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**Barrett, Herbert James**

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**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: | Way and Works |
| Designation: | Labourer |

Rail employment notes: Born 28/1/1885. Joined WAGR 27/1/1910 aged 24 as Labourer, Perth. Transferred in same role to Midland Junction 23/10/1912, North Fremantle 1/7/1913 and Perth 22/9/1914.

Granted leave to join AIF 26/4/1916 (Service No.1797). Killed in action 8/6/1917.

**Military service information:**

| | |
|---|---|
| Conflict: | First World War 1914-1918 |
| Service: | Australian Imperial Force (AIF) |
| Military unit: | 34th Australian Infantry Battalion |
| Service number: | 1797 |
| Date of death: | 8 June 1917 |
| Place of death: | Messines, Belgium |
| Age: | 32 |
| Rank at time of death: | Private |
| Buried/commemorated: | Strand Military Cemetery, Ploegsteert, Wallonie, Belgium |

Herbert James Barrett enlisted in Perth on 27 March 1916 and his basic military training and attestation were at Claremont Showgrounds. He had no previous military experience and his wife became his Next of kin. His initial training was as a member of 65 Depot Company before being allocated to 2nd Reinforcements to 44 Battalion on 2 May 1916 with the regimental number 1797.

He departed Australia aboard HMAT *Miltiades* on 9 August 1916 and disembarked at Plymouth following which he joined 11 Training Battalion. As 3 Division AIF prepared to depart England to join the British Expeditionary Force Private Barrett was taken-on-strength of 34 Battalion on 10 November 1916. In France he had a detached period of duty with 9th Field Engineers and another in an unidentified working party. He rejoined the Battalion in time for the major assault at Messines. There is a solitary report in his Red Cross File that records him being Killed in Action forward of the front line. Death was said to be instantaneous. His body was recovered and buried in the temporary cemetery known as 'The Willows' but later exhumed and buried in the Strand Cemetery near Ploegsteert, South of Ypres.

**Additional/personal information:**

Herbert Barrett was born in South Elmore, Victoria in 1885, the fourth of nine children born to Henry and Mary Ellen (nee Bennett) Barrett between 1881 and 1895. Herbert then moved to Western


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Australia, apparently with his family, as did many people after the 1890s gold finds He married Mary Hutchison Baird in the Perth district (BDM 461/1911). It appears two children were born to the couple before Herbert was killed:

> BARRETT.-Herbert James, dearly beloved husband of Mary Hutchison, and father of Victor and Donald, 29 York street, Subiaco, aged 31 years. -Inserted by his sorrowing wife and children.
>
> BARRETT.-Herbert James, dearly beloved son of Mr. and Mrs. N. Barrett, 6 Hamilton street, Subiaco, and brother of Stanley, Norman, and Walter (on active service), Harry (Blackbov, returned). Bert, W.A.G.R; Arthur, Mrs. F. E. Matthews, and Mr. W. Evans, of Subiaco, aged 31 years.-Inserted by his sorrowing mother and father, sister and brothers. *Western Mail* 6/7/1917p26

For his service he was entitled to the British War Medal and the Victory Medal which were issued to his widow. Military pensions were granted to his widow at 40/- per fortnight, son Herbert Henry (born 1913) 20/- and son Donald Kitchener (born 1915) 15/- all to date from 2 September 1917. Mrs Barrett also received a benefit from the Railway Employees Fund.

In 1920 Mrs Barrett advised Army records that she was moving to an address in Edinburgh, Scotland. Her two sons would accompany her. Nothing further is known although the last file relating to Herbert James Barrett held at the AWM was not closed until 1945 (not available remotely).

Further information and/or photos 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----------

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