169

Kirby, Thomas

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

One of the earliest waves of enlistments, Thomas Kirby was wounded in the first Gallipoli landing, evacuated, treated, then returned to Gallipoli where he died, probably pointlessly as the British finally agreed to withdrawal from the Dardanelles before the end of the first year, with 44 000 Allied men dead.



Memorial at Railway Workshops Midland (D.Graham/panoramio)

Rail employment information

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

Rail employment notes: Born 18/2/1894. Joined WAGR 18/12/1912 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.)

Transferred to Leonora 27/10/1913 and to Kalgoorlie 21/2/1914.

Granted leave to join AIF 18/8/1914 (Service No.563). Killed in action at Gallipoli 28/6/1915.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	11th Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	563
Date of death:	28 June 1915
Place of death:	Gallipoli, Dardanelles, Turkey
Age:	21
Rank:	Private

Burial/memorialisation: Lone Pine Memorial, Gallipoli Peninsula, Canakkale Province, Turkey

Thomas Kirby enlisted in the AIF at Blackboy Hill Camp on 18 Aug 1914 and completed his basic training at the same camp. On enlistment he nominated his father Thomas Kirby resident in London as his Next Of Kin. Thomas Kirby had been born in Birmingham and migrated to Australia at the age of 17 years. He had 9 months service in the 35th Fortress Company of the Militia (volunteer part-time forces). He was assigned to 11 Battalion with the regimental number 563. The Battalion boarded A11 HMAT *Ascanius* at Fremantle on 31 October 1914 but did not depart until 2 Nov 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 02 Mar 1915 when the Battalion moved by rail to Alexandria, boarded HMT *Suffolk* and sailed for Mudros on

Lemnos 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. Finally the British ordered the attack on Gallipoli and on 25 April 1915 11th Battalion as part of the 3rd Brigade landed at Anzac Cove and suffered considerable casualties. As his father wrote in post-war:
"My late son was in that never to be forgotten landing of the Australians on 25th April 1915."

More than 2000 men Australian and New Zealand men died in the first 24 hours of what would ultimately be a pointless British-commanded attack.

Private Kirby was evacuated to Egypt with acoustic deafness and admitted to hospital on 15 May 1915. His hearing returned and he was returned to Gallipoli where he re-joined his Battalion on 13 June 1915. Private Kirby suffered a penetrating wound to the skull and was evacuated aboard HMHS *Sicilia* but he died on 28 June 1915 (Died Of Wounds) and was buried at sea. He is remembered on the Lone Pine Memorial.

Additional/personal information:

Thomas Kirby had been born in Birmingham in England, a son of Mr T. Kirby, but the family then moved to London where he went to school. He moved to Australia when he was 17, apparently the only member of his immediate family to do so.

For his service he was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star and the British War Medal which were issued to his father from Melbourne. The final medal of his "trio", the Victory Medal was issued from Australia House, London. Pte Kirby had at least one relative in Australia as there is letter from a cousin, Mrs E Fox of East Fremantle on file.

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----------