

## **Frederick John Marven Syer (aka Frederick William Loney)**



Private (Pte) 2610 Frederick John Marven Syer enlisted in the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Battalion in the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Brigade of the 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Division at Liverpool on 28 June 1915. He enlisted under the alias Frederick William Loney, as he still had almost five years remaining on his seven year commitment to serve with the Royal Australian Navy from 8 May 1913.

He embarked overseas on 9 August and disembarked in Egypt in early September. He landed at Lemnos on 28 September and was subsequently taken on strength of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion at Leane's Trench, Gallipoli on 30 October.

A month later, he came down with diarrhoea and was evacuated back to Egypt on 1 December, where he was admitted to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Australian General Hospital at Ghezireh between 3 – 11 December 1915. He rejoined the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on 6 February 1916 after they had been evacuated from Gallipoli.

A week later he was transferred and taken on strength of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Battalion in the 14<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade of the 5<sup>th</sup> Australian Division at Tel el Kebir on 14 February, where he was also promoted to Corporal on 24 March.

The battalion departed Egypt on 19 June and disembarked at Marseilles on 28 June, where they entrained for the north. They entered the front line for the first time at Fleurbaix on 10 July and became embroiled in the AIF's major battle on the Western Front, at Fromelles, on 19 July.

The Battle of Fromelles was a disaster. The 53<sup>rd</sup> Battalion formed part of the initial assault and sustained 625 casualties, amounting to over three-quarters of its original attacking strength. Despite these high losses the battalion continued to alternate in and out of the front line at Fromelles for a further two months.

Cpl Syer was promoted to Sergeant (Sgt) on 20 October 1916, then, on 24 October he was mentioned in the 5<sup>th</sup> Division's despatches for his gallantry and meritorious service during an earlier patrol near Flers. The despatch noted that, *"He showed great courage and resource when on patrol. When wounded he remained at duty, inspiring those under him by his example."*

Shortly after, he was promoted to Company Sergeant Major (CSM) on 17 November and then granted leave in England from 30 November – 14 December.

In March 1917, the 53<sup>rd</sup> Battalion participated in the cautious advance that followed the German retreat to the Hindenburg Line. While spared the main assault, they did later defend the gains made during the Second Battle of Bullecourt against subsequent German counterattacks, for the loss of 274 battalion casualties, between 9 – 15 May.

CSM Syer attended the 5<sup>th</sup> (British) Army School between 3 July – 8 August, by which time the allies' focus of operations had already switched to Belgium.

The Third Battle of Ypres had commenced on 31 July, and the 53<sup>rd</sup> Battalion moved up to Glencorse Wood on the night of 24 September in preparation for their part in the Battle of Polygon Wood, set for 26 September.

The attack commenced at 5.50 am and was a success, with all objectives achieved and the inevitable German counterattacks repulsed. The 53<sup>rd</sup> Battalion also captured around 80 prisoners and ten machine guns, for the loss of 226 men wounded and 83 killed or missing, one of whom as CSM Syer who was killed in action on 26 September 1917. His body was never recovered, and he has no known grave.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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*The Butte, which stood on the far side of Polygon Wood, was taken by the 5<sup>th</sup> Division on 26 September 1917*

Company Sergeant Major 2610 Frederick John Marven Syer is remembered on Panel 29 of the Menin Gate Memorial in Ypres, Belgium.

Name: Syer, Frederick John Marven (aka Loney, Frederick William)	
Service Number	2610
Date enlisted	28 June 1915
Place enlisted	Liverpool, NSW
Rank on enlistment	Private
Initial Unit	1 <sup>st</sup> Infantry Battalion
Previous military service	Royal Australian Navy – 2 years (serving)
Date and ship embarked for overseas	9 August 1915 HMAA A54 <i>Runic</i>
Stated age/DOB (if known)	21 years 9 months (23/10/1894)
Place of birth	Geelong, Victoria
Marital status	Single
Occupation	Able Seaman (RAN)
Religion	Church of England
Next of kin and address	Syer, Mr Walter, stepbrother, 26 King William Street, Fitzroy, Victoria
Appearance	Fresh complexion, dark hair, blue eyes, height – 5 feet 8 inches, weight – 9 stone, 3 lbs, chest measurement – 32/34 inches
Final Rank	Company Sergeant Major
Final Unit	53 <sup>rd</sup> Infantry Battalion
Theatres of war served in	Egypt, Gallipoli, France, Belgium
Fate	Killed in action
Date and place died	26 October 1917 Polygon Wood, Belgium
Cemetery details	No known grave. Commemorated on Panel 29 of the Menin Gate Memorial, Ypres, Belgium
Honours/medals	1914-15 Star, British War Medal, Victory Medal
Notes	Connection to Leopold is not entirely clear, but he was Geelong born and bred. Also remembered on the Leopold War Memorial.