

## Ernest Gillies

Born in Aston in 1885 to John and Elizabeth Gillies, Ernest attended Lozells County Primary School, Lozells Street. Education was not free and John's job as a silver engraver must have paid sufficiently well for him to afford the fees. Ernest had six sisters and an older brother and, when his mother died in 1902, the youngest of these, Maud, was only 8 years old. Ernest's father didn't remarry, and in 1911 his father, brother, and sister Maud were living with Ernest's married eldest sister Florence in Village Road, but not Ernest and he doesn't appear in the census return at all.

We do know however that Ernest emigrated to Australia in 1912. Unemployment was quite high in the UK and Australia became a place to emigrate for people looking for a better life. Ernest was a jeweller, had a school education, and was already in work in 1901 at the age of 17 years, a maker of gold rings; with the jewellery industry in Birmingham it is hard to imagine he couldn't find work. Perhaps he just wanted a different life. Ernest did not have assisted passage, although fares were very modest in any case, but it did mean he was not guaranteed work on his arrival. He left Liverpool aboard SS Dorset on 17 February 1912 bound for Sydney, arriving on 15 April.

Ernest enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force on 15 April 1915, exactly three years to the day since his arrival in Australia, answering the call as did many residents and immigrants. Living in Petersham (a suburb of Sydney), Ernest was a jeweller, so it appears he had found work and carried on his trade.

He sailed from Sydney aboard SS Karoola on 16 June 1915, directly to the Dardanelles (also known as the Straits of Gallipoli), a strategically important waterway between Europe and Asia. A multi-national force had been attempting to open up the Gallipoli Straits since April, and this involved intense land-based fighting with fierce resistance on the Gallipoli Peninsula. It is possible that Ernest's unit did some training in Egypt on the way to Gallipoli, but Ernest joined up with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Australian Infantry on 6 August, and on 7 August he was committed to the fight in what was later to be known as the Battle of Lone Pine. He was mortally wounded on that day, receiving bomb wounds to his face, arms and both legs. Initially seen at the 1<sup>st</sup> Anzac Casualty Clearing Station, he was transferred onto Hospital Ship Sicilia on the 8<sup>th</sup>. He died from his wounds on 11 August and was buried at sea.

It had been a little under 4 months since Ernest had enlisted. He had endured a long sea voyage, presumably had had little training, and was thrown into a pitched battle against formidable entrenched Turkish soldiers. In the three days of fighting at the defence of Lone Pine, seven Victoria Cross medals were awarded to AIF soldiers. The Gallipoli campaign was unsuccessful, and allied forces withdrew in December 1915 with the loss of a little under 71,000 allied and 60,000 Turkish soldiers. What an utter waste of human life.

It is perhaps fitting that Ernest is remembered in three different places: in England where he was born, on the Memorial inside St Peter and St Paul's church, Aston, Birmingham; in Turkey where he died, on Lone Pine Memorial; and in Australia, where he had moved for a better life, on the Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

Written by researcher Ann Hartley, with amendments and additions by Jenni Gardner, Ernest's great niece.