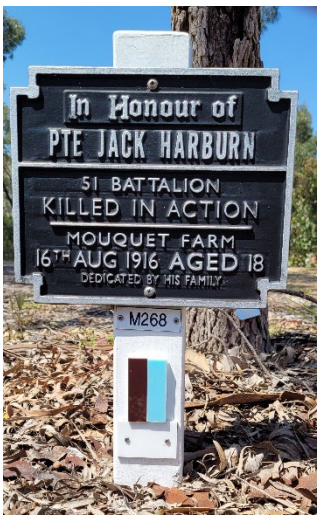
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Harburn, John ("Jack")

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



Plaque M268 in Kings Park

Rail employment information

Employer:	Western Australian Government Railways & Tramways
Branch:	Locomotive
Designation:	Cadet

Rail employment notes: Born 10/3/1898. Joined WAGR 9/7/1914 aged 16 as Cadet, 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. It is likely that a young "Cadet" was employed with a view to a clerical or accounting role.

Granted leave to join AIF 15/7/1915 (Service No.2811). Killed in action 16/8/1916.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	51st Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	2811
Date of death:	16 August 1916
Place of death:	Mouquet Farm, France
Age:	18
Rank:	Private

Burial/memorialisation: Villers-Bretonneux Memorial, Villers-Bretonneux, Picardie, France

John Harburn enlisted on 29 June 1916, although using his preferred name "Jack" and nominated his father John Harburn of Cottesloe as next of kin. He stated that he had experience in the 86th infantry regiment, a volunteer militia unit. He was allocated to 9th reinforcement to 11th Infantry Battalion, and after initial training he embarked on HMAT *Hororata* on 5 October 1915 at Fremantle.

On arrival in Egypt he joined the pool of reinforcements before he was taken-on-strength of 11 Battalion on 7 January 1916. He was transferred to the newly-formed 51 Battalion on 1 March 1916 and continued to train with that unit until departure from Alexandria on 5 June 1916 aboard HMT *Ivernia*. He disembarked at Marseilles on 12 June 1916 to join the British Expeditionary Force, as the allied forces were known. Pte Harburn had a very short hospital admission before moving into battle.

Private Harburn was killed in action in the battle around Mouquet farm in France on 16 August 1916.

His body was never recovered and he is remembered on the Villers-Bretonneux Australian Memorial.

A photo of Private Harburn in uniform may be seen on his page on the Australian War Memorial website.

The Australian War memorial 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 – tragically, more than 11 000 men. The largest number recorded from one unit is from 28th Battalion – some 365 West Australians.



Additional/personal information:

John Harburn was a son of John William Harburn and Jane Ann Harburn (nee Baxter), born in 1898 in Cottesloe(BDM 1428/1898). The parents were married in NSW in 1886 and had 3 children in Sydney but sometime between 1895 and 1898 they moved to WA – as did many people after the 1890s gold finds.

He appears to have been the eldest of 5 more children then born in WA. His birth was registered as "John Harburn" but he seems to have preferred "Jack" and he enlisted under that name.

It took time for official news to circulate and so it was common for friends to express their thoughts on the anniversary date:

> HARBURN.-In sad but loving memory of our dear son and brother, Private Jack Harburn, 31st Battalion, who made the supreme sacrifice at Pozieres on August 14, 1916; aged 18 years 5 months…. -Inserted by his sorrowing father and mother, sisters and brothers, Cottesloe.
>
> HARBURN.— God was kind, He gave me strength, To bear my heavy cross: He is the only One who knows How bitter was my loss. -Inserted by his loving brother, Lieutenant W. R. Harburn, 51st Battalion (on active service).
>
> HARBURN.- A tribute to the memory of my dear comrade. Private Jack Harburn (Jock), 51st Battalion, killed in action on August 16, 1916. at Pozieres, whilst fighting for King and country: aged 18 years 3 months. … -Inserted by his comrade, Private F. Hawkes (on active service).
> All *The West Australian* 14/8/1917p1

For his service he was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal which were issued to his father together with other memorabilia.

Private Harburn has a memorial plaque (M268) in Kings Park dedicated by family members in 2008.

John's elder brother Captain R W Harburn MC and Bar, also 51 Battalion, served 1914 to 1918.

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----------