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Girvan, John

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: Station Master

Rail employment notes: Born 4/6/1875. Joined WAGR 21/7/1902 aged 27 as Porter, East Northam. Promoted to Night Officer, Baandee 1/4/1903 and transferred to Calooli 14/10/1905, Karalee 10/3/1906 and Walkaway 23/5/1907. Re-classified Night Station Master, Walkaway 1/1/1910 and transferred to Mundijong 9/6/1910, West Guildford 16/6/1910, East Perth 28/9/1910 and Midland Junction 11/1911. Promoted to Station Master, Lion Mill 4/1913.

(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 midnight-8am.
Lion Mill was later renamed to Mount Helena.)

Granted leave to join AIF 6/1915 (Service No.849). Killed in action 26/3/1917.

Military service information:

Conflict: First World War 1914-1918

Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	28th Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	849
Date of death:	26 March 1917
Place of death:	Bapaume, France
Age:	42
Rank:	Sergeant

Burial/memorialisation: Bapaume Australian Cemetery, Bapaume, Picardie, France

John Girvan enlisted in the AIF on 19 March 1915 in Perth. On enlistment he stated that he had no previous military experience and that his wife Mrs Alice Maud Girvan (resident in NSW) was his Next of Kin. On completion of his basic military training he was posted to 28 Battalion with the regimental number 849. The Battalion departed Australia from Fremantle on 9 June 1915 aboard A11 HMAT *Ascanius* and disembarked in Egypt on 2 July 1915 to enter camp at Abbassia. Following the formation of the 2nd Australian Division the Bn undertook training in Egypt before embarking HMT *Ivernia* on 4 September 1915 for service on Gallipoli.

On 24 September 1915 he was made up to the rank of Sergeant and assigned to duties at Corps HQ. Following the Gallipoli campaign, he returned to Egypt where he joined the GOC Escort for duty between 11 Jan 1916 and 9 June 1916 during which time he moved to England. In the UK he spent some time with 4 Trg Bn before departing England through Folkestone aboard HMT *Franconia* and joined the British Expeditionary Force at 2 ADBD before re-joining 28 Battalion on 18 November 1916. The Battalion carried out frontline duties in the trenches over the winter of 1916-1917. On 26

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March 1917, 28 Bn participated in the assault on Lagnicourt. During that attack Sergeant Girvan was posted as Missing In Action but this was later amended to Killed In Action when a witness reported him being struck by artillery shell near Bn HQ. His body was recovered and buried in the Bapaume Australian Cemetery.

Additional/personal information:

John Girvan had been born in Wales and migrated to Australia at the age of 10 years. Whilst working in the Yilgarn region (Calooli and Karalee) he married Alice M. Farr (BDM 7/1906). He then transferred to Walkaway (south of Geraldton) where the couple had two sons before he won posts in the Perth region where a third son was born.

> GIRVAN.--On March 26, in France, killed in action, Sergeant John Girvan. late W.A.G.Railways, beloved husband of Mrs. A. M. Girvan, Maylands, and father of Leslie, Jack, and Ray. He died in honour. *The West Australian* 21/4/1917p1

For his service he was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal which were issued to his widow together with other memorabilia. Military pensions were paid to Mrs Girvan at 53/9d per fortnight, sons Leslie 20/-, Jack 15/- and Raymond 10/- per fortnight all to date from 13 June 1917. His widow was also the beneficiary of a policy held by NML Ltd. He has an inscription on his tombstone which reads: "In Everlasting Memory of a Fond Husband and Father." In 1921 Mrs Girvan re-married while in NSW and became Mrs A M Russell. She later returned to WA and died aged 59 years on 15 July 1937 and was buried in 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----------

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