Britt, William

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



Memorial plaque M228 in Kings Park

Rail employment information

Employer: Western Australian Government Railways & Tramways

Branch: Locomotive

Designation: Apprentice Fitter

Rail employment notes: Born 9/6/1893. Joined WAGR 6/6/1910 aged 16 as Apprentice Fitter, Midland Workshops.

In this era, the "Locomotive" branch of the WAGR, which would later be named the Chief Mechanical Engineer's branch, included the major workshops at Midland (then Midland Junction) employing a wide range of tradesmen to work on locomotives, carriages and freight wagons as they were built or passed through for repairs, and also trained apprentices in many trades.

Granted leave to join AIF 14/8/1914. Killed in action 9/6/1918.

Military service information:

Conflict: First World War 1914-1918

Service: Australian Imperial Force (AIF)

Military unit: 11th Australian Infantry Battalion

Service number: (270)

Date of death: 9 June 1918

Place of death: Amiens, France

Age: 25

Rank: Lieutenant

Burial/memorialisation: Villers-Bretonneux Military Cemetery, Villers-Bretonneux, Picardie, France

William Britt was a very early enlistment in the AIF when he joined up on 2 September 1914 at Blackboy Hill Camp. His widowed mother Mrs Mary Ann Britt was declared to be his Next of kin. He had previous military service of 2 years in the 11th Infantry Regiment, Militia. His basic training was conducted at Blackboy Hill Camp following which he was assigned to 11 Battalion with the regimental number 270.

The Battalion boarded HMAT *Ascanius* at Fremantle on 31 October 1914 but did not depart until 2 November 1914. Ascanius then joined the first convoy which had earlier departed from Albany with a substantial Naval escort to provide cover against the German Light Cruiser *Embden* which was thought to roaming the Indian Ocean. *Ascanius* later suffered minor damage in a collision with Shropshire and was required to enter Aden for repairs before proceeding up the Red Sea. Suez was reached on 5 December 1914 and the troops disembarked the following day and established camp at Mena with other elements of the 3rd Brigade. Training continued in Egypt until 2 March 1915 when the Battalion moved by rail to Alexandria, boarded HMT *Suffolk* and sailed for Mudros on Lemnos

 © Rail Heritage WA

Island. There was a delay of 7 weeks while the troops practiced the use of scrambling nets and maintained fitness with route marches on the Island. Pte Britt landed on Gallipoli on 25 April 1915 and participated in all the early battles. He developed dysentery and was hospitalised on 24 May 1915 before returning to duty on 26 July 1915. After the furious campaigns of August 1915, he was again off duty with dysentery between 11 September 1915 and 02 October 1915. The Battalion withdrew from Gallipoli in December 1915 and returned to Egypt. Private Britt was promoted to the rank of Corporal on 28 January 1916.

In the reorganization of the AIF Divisions Corporal Britt was transferred to the 51st Battalion as it was raised. His transfer was dated with effect from 29 February 1916. His training was interrupted by an admission to hospital between 14 Mar 1916 and 1 April 1916. The Battalion entered a period of intense training at both an individual and unit level until moving to Alexandria by rail on 5 June 1916. Before departing Egypt, he was made up to be a Sergeant on 1 June 1916. The Battalion boarded HMT *Ivernia* on 5 June 1916 and departed for Marseilles which was reached on 11 June 1916 where the troops disembarked to join the British Expeditionary Force. Action at Pozieres and Moquet Farm followed. He was Wounded in action sometime between 14 and 16 August 1916 which required hospital treatment before he was fit to resume duty on 1 October 1916. In the UK he also attended a Gas Course and spent some time with the training battalion of the Brigade. Sergeant Britt was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant on 8 February 1917 which was upgraded to Lieutenant on 7 August 1917. Lieutenant Britt was Killed in action on 9 June 1918 during the Battle of Amiens. He was buried on the battlefield in a marked grave at Sailly-le-Sec. After the War his remains were moved (along with others from numerous small cemeteries) to the cemetery at Villers-Bretonneux.

The Australian War Memorial and Cemetery at Villers-Bretonneux, France.

Australian soldiers killed in France, whose bodies could be found for relocation, are buried and marked by the rows of gravestones seen to left and right.

The wing walls to both sides of the central watch tower record, carved in stone, the names of Australian soldiers killed in France but with no known grave.



Additional/personal information:

William Britt was born in the Toodyay district WA in 1893, a son of John Thomas and Mary Ann (nee McCluney) Britt. He was the third child, with siblings John Percy, Margarett, Mary Anne and Charles Thomas. His parents had married in the same district in 1887, however John Britt died in 1906.

> BRITT.—Killed in action on June 10, 1918, somewhere in France, Lieutenant William Britt, dearly loved son of Mrs. M. A. and the late J. T. Britt, of Toodyay, aged 25 years, after over three years' hard fighting. He has fought the good fight, He has finished his course. Always a hero.
>
> BRITT.—Killed in action somewhere in France on June 10, 1918, Lieutenant William Britt, aged 25 years, loved friend of Mr. and Mrs. Tobin and Family and Mr. and Mrs. Wheeler. One of the bravest, one of the best. —Inserted by his sorrowing friend, Annie. Both *The West Australian* 25/6/1918p1

 © Rail Heritage WA

For his service he was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal which were issued to his mother along with other memorabilia. His family paid for an inscription on his gravestone which reads: **Perfect Peace with Loved Ones Far Away**.

In 2018 his family created a memorial tablet in Kings Park (M228). Lieutenant Britt's brother Charles Thomas Britt also served in the AIF as a member of 11th/28 Bn having enlisted on 14 Feb 1916 but returned to Australia on 9 May 1919.

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----------