167

Kerr, Joseph

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:	Way and Works
Designation:	Repairer

Rail employment notes: Employed as Repairer at Yuna
("Repairer" was a track maintenance worker in a gang responsible for upkeep of a section of railway line. A typical gang might include between 3 and 6 Repairers with one Leading Hand Repairer and a Ganger in charge. The WAGR Annual report for 1914/15 showed they employed 882 Repairers at 8 shillings per day, with many at very small settlements or tent camps.)

11th Battalion AIF (Service No.2155). Killed in action 22/7/1916.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	11th Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	2155
Date of death:	22 July 1916
Place of death:	Pozieres, France
Age:	30
Rank:	Private

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

Joseph Kerr began his enlistment in Geraldton WA and completed it at Blackboy Hill Camp on 19 April 1915. On enlistment he nominated his father Joseph Kerr, resident in Scotland as his Next of Kin. He had no previous military experience. Following training at Blackboy Hill camp he was allocated to 6th Reinforcements to 11 Battalion with the regimental number 2155.

His reinforcement group departed Fremantle on 6 June 1915 aboard A2 HMAT *Geelong* and disembarked in Egypt. After a very short interval he crossed to Gallipoli and was taken on strength of 11 Battalion on 4 May 1915. He participated in the vigorous fighting of early August and was not injured. However Private Kerr suffered severe dysentery and on 6 September 1915 was evacuated to Egypt where he passed through a number of medical establishments before being classed as fit to re-join his Battalion which he did on 19 November 1915 just prior to the conclusion of the campaign.

He remained in Egypt until 29 March 1916 when he departed Alexandria aboard HMT *Corsican* and disembarked at Marseilles on 5 April 1916. The Battalion moved north and began operations in the Battle of Pozieres. Private Kerr was not seen after the period 22 July to 25 July 1916. He was deemed to have been Killed in Action and the date assigned was 22 July 1916. His remains were never found, he has no known grave, and is remembered on the Villers Bretonneux Memorial.

© Rail Heritage WA

The Australian War memorial at Villers-Bretonneux, France.

Soldiers killed in France 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:

Joseph Kerr was born in Scotland and migrated to Australia at the age of 27 years. In earlier years he had worked as a seaman. His father remained in Scotland however a brother George Kerr came to WA and took up farming in the Yuna district.

For his service he was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal which were forwarded to his father directly from Australia House London together with other memorabilia.

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----------