015

Benson, Alfred Ernest

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:	Audit
Designation:	Clerk

Rail employment notes: Born 9/8/1887. Joined WAGR 1/5/1901 aged as Cadet, Perth. Promoted to Clerk, Perth 1/7/1906.

Granted leave to join AIF 20/8/1914 (Service No.3046). Killed in action at Gallipoli 7/5/1915.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	8th Australian Field Artillery Battery
Service number:	3046
Date of death:	7 May 1915
Place of death:	Gallipoli, Dardanelles, Turkey
Age:	29*
Rank:	Gunner

Burial/memorialisation: Shell Green Cemetery, Gallipoli Peninsula, Canakkale Province, Turkey

Alfred Ernest Benson was the son of John and Mary Benson and born in Western Australia. He enlisted in the AIF at Blackboy Hill Camp on 19 August 1914. Elder brother David Michael Benson also enlisted, on 25 August 1914, but he was a telegraphist and was transferred to 30th Signalling Company and was transferred to Melbourne from whence he embarked on 20 October 1914.

Alfred stated that he had no previous military experience and that his mother would be his Next of kin as his father had deserted the family years before and his whereabouts were unknown. He was allocated to be a Driver on the day of enlistment and assigned to the Divisional Ammunition Column serving with 8th Battery Australian Field Artillery and allocated the regimental number 3046. He embarked on HMAT *Medic* 31 October 1914 and departed Australia on 1 November 1914.

He disembarked at Alexandria and entered the camp at Mena, Egypt. He gave up the qualification of Driver on 7 April 1915 and his rank was then Gunner. Various parts of his documentation failed to note the change and some documents after Apr 1915 still refer to him as Driver Benson. The Field Battery landed on Gallipoli on 25 April 1915 although their armaments were poorly suited for the terrain. Gunner Benson was Killed in action on 7 May 1915 and was buried in a small cemetery (7 Gunners) termed 8th Battery Cemetery which was located in Victoria Gully. His burial was conducted by Chaplain, The Revered Green.

Later the remains were exhumed and reburied at Shell Green Cemetery.

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Additional/personal information:

Alfred Benson was born in the Perth district and attended James Street state school. His parents must have been early migrants to WA as John Benson and Mary Ann (nee Finlay) married in Fremantle in 1870. They appear to have had 12 children between 1871 and 1887, of whom Alfred was the last child. (ref. The Bicentennial Dictionary of Western Australians Vol 1, and family notices below.)

*The birth date Alfred gave the WAGR would make him 27 years old, however his mother quoted 29 when returning correspondence to the army after the war.

> BENSON.—On May 7, died of wounds at the Dardanelles, Alfred Ernest, dearly beloved son of Mr. and Mrs. J. Benson, late of 94 Goderich-street, East Perth, and of 9 Hutt-street Mount Lawley, aged 29 years. Deeply mourned, *The West Australian* 17/6/1915p1

> Mrs. Benson and Family desire to THANK their many kind friends for personal sympathy, letters, cards, and telegrams in their recent sad bereavement of the loss of their dearly loved son and brother, Alfred Ernest, who was killed in action at Gaba Tepe. *The West Australian* 2/8/1915p1

The graves at Shell Green Cemetery are flat tablets and not the standard vertical headstones. Gnr Benson's tablet bears the inscription: "Their Name Liveth for Evermore". For his service he was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal and these were issued to his mother on the basis that his father could not be found. In 1967 one of his sisters successfully applied for the ANZAC memorial issued by the Australian Government to mark the 50th Anniversary of the Gallipoli campaign. She said she was in possession of his 3 First World War medals, or the "Trio".

Before he departed Australia Gunner Benson had made his Will (mother as sole beneficiary) and lodged the document with a Mr H J Smith of Reserve St Claremont who was to be his executor and who did act in that capacity. His estranged father John Benson (of no known address) died at the age of 74 years on 6 March 1924 and was buried at Karrakatta. His estranged wife Mary, Alfred's mother, died at the age of 84 years on 30 July 1934 and was buried with John Benson. The family notice for Mary Benson gives the list of Alfred's siblings:

> BENSON. — At her home in Mt. Lawley on July 30, 1934, Mrs. Mary Ann Benson, relict of the late John Benson, and loved mother of Mrs. A. Miller (Victoria Park), Mrs. M. Brown (Mt. Lawley), Mrs. J. Collingwood (Inglewood). Mrs. J. Laing (Mt. Lawley). Mrs. Tom Scott (Mt.Lawley). Mrs- H. Kelly (Parkes. N.S.W.) and David Michael (Nedlands), Sydney James. (Mt. Jackson), George Albert (South Perth), William (deceased), Henry (deceased), Alfred (deceased). Aged, 84 years and 9 months. At rest. *The Daily News* 31/7/1934p1

Elder brother David Michael Benson also enlisted (service number 138), but he was a telegraphist and was transferred to Melbourne from whence he embarked on 20 October 1914. He was in the original Division but transferred to 4 Division at the reorganization in Egypt. Returned to Australia on 8 October 1918 under the provisions of the 1914 enlistees leave. He received a decoration, Meritorious Service Medal (MSM) just prior to returning to Australia. Died 1962.

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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