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Breuer, James Herman

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

This soldier was keen to volunteer, but first had to convince military authorities that he was 'safe' because of German parentage. Having gained acceptance, he was killed by German forces.



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

Rail employment information

Employer:	Western Australian Government Railways & Tramways
Branch:	Locomotive
Designation:	Apprentice Fitter

Rail employment notes: Born 18/1/1894. Joined WAGR 6/5/1909 aged 15 as Call Boy, Northam. "Call boy" was the most junior job for a young man wanting to join the locomotive crews on the WAGR, involving work around the locomotive shed and also being sent out, usually on bicycle, literally to call/wake crews for their rosters, especially when train times changed. The next step would be Cleaner then fireman. However it appears that James than changed his mind towards workshop trades training.

Appointed Apprentice Car & Wagon Builder, Midland Workshops 22/6/1909 and transferred to Apprentice Fitter, Midland Workshops 9/1/1911. Granted leave to join AIF 20/10/1915 (Service No.4384). Killed in action 12/10/1917.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	16th Battalion.
Service number:	4384
Date of death:	12 October 1917
Place of death:	Flanders, Belgium
Age:	23
Rank:	Private

Burial/memorialisation: Menin Gate at Ypres (now Ieper), Belgium

James Herman Breuer was serving as the Quarter Master Sergeant of 13 Field Coy RAE (part-time Militia) having previously served in Senior Cadets for 2 years and then 13 Fd Coy for 3 years where he had risen from the rank of Sapper to QMS. His indication that he wished to enlist in the AIF came to the notice of the General Staff Officer (Intelligence) of HQ Fifth Military District because of his father's German background. His father was a naturalised British subject and his mother had been born in Victoria. James was a natural born British subject having been born in Perth (BDM 260/1894). Following a detailed interview James was cleared for AIF enlistment.

On 12 October 1915 he was enlisted into 13th Reinforcements to 16th Battalion at Blackboy Hill Camp where he undertook infantry training before boarding A54 HMAT *Runic* and departing for

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Egypt on 29 Jan 1916. He disembarked at the Port of Alexandria on 26 Feb 1916 and remained on reinforcement details as the AIF was reorganized after the Gallipoli campaign. On 2 April 1916 he marched into 48 Bn as it was being formed at Serapeum. Training of the newly created 48 Bn continued until departure from Egypt aboard HMT *Caledonia* on 2 June 1916. The Bn disembarked at Marseilles on 09 Jun 1916 and formally joined the BEF. James Breuer's rank oscillated between Pte and Cpl throughout his time in France. He was absent 'sick' between 11 Sep 1916 and 07 Jan 1917 and again between 19 and 22 Feb 1917. Cellulitis caused him to be evacuated to the UK where he was hospitalized at Brighton on 06 Mar 1917. Following recovery from cellulitis Pte Breuer was given furlough between 07 June and 22 June 1917. He finally rejoined the Battalion on 1 September 1917 as the front line moved slowly through the mud of Flanders in the Third Battle of Ypres. 48 Battalion was marked for a final drive to Passchendaele on 11-12 Oct 1917 but were beaten back with considerable losses. Pte Breuer was Killed in Action on 12 October 1917. His body was never recovered, he has no known grave, and is remembered on the Menin Gate at Ypres (now Ieper).

Additional/personal information:

There is a fine studio photographic portrait of James Breuer as a Cpl (undated) in the AWM as H05591. His mother received a pension of 40/- per fortnight dated from 07 Jan 1918. The service medals were distributed to his father.

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----------