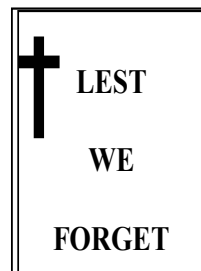


A SOLDIER'S STORY



Service No.: 5444
Name: Irwin Ernest PHILLIS
Nickname: Ernie



Medals and Decorations

British War Medal
Victory Medal

Rank: Private
Service: Army
Enlisted: 11 Mar 1916
KIA: 20 Sep 1917

Irwin (Ernie) was born on 21 Apr 1885 at Snow Town (SA) to George James Phillis and Florence Elizabeth Phillis (nee Hiscock). There were 9 children in the family, 5 boys and 4 girls, of which he was the eldest. His father was a farmer at “*Updown*” farm at Snow Town, before moving to Warradale, Adelaide.

Ernie came to the Butler area in 1906 with his 2 younger brothers ; they came by boat from Yorke Peninsula with their horses and his piano – he was an excellent pianist . On their first night in the bush their horses disappeared . The boys finally tracked the horses back to the beach where they (the horses) were standing in line gazing out across the gulf. The 3 boys worked and lived on Section 18 in the Hundred of Butler (3000 acres – 1200Ha) until his enlistment.

He enlisted on 11 Mar 1916 at Tumby Bay (spelt Tumley Bay on the enlistment form). He went to Adelaide for processing and was posted to 2nd Depot Battalion (Bn) at Mitcham for training. At the completion of 12 weeks training he was allocated to 14th Reinforcements/ 27th Bn. His unit was the second of the predominantly SA manned Bn to be raised and was known as “Unley’s Own”. Raised in Mar 1915 it saw action in Gallipoli before being withdrawn back to Egypt and then sent to France, first entering the front line at the Somme in Apr 1916 as part of the first Australian troops in this area. On 4 Aug 1916, the 27th Bn was on the left flank of the 2nd Division attack aimed at capturing the heights above Pozieres. The 27th Bn's axis of advance took it through the Windmill, or rather the ruins of the 17th Century windmill , which had the dominant view of the surrounding area. They captured it, and held it in the face of unrelenting artillery fire and counter attacks.

The 2nd Division was relieved in place by the 4th Division, two nights later. By

coincidence, the 27th Bn was relieved by the 48th, also drawn mainly from SA. When the 48th took over they reported that there was no one left alive in the forward positions. The 48th suffered similarly high casualties and indeed the area around the windmill is said to contain more South Australian DNA than any other piece of ground anywhere in the world save for metropolitan cemeteries in South Australia.

Ernie embarked at Adelaide on 18 Aug 1916 aboard HMAT "*Ballarat*" bound for Plymouth (UK), arriving on 30 Sep 1916. He then undertook a further 2 months training at 7th Training Bn at Folkstone (UK), before travelling to Etaples (France) where he was immediately placed into an isolation "camp" with mumps.

On 21 Jan 1917 he was eventually taken on strength by his unit (27th Bn); he must have been an effective soldier because he was then promoted to Lance Corporal within 3 weeks of joining. His Bn at this time was involved in minor, but costly, attacks during the German withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line.

On 22 Jun 1917, Ernie was transferred to 7th Light Trench Mortar (LTM) Battery and reverted to his substantive rank of Private. These Mortar batteries were armed with 8 x 3inch Stokes Mortars and were manned by Infantry soldiers, not Artillery men. They suffered very high casualty rates because they became the prime targets for retaliation by the enemy counter bombardment units; the casualty rates were so high that married men were not permitted to serve in many of the batteries. The 7th LTM Battery was part of the 2nd Division and was often in support of 27th Bn, his old unit.

The 27th Bn did not carry out a major attack again until 20 Sep 1917. On this occasion it was part of the 2nd Division's first wave at the battle of Menin Road, which was part of the Third Battle of Ypres. The Bn was victorious, but unfortunately this was not seen by Ernie who was killed in action (KIA) on the first day of the battle.

He is buried at Hooze Crater Military Cemetery, Zillebeke, Belgium



British War Medal Victory Medal



Hooze Crater Cemetery, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium