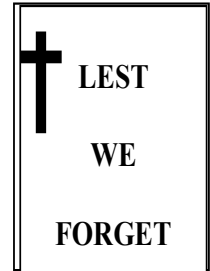


A SOLDIER'S STORY



Service No.: 5431
Name: Lawrence Selvester POLOMKA



Medals and Decorations

British War Medal
Victory Medal

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

Lawrence was born at Seven Hills (near Clare, SA) on 9 Aug 1889 to John Polomka and Barbara Polomka (nee Vogt). There were 14 children in the family, 5 boys and 9 girls, of which he was the sixth eldest. His father was a farmer.

His schooling was undertaken at Seven Hills, on completion of which, at Grade 7, he worked on the family farm before moving to Tumby Bay and undertaking work on farms in the area until his enlistment in the Army in 1916; at the time he gave his employment as farmer.

On enlistment he was posted to 2nd Depot Battalion (Bn) at Mitcham for a period of 12 weeks to complete basic training. He was then transferred to 14th Reinforcements/27th Bn and undertook further training before embarking at Adelaide on 12 Aug 1916 aboard HMAT “Ballarat” bound for Plymouth (UK), arriving on 30 Sep 1916. After a further 2 months of training he embarked for Etaples (France) on 17 Nov 1916: immediately on arrival in France he was placed in an isolation ward of 24th General Hospital with mumps, a disease that seems to have been prevalent amongst the troops at the time. He was finally taken on strength by his unit on 26 Dec 1916 after his release from hospital.

The 27th Bn was a South Australian Bn which had been raised in 1915 and had seen action at Gallipoli and in the Middle East before entering the front line trenches on the Western Front in Apr 1916. The Bn took part in its first major battle at Pozieres between 28 Jul and 5 Aug 1916. It was after this action that Lawrence joined his unit and took part in two attacks to the east of Flers in the Somme Valley, both of which floundered in the mud and were unsuccessful. The Bn then participated in a number of attacks during the German withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line in early 1917; although these attacks are described as minor in nature, casualties were relatively high.

The 27th Bn did not carry out a major attack again until Sep 1917. On this occasion, it was part of the 2nd Division's first assault wave at the battle of Menin Road Ridge, which was part of the Third Battle of Ypres. Victory in this action was followed up with the capture of Broodseinde Ridge on 4 Oct, in which the 27th Bn also played a major role, but like so many of his mates, Lawrence did not get to see this, as during the initial attack he was killed in action (KIA) in Belgium at Westhoek Ridge near Polygon Wood on the 20 Sep 1917, the first day of the action. He was aged 26 years.

He is commemorated at Ypres on the Menin Gate Memorial, as his resting place is unknown. His name is also included on the Tumby Bay Memorial.

His 20 year old brother also served in 27th Bn and was wounded in action.



Wheat Carting in Tumby Bay, circa 1915



Menin Gate Memorial, Ypres, Belgium