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## Hallahan, William Alfred

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

The fervour of the times saw **four brothers** enlist – three died in action while the fourth was taken Prisoner of War.



Memorial in France to the Australian 4th Division, which included 51st Battalion Photo G.M.Galvin

**Rail employment information**

| | |
|---|---|
| Employer: | Western Australian Government Railways & Tramways |
| Branch: | Locomotive |
| Designation: | Fireman |

Rail employment notes: Born 1/10/1891. Joined WAGR 29/4/1910 aged 18 as Cleaner, Kalgoorlie. ("Cleaner" in this case was a position in the Locomotive branch, cleaning locomotives and otherwise employed at a locomotive depot whilst training to be a Fireman, the next step up the ladder.)

Promoted to Fireman, Kalgoorlie 1/7/1912.

Granted leave to join AIF 18/8/1914 (Service No.542). Killed in action 26/6/1916.

**Military service information:**

| | |
|---|---|
| Conflict: | First World War 1914-1918 |
| Service: | Australian Imperial Force (AIF) |
| Military unit: | 51st Australian Infantry Battalion |
| Service number: | 542 |
| Date of death: | 26 June 1916 |
| Place of death: | Armentieres, France |
| Age: | 25 |
| Rank: | Corporal |
| Burial/memorialisation: | Rue-Du-Bois Military Cemetery, Fleurbaix, Bethune, Nord Pas de Calais, France |

William Alfred Hallahan enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force at Blackboy Hill Camp on 8 August 1914. He nominated his father James Patrick Hallahan as his next of kin. William was a New Zealander by birth and he had no previous military experience. He completed his basic military training at Blackboy Hill Camp following which he was allocated to 11 Battalion with the regimental number 542.

Private Hallahan sailed from Fremantle on 2 November 1914 aboard HMAT *Ascanius* having boarded on 31 October 1914. *Ascanius* joined the other ships of the First Convoy (sailing from Albany) at sea protected by a strong Naval force. The Battalion landed in Egypt and moved to the 3rd Brigade camp at Mena where training continued.

He sailed from Alexandria on 2 March 1915 aboard A23 HMAT *Suffolk* for Mudros. The Bn remained at Mudros for 7 weeks maintaining fitness with route marches and practised the use of scrambling nets. The Battalion landed at Anzac Cove on 25 April 1915 and Private Hallahan participated in the Gallipoli campaign until 28 June 1915 when he was Wounded in Action, suffering

gunshot wounds to thigh and buttocks. He was evacuated to Malta where he landed on 16 July 1915. From Malta he was moved to the 3rd London General Hospital but when recovered from his wounds he boarded HMT *Oriana* for transport back to Egypt where he re-joined 11 Battalion on 15 January 1916. The *London Gazette* of 28 January 1916 carried notification that Private Hallahan had been awarded a Mentioned in Despatches. On 29 February 1916 Private Hallahan was transferred to the newly formed 51 Battalion as the AIF was expanded and was then promoted to Corporal on 30 April 1916.

The Battalion sailed from Alexandria on 5 June 1916 aboard HMT *Ivernia* and disembarked at Marseilles on 12 June 1916 to join the British Expeditionary Force. The Battalion entered a quiet sector of the Western Front at Armentieres but during a period of heavy shelling Corporal Hallahan was Killed in action on 26 June 1916. He was buried in the Rue-Du-Bois Military Cemetery with the Rev W G Corgill officiating.

**Additional/personal information:**

William Hallahan was born in Ross in New Zealand in 1891, a son of James Patrick and Janet Hallahan. NZ records show he was one of 7 children, although two may have died young. He apparently went to school in that country before emigrating to Australia with the family. (NZ BDM 14866/1891 et al)

> KILLED IN ACTION (FRANCE)
> HALLAHAN — Corporal William Alfred Hallahan, third son of James P. Hallahan, and brother of Grace and Agnes, and Wendell, Walter, and Bob (on active service). *Kalgoorlie Miner* 29/7/1916p4

Tragically, three of these brothers would be killed in the war, while the last would return but only after a lengthy period as a prisoner of war:

> Captain Wendell R Hallahan MC MM, 11 Battalion AIF [Killed in Action 1918]
>
> Private Walter Rewi Hallahan, 6 Battalion AIF [Killed in Action 1916]
>
> Corporal Robert Thomson Hallahan, 11 Battalion AIF [taken POW at Lagnicourt]

Such was the fervour of the times to serve for “King and country” or even for “King and Empire”.

For his service he was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal which were issued to his father together with other memorabilia. Corporal Hallahan had made his Will in his paybook in which he left his estate to his father. His father paid for an inscription on his tombstone which reads: “Loving and Well-Beloved Son and Brother” Sit Tibi Terra Levis. [latin; May the earth rest lightly on you].

William’s father James Patrick Hallahan died in Perth in 1946. William’s mother Janet appears to have died while he was young, possibly in New Zealand.

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----------