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Blair, Arthur David

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:	Night Station Master

Rail employment notes: Born 3/1/1886. Joined WAGR 23/10/1912 aged 26 as Goods Porter, Fremantle Goods. Transferred to Porter, Fremantle 8/2/1913 and promoted to Night Station Master, Lion Mill 22/7/1914. (When stations were busy enough to warrant more than one officer, the Station Master normally worked day shift 8am – 4pm and had overall responsibility, the Assistant Station Master worked 4pm-midnight and the Night Station master worked midninght-8am.)
Lion Mill was the earlier name for Mount Helena.

Granted leave to join AIF 13/11/1915 (Service No.3013). Killed in action 4/8/1916.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	28th Australian Infantry Battalion.
Service number:	3013
Date of death:	4 August 1916
Place of death:	France
Age:	30
Rank:	Lance Corporal

Burial/memorialisation: London Cemetery and Extension, Longueval, Picardie, France

Arthur David Blair enlisted in the AIF in Perth on 9 October 1915. He was married and his wife Alice Dent Blair became his NOK although in some places she is referred to as his mother. He had 3 years of Citizen Force military experience. His basic training was conducted at Blackboy Hill Camp following which he was allocated to 7th Reinforcements to 28th Battalion.

He departed Australia from Fremantle aboard HMAT *Medic,* as a temporary Corporal for the voyage only. He disembarked in Egypt on 16 February 1916 and was taken-on-strength of 28 Bn. The Battalion departed from Alexandria on 21 March 1916 aboard HMT *Oriana* and disembarked at Marseilles on 27 March 1916 to join the British Expeditionary Force, as the allied forces were known. After a brief period in the trenches at Armentieres the Battalion moved to the Battle for Pozieres. Pte Blair was appointed as a Lance Corporal on 24 June 1916.

Between 4 and 6 August 1916 he was posted as Missing in action. Subsequent investigation showed that he was most likely killed by a high explosive shell on 4 August 1916 and his remains were covered over during further shelling. His Red Cross File shows that there were a number of soldiers who witnessed his death but there was no account of a burial. A Court of Enquiry held on 4 January

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1917 determined that he had been killed in action and he was no longer to be shown as missing in action.

Additional/personal information:

Arthur Blair was born and schooled in South Melbourne, Victoria before moving to WA. He served in the Citizen Military Forces (a volunteer force) in the West Australian Cameron Highlanders group.

He married Alice Dent Rathbone in 1915, the marriage registered in Leederville WA. It is not known if they had any children together. (The birth of a child named Arthur D S Blair was registered in Perth in 1916 but it is not certain of this was related)

As he was at first posted as "missing", it was months before his wife received official confirmation of his death and so there was not the normal group of family notices, however his wife posted a note of thanks:

> Mrs. R. Blair, of Katanning, wishes to THANK all kind friends. and relations for letters, telegrams and personal sympathy, especially Mr. Cusack and Mr. Gully, of Perth, in the loss of her husband, late Robert Blair. *The West Australian* 10/2/1917p1

For his service he was entitled to the British War Medal and the Victory Medal which were issued to his widow together with other memorabilia. He held a policy with T & G Mutual life and there is some correspondence on file from that company. His personal file holds no details on a pension to his widow but a Repatriation Department file remained open until the time of her death.

In 1938 the remains of Lance Corporal Blair were discovered on the battlefield of Pozieres. Identification was by means of an engraved watch and his identity disc and these two items were forwarded to his widow as keepsakes. The remains of L/Cpl Blair were then buried in the London Cemetery and Extension Longueval. Mrs Alice Dent Blair died in 1946 and was cremated at Karrakatta cemetery.

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----------