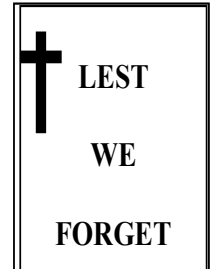


A SOLDIER'S STORY



Service No.: 2009
Name: Walter Henry WILLIAMS
Nickname: Wal



Medals and Decorations

Military Medal
British War Medal
Victory Medal

Rank: Private
Service: Army
Enlisted: 11 Mar 1916
KIA: 12 Oct 1917

Walter was born at Baroota (near Port Germein, SA) on 15 Jun 1895 to John Williams and Laura Amelia Williams (nee Glasson). He was one of 6 children, 5 boys and a girl. His father was a farmer at Lipson

He went to school at Lipson, as did his brothers, leaving at the age of 14 to work on his father's farm at Lipson and a second farm that had been purchased at Butler. He remained working on the farms until he enlisted.

In Mar 1916 he enlisted in the Army and was sent to 2nd Depot Battalion for training, before being posted to the 48th Battalion (Bn). On 12 Jul 1916 he embarked at Outer Harbour bound for Plymouth (UK), disembarking on 9 Sep 1916: he was then sent to the 12th Training Bn for further training before joining his unit at Etaples (France) on 9 Dec 1916.

The Bn, as part of 4th Australian Division, was involved in fierce fighting for the early part of 1917, culminating at the first battle of Bullecourt on 11 Apr 1917, at which Wal was awarded the Military Medal for conspicuous gallantry in the field. In part the citation reads "At Bullecourt on 10th and 11th April 1917 for devotion to duty during operations. He was one of a scout patrol that went forward on the night of 10th inst. And penetrated the wire, reconnoitred trenches and returned with valuable information. He assisted to guide the attackers on the morning of 11th instant. He showed great coolness and courage under very heavy enemy artillery and machine gun fire". Unfortunately the attack had been hastily planned and mounted and was a disaster. The tanks, which were supposed to support the attacking Australian Infantry either broke down or became bogged and were quickly destroyed, nevertheless, the infantry managed to break into the German lines.

Due to uncertainty as to how far they had advanced, supporting artillery fire was withheld and eventually the Australians were hemmed in and forced to retreat. The two Australian brigades that carried out the attack (4th & 12th) suffered over 3300 casualties; 1170 Australians were taken prisoner – the largest number captured in a single engagement during the war!

Wal is only the second soldier from the area known to have been awarded the Military Medal (MM), one of the highest bravery awards available to Other Ranks. A letter forwarded to his father from the Army reads in part “His Majesty the King has been graciously pleased to award the Military Medal for bravery in the field to Private Williams”.

Unfortunately his bravery also resulted in his death only a few months later on 20 Oct 1917, when he was killed in action (KIA) at the first battle of Paesschendaele as a part of the continuing third battle of Ypres on the Western Front. This battle involved an unsuccessful attempt to seize Paesschendaele Ridge from the defending Germans on 12 Oct 1917. The vicious fighting took place in the most horrendous waterlogged conditions, “which helped render the name Paesschendaele a synonym for slaughter”. The Australian’s attempts to struggle forward to their objective with little artillery support represented the last major Australian participation in the third battle of Ypres.

Again the difficulties in communication are starkly portrayed in the various correspondences between Wal’s father and the Army in regard to information regarding the death of his son and the whereabouts of his effects. These correspondences are spread over several months!

Wal’s name is inscribed on the Menin Gate and the Tumby Bay Memorial



Military Medal British War Medal Victory Medal

At SUILLECOURT on 10th and 11th April 1917 for consistent good work and devotion to duty during the operations. He was one of a scout patrol that went forward on the night of 10th inst. and penetrated the wire, reconnoitred trenches and returned with valuable information. He assisted to guide the attackers on the morning of the 11th inst. He showed great coolness and courage under very heavy enemy artillery and machine gun fire.

J. Robertson
Brigadier-General.
Commanding 18th. Aust. Inf. Brigade.

Major-General.
Commanding 4th. Aust. Division.

