

GILLIES

Norman John MM

Service No: 4429



PTE. NORMAN GILLIES,
(Wounded He recently received
the Military Medal.)

Courtesy National Archives of Australia.

BASIC INFORMATION

Name: Norman John Gillies

Service number: 4429

Date of enlistment: 14/2/1916

Age at Enlistment: 18 years

Civil Occupation: Farm Hand

Medals, Honours, Awards: British War Medal and the Victory Medal,
Military Medal

Height: 5 feet 6 inches

Weight: 121 pounds

Chest measurement: 36 inches

Complexion: Fair

Eye Colour: Blue

Hair Colour: Light brown

Father: James Andrew Gillies

Mother: 1. Elizabeth Ann Whitbread, 2. May Taylor

Siblings: Grace Catherine (b.1894), Lena Maud (b.1896), Eliza Rebecca Irene (1906-1908), Marjery Cecilia (b.1911), Doris (b.1913) and her twin Lennard James (b.1913-1913).

Married: Ethel Louise Semmons nee Jenkins

Life Story

Norman John Gillies was born in Port Pirie, South Australia, in 1898. He was the son of James Andrew Gillies and Elizabeth/Eliza Ann Whitbread. Elizabeth died of typhoid at Port Pirie in 1899. She left behind three living children, and a family member recalls that Eliza was pregnant with twins at the time of her death.

At some point after the death of his first wife, James Andrew moved his family to York in Western Australia and, in 1905, he married May Taylor, the daughter of John Taylor of "Yangedine." The couple went on to have four more children but divorced in 1919. May remarried, in 1920, to George Hind Webster.

Norman enlisted on the 14th February 1916. He was underage and needed a parent's permission, but his enlistment application states "father's whereabouts unknown, mother dead, no guardian."

Norman joined the 28th Battalion, 11th Reinforcements, and embarked from Fremantle aboard HMAT A9 *Shropshire* on the 31st March 1916, bound for Egypt. He left Alexandria for Plymouth, England, on the 28th May and proceeded to join his unit in France on the 12th July.

On the 16th August, Norman was Taken on Strength with the 2nd Australian Pioneer Battalion in the Field, and participated in the Battle of Pozieres. His actions during the Battle, led to him being awarded the Military Medal for "valuable services, showing conspicuous coolness and devotion to duty." The citation read:

On 26th August, 1916, Private Gillies was left on the LA BOISSELLE – CONTALMAISON ROAD at head of SAUSAGE VALLEY in charge of four horses, and while there the enemy suddenly opened a very heavy artillery barrage on the road where he was waiting. The shells fell all around, three of the horses were slightly wounded (one in two places) and some fragments struck Gillies' steel helmet. There were recesses in the Northern bank of the road in which Gillies' himself might have crouched for shelter, but he stuck to the frightened horses until the shelling shifted down the valley and he was able to move westward.

On the 15th November 1916, while still active in the Somme Valley, Norman was Wounded in Action and admitted, two days' later, to the 12th General Hospital in Rouen with a gunshot wound to the abdomen. The notations on his service record also listed a gunshot wound to the left forearm on the 21st November but, on the 22nd, the record stated he had a gunshot wound to the right foot.

Norman was transferred to England and admitted to the 2nd Southern General Hospital. His daughter recollects being told that "they wanted to cut his foot off, but he wouldn't let them." He was transferred to England and doctors tried to save what they could. Norman subsequently had one foot quite smaller than the other, and he used to refer to it as his "Little Willy."

By October 1917, Norman was convalescent. He returned to Australia on the 20th January 1918.

Norman married Ethel Louise Semmens in Perth, in 1922. The couple went on to have three children: Raymond Norman (who served in the R.A.A.F. during World War Two), Elaine Maud and Roma Ann.

Norman died in 1972. Ethel followed in 1973.

Acknowledgements

The following people and organisations helped with the research to compile this booklet.

Heather Harvey

Roma Isard nee Gillies

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