farming business in the Ayr District, the family moved to the Deep Lead Goldfield near Cape River.
- Richard and Lydia took up land six miles from Pentland and the farm they established became the foundation of the several properties which were later worked by their sons. Pentland is a town in north-western Queensland between Charters Towers and Hughenden, 240 kilometres (150 miles) from the North Queensland city of Townsville. The Cape River rises in the area.
- Mr and Mrs Pilcher stayed on their selection with their family till they died, Richard in 1939 and Lydia the following year. They were well known in their local community, notably hospitable, musical, involved in church and school activities. The family included seven sons and three daughters.
- The names of their four sons who served in the Great War appear on the honour boards in the Soldiers Memorial Hall at Pentland and Saint Andrew's Uniting Church in Brisbane. The two older brothers, Algernon and Ernest came to Brisbane as ambulance officers and were members of Saint Andrew's Presbyterian Church. They enlisted to serve in the Australian Imperial Force in 1914. Their two younger brothers, Leon and Percy enlisted in Charters Towers in January 1916 and began their training at Enoggera before embarkation later that year.

### **PRE-ENLISTMENT:**

- Ernest Pilcher was born on 28 December 1889 in Ayr, Queensland, to parents, Richard and Lydia PILCHER, Pentland, Townsville, North Queensland
- His schooling was at Deep Lead State School
- His home town was in Pentland, Charters Towers, Queensland
- His occupation was that of a motor driver as a single man
- He had also worked in Brisbane at the Ambulance Brigade in Ann Street.
- At the time of enlistment he lived in Rockhampton, Queensland where he was working as an ambulance bearer
- His next of kin was listed as his father, R Pilcher, Capeville, Pentland





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### **SERVICE:**

- Service Number: 55
- Ernest Pilcher enlisted on 8 September 1914, at Enoggera, Qld, just three weeks after the outbreak of war.
- He enlisted as a Private joined the Army Medical Corps with the 3rd Field Ambulance, A Squadron, having had previous knowledge of first aid and nursing.
- On enlistment he was aged 24 years and 9 months
- He embarked with 1st Division Motor Transport Company 3rd Field Ambulance, as a Driver, from Brisbane on board Transport A22 Rangatira on 25 September 1914.
- On 25 Apr 1915 he was in the landing at Gallipoli and was wounded through the left shoulder. He was sent to hospital in Egypt for about five weeks and returned to Gallipoli where he remained until the evacuation.
- While in Gallipoli he became
- Ernie went to France with the rest of the Australians where he drove an ambulance motor.
- He was gifted with musical ability and he was transferred into an Australian Divisional Supply Column (motor transport) where he was able to further his talent for music by joining both its band and its orchestra.
- On 25 Jun 1918 he was severely wounded near Hazebrouk, Northern France, while on active duty as a Driver, with the 1st Motor Transport Company, Merris (France).
- Driver Ernest Sydney Pilcher died of wounds on 25 June 1918 in France aged 28 year
- War service: Egypt, Gallipoli, Western Front



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### LETTERS:

Ernest's parents in Pentland received a letter from Major G.R. Shirlaw saying:

"I feel that I must write to you on behalf of the members of this unit to express our deep sympathy with you in the death of your son, Driver E. S. Pilcher. No doubt you would like to know some of the circumstances surrounding his last few hours. The night before his death he was one of the drivers on a lorry detailed on special duty in the forward area.

"While parked up waiting for orders the enemy commenced shelling the place where they parked, forcing them to move their lorry to another and seemingly safer spot, but again the enemy located them and fired another salvo round their lorry, this time wounding your son and three other drivers who were with him.

"Your son was placed on an ambulance after having first aid treatment and taken to the advanced dressing station in the vicinity. Everything possible was done for him but I am sorry to say that he died before reaching the next dressing station. His death took place about 3 am on the 25th of June. He was badly wounded in the head and chest. He was buried that morning close to the dressing station and I am having a cross made with his name and particulars inscribed on it, and which will be placed over his grave to mark the spot where he lies.

"I cannot speak too highly of his work as a soldier. He was always ready and willing to carry out any duty which he might be called on to do and in every way he had done his duty as a son of Australia. I am afraid that anything I can say will be little compensation for your great loss, but it may be some comfort for you to know that the unit feels that it had lost one of its best members. I have forwarded all his personal belongings to the base for disposal."





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### LETTERS:

As the following weeks and months went by, Ernest's parents and his brother "legatee", all in Pentland, received letters and parcels.

One sealed package contained "3 pieces music, 12 photos, 2 rice bowls, Holy Bible, 3 note books, bread fork (badly damaged), Testament, match box, handkerchief."

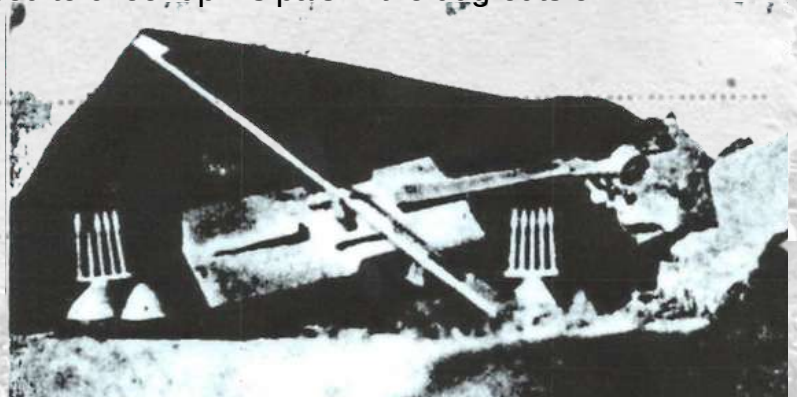
A letter dated 12 June 1920 stated:

"Your son, the late No 55 Driver E. S. Pilcher, 1st Mechanical Transport Company his remains have been exhumed and re-interred in the Le Grand Hasard Military Cemetery, one mile south south west of Hazebrouck. The work is carried out with every measure of care and reverence in the presence of a Chaplain."

### Recognition of Service

Reports of Ernest Sydney Pilcher's war service were published in several Queensland newspapers. The Queenslander of 27 July 1918 said,

"Pte E. S. Pilcher was well liked and respected wherever he went, and had numerous friends in both Brisbane and Rockhampton. He was known to many in both civil and military life as the maker of the 'Gallipoli violin' out of a chocolate box, with which he used to cheer up his pals in the dug-outs on Gallipoli."





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### **HONOURING THEIR SERVICE:**

- Ernest Pilcher's name is on the Pentland and District 1914-1918 Honour Board in his home town in North Queensland. This Honour Board is in the Pentland Soldiers Memorial Hall erected in 1926 in memory of those soldiers who paid the supreme sacrifice during World War 1.
- The Soldiers Memorial Hall was officially opened on 24 April 1926 by Mrs Pilcher who received an inscribed cup from the Pentland residents as a memento of the occasion. Mrs Pilcher was the mother of four sons who had gone to the war with one son paying the supreme sacrifice while recovering from his war wounds in France.

**The strength of a family, like the strength of an army, is in its loyalty to each other.**

(Mario Puzo)

### **CEMETERY &/OR MEMORIAL:**

- Cemetery: Le Grand Hasard Military Cemetery, (Plot 4, Row C, Grave No. 4), Morbecque, Nord Pas de Calais, France
- Memorials: Australian War Memorial Roll of Honour, Panel number, 181
- Brisbane St. Andrew's Uniting Church Honour Roll,
- Pentland & District Honour Roll

### **MILITARY HONOURS & AWARDS:**

- 1914/15 Star
- British War Medal
- Victory Medal

for his War service in Gallipoli, Egypt and on the Western Front



### **RIFLE SHOOTING:**

- Ernest Sydney PILCHER was a member of the Millchester Rifle Club.

**ARMISTICE CENTENARY WAR MEMORIAL  
Commemoration Service**



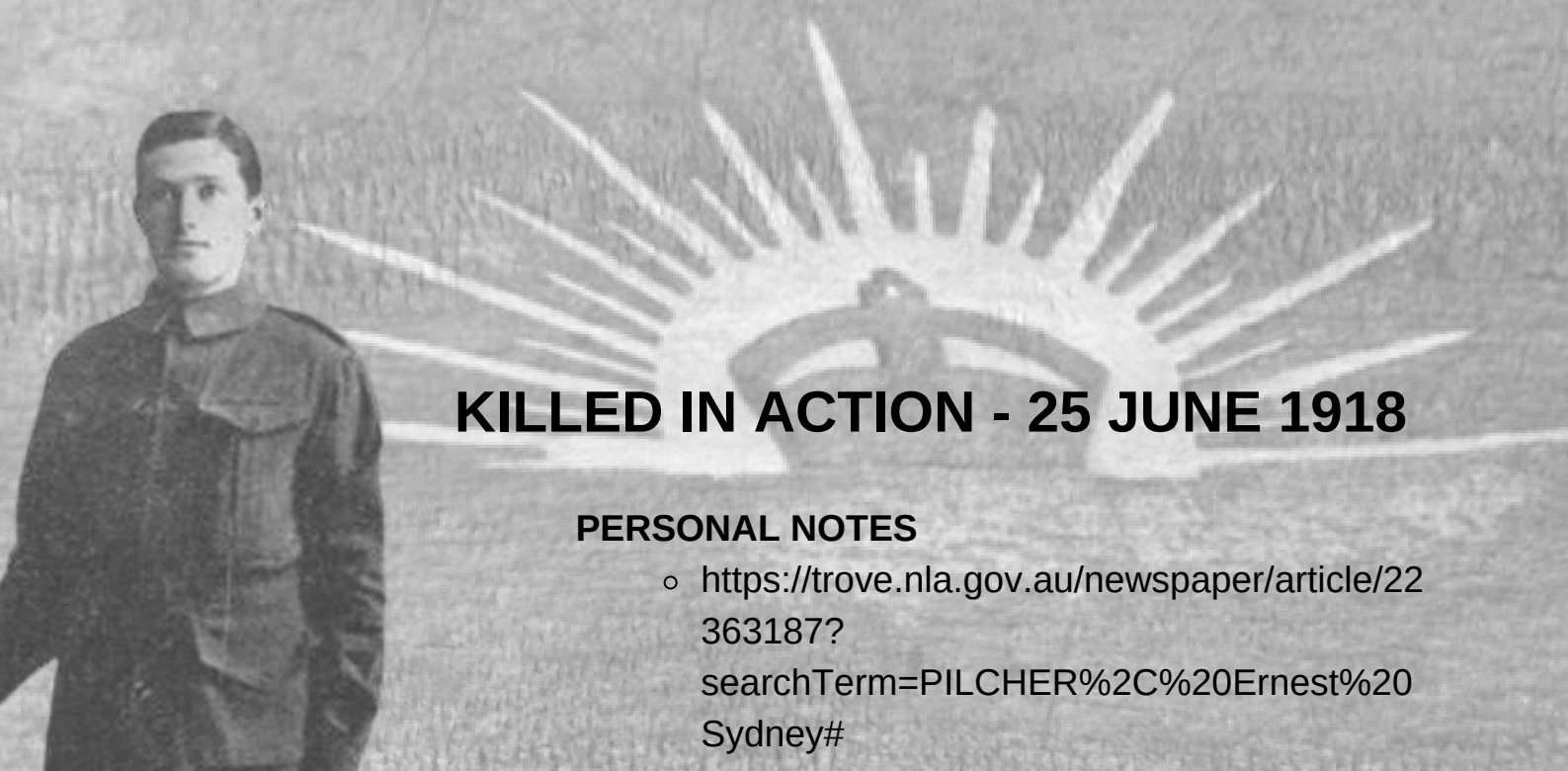
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## KILLED IN ACTION - 25 JUNE 1918

### PERSONAL NOTES

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He entertained diggers playing the 'Gallipoli violin' he made from a chocolate box



Photograph taken in Gallipoli, Turkey

Group portrait of Australian soldiers and officers. Identified is 55 Driver Ernest Sydney Pilcher, 3rd Field Ambulance Brigade, of Pentland, Qld, holding a violin made from a chocolate box (Back Standing). He became well-known for playing this 'Gallipoli Violin' to cheer up the troops in the trenches.