

NORMAN HURTLE CHARLES McNESS



WX6004 Private Norman Hurtle Charles McNess was born at Nannup on the 22nd of May 1912. His parents were Charles and Matilda Emily (nee Evely.) Norman married Lilian Isobel Jeffrey at Busselton in 1934.

At the time of his enlistment, 29th of June 1940. Norman gave his address as Nannup, occupation as that of a timber worker and Next of Kin, wife. Lilian Isobel also living at Nannup. In December of 1941, Lilian changed her place of living to that of Thomas Street, Busselton.

Norman was initially placed in the Recruit Training Battalion at Northam and then transferred to the newly formed 2/28th battalion at Melville camp near Fremantle. In early January 1941, the 2/28th moved to Fremantle where it joined a troopship convoy bound for the Middle East. The battalion arrived at Port Tewfik, Suez at the end of January and then on to Southern Palestine by train. Southern Palestine was being used by the Australians as a base. The 2/28th went into camp at Khassa near Gaza. where they could complete their training.

By July of 1942, the war in North Africa was drawing to a climax, the Germans and Italians had reached El Alemein in Egypt, overrunning Tobruk early in the year. El Alemein is about 120 kilometres from Alexandria. Consequently, the 9th Division was rushed to the El Alemein defensive "Box" and held the northern sector for almost four months, as the British Eighth Army was reinforced and equipped for a new offensive under a new Commander, General Montgomery. The 2/28th reached the Alemein front on the 10th of July and the division attacked a week later.

Just after midnight on the 27th of July, the 2/28th attacked Ruin Ridge and by 1am they were on the feature. But things were starting to go wrong; the Germans were attacking the Australians from rear positions; three company commanders were wounded; and many of the vehicles that should have brought forward ammunition were destroyed or damaged. Increasingly cut off, an attempt by British tanks to relieve the battalion was abandoned after 22 vehicles were "knocked out". Shortly before 10am enemy tanks began moving in on the Australians from three directions. A company was overrun and the battalion's commander had little choice but to surrender. The Australians were rounded up and marched through the British artillery barrage, resulting in more casualties, as they moved behind the German lines.

The 2/28th suffered heavily at Ruin Ridge. Sixty-five officers and men from the battalion and its support units were killed or wounded; nearly 500 were captured and became prisoners of war.

It is assumed that Pte. Norman McNess was one of those captured as his service record shows that he lost his life when an enemy troopship, the "Nino Bixio" was torpedoed and badly damaged by an allied submarine, HMS Turbulent, between Benghazi (North Africa) and Italy on the 17th of August 1942.

The attack by HMS Turbulent resulted in a torpedo exploding in the No.1 hold and a second in the engine room of the "Nino Bixio". The explosion in the No.1 hold killed and estimated 200 men.