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Baird, John

A West Australian railway employee
killed while on military service for their country



Memorial at Railway Workshops Midland (D.Graham/panoramio)

Rail employment information

Employer:	Western Australian Government Railways & Tramways
Branch:	Traffic
Designation:	Clerk

Rail employment notes: Detailed WAGR employment record has not been found, however the railway's Honour Roll shows him as a Clerk in Perth Goods Office and this is also stated by his widow. 32nd Battalion AIF (Service No.1211).

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force
Military unit:	32nd Australian Infantry Battalion.
Service number:	1211
Date of death:	1 December 1917
Place of death:	Belgium
Age:	40
Rank at time of death:	Sergeant
Burial/memorialisation:	Messines Ridge Cemetery, Messines (now Mesen), Belgium

John Baird from Lithgowshire Scotland migrated to WA at the age of 34. He enlisted in the AIF on 19 July 1915. John Baird had previously had 3 years' service in the British Territorial Army. His wife Margaret Baird was appointed as his Next of kin. At the time of his enlistment Australia had decided to create a second division in response to the flood of volunteers coming forward is response to the Gallipoli campaign. Even creating a whole new division did not accommodate the numbers and the decision was made to create an 8th Brigade. Using the model of the 4th Brigade one of the Battalions would be formed with two companies each from South Australia and West Australia. This was to become 32nd Bn and would concentrate in South Australia before departing for overseas service. A and B companies would be South Australian while C and D companies would be West Australian.

Baird was promoted to the rank of Corporal before sailing. Cpl Baird with the regimental number 1211 was equipped at Blackboy Hill Camp and with the other members of the partial 32 Bn sailed to Adelaide from Fremantle aboard the SS *Indarra* as a member of D Company. (On the voyage Fremantle to Adelaide 5 stowaways were found). Training continued in South Australia at Mitcham Military Camp and the Morphettville racecourse. AWM holds an undated studio photograph of Baird as a Pte (P09291.198) in uniform. The Battalion departed from the Port of Adelaide aboard A2 HMAT *Geelong* on 18 November 1915 and disembarked at Suez on 18 Dec 1916. The Bn then undertook both individual and unit training in Egypt. On 17 Jun 1916 the Bn departed Alexandria

aboard HMT *Transylvania* and disembarked Marseilles on 23 June 1916 to join the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). In France he undertook training in the Armentieres sector where he was promoted Acting Sergeant on 13 September 1916 before participating in the debacle at Fromelles. A/Sgt Baird was slightly Wounded in action on 19 July 1916 at Fromelles and proceeded to be treated through a number of medical units and convalescent depots before returning to 32 Bn in his substantive rank of Cpl on 7 February 1917. He served in the Third Battle of Ypres including battles at Lagnicourt and Bapaume before being granted UK leave between 18 Aug and 01 Sep 1917 when he rejoined. His rank varied between Cpl and A/Sgt but he was eventually confirmed as a substantive Sergeant. He was Killed in action on 1 December 1917 while the Bn was holding the frontline at Messines. He was buried at The Strand Cemetery but his remains were relocated to Messines Ridge Cemetery, Messines (now Mesen) as several smaller cemeteries were concentrated.

Additional/personal information:

It appears that Baird married before coming to Western Australia. There is no mention of children.

For his service he was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal which were issued to his wife. Mrs Margaret Baird was awarded a pension of £2-12-3 per fortnight commencing on 21 Feb 1918. CWGC show his age at the date of death as 37 years but his wife states 40 years on his honour circular. Mrs Baird paid for the following inscription on his headstone: "Oh For a Closer Walk with God".

The news must have been a rude Christmas arrival for his wife and friends:

> BAIRD.—Killed in action, December 1, Sergeant John Baird, beloved husband of Margaret Baird, Cottesloe, late of Perth Goods Office. *The West Australian*, 24/12/1917p1
>
> Mrs. Baird, of Cottesloe, desires to THANK her many kind friends for letters, cards, telegrams and personal expressions of sympathy in her recent sad loss of her dear husband, Sergeant John Baird, killed in action in France December 1, 1917. *The West Australian*, 7/1/1918p1

Further information may be added as available. Information may also be found on the Australian War Memorial website: *https://www.awm.gov.au/advanced-search/people*

Abbreviations: WAGR= Western Australian Government Railways (& Tramways at some periods); MRWA= Midland Railway of Western Australia; BDM=Western Australian Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages website; AWM=Australian War Memorial (Canberra and website); CWGC= Commonwealth War Graves Commission (including website). DVA=Department of Veterans' Affairs (including website)

Acknowledgements: Rail employment notes from WAGR Honour Roll and WAGR records held by State Records Office, Perth, transcribed by J.Austin 2019. Military information researched by Dr G.M.Galvin. Family information and collation by G.Higham.

----------Lest we forget----------