Muir, Rollo Moncrieff

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



Memorial erected by the citizens of Bullecourt to honour Australian soldiers wounded and killed there.

Rail employment information

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

Rail employment notes: Born 6/4/1892. Joined WAGR 9/3/1911 aged 18 as Cleaner, Northam. Transferred to Merredin 21/8/1912, Southern Cross 18/11/1912, Northam 24/2/1913 and Merredin 2/6/1913. ("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 10/8/1913 and transferred to Perth 26/3/1914.

Granted leave to join AIF 7/9/1914 (Service No.283). Died of wounds whilst a prisoner of war in Germany.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	16th Australian Infantry Battalion.
Service number:	283
Date of death:	30 April 1917
Place of death:	Germany (in POW camp)
Age:	25
Rank:	Private

Burial/memorialisation: Hamburg Cemetery, Hamburg, Germany

Rollo Muir enlisted in the AIF on 7 September 1914. (Following his death, a second forename was added to Army records and he was then identified as Rollo Moncrieff Muir.) His initial training was at Blackboy Hill Camp and he was then allocated the regimental number 283 of 16 Battalion. His two younger brothers also enlisted and served in 12 Bn and 51 Bn. The 16th Battalion moved to Broadmeadows Camp in Melbourne where the 4th Brigade concentrated prior to departure from Australia aboard A40 HMAT *Ceramic* on 22 December 1914. Private Muir had no prior military training and he nominated his father as his Next of Kin.

Following arrival in Egypt the Battalion continued training in individual and formation military skills. On 5 April 1915 he was shipped from Alexandria to the Royal Naval Hospital (Malta) as a possible venereal case but the records do not indicate that he had any form of venereal disease and his service record does not record any non-effective service. On 1 August 1915 he shipped back to Alexandria aboard HMT *Karoa* and then on the following day to Gallipoli on HMT *Osconian* where he rejoined his unit. On 8 August 1915. 16 Battalion made an unsuccessful assault on Hill 971 and withdrew to

Reserve Gully leaving 80 men to assist a Gurkha Regiment assaulting Damakjelik Bair. Private Muir was one of the 16 Battalion men who were Wounded in Action on 12 August 1915 and evacuated to Mudros and from there to the UK via HMT *Aquitania*. He had suffered GSW to the buttock and hip. The ship arrived in London on 23 August 1915 and he was admitted to 3rd London General Hospital for a 3 day stay before being transferred to 1 Australian Auxiliary Hospital at Harefield. At some time later he was sent to No 2 Convalescent Depot where he remained until 28 July 1916 when he moved to 4 Training Bn and was taken on strength of that unit. He was admitted to Hospital for 14 days with Mumps before returning to 4 Training Bn. The records do not indicate how much of the time at the Training Bn was him being instructed and how much he was an instructor. On 16 January 1917 he crossed to France aboard SS *Princess Victoria* departing from Folkestone and finally rejoined his Battalion on 21 January 1917.

In the failed assault on the German fortifications at Bullecourt on 11 April 1917 he was initially marked as a Wounded in Action and a Prisoner of War but this was later amended to Missing. He was finally registered as a Prisoner of war on 23 April 1917 at the sick quarters of the Verden POW Camp. He had suffered massive wounds from grenade detonations. On 30 April 1917 he died and was buried in the cemetery attached to the POW Camp. His death was notified on the War Office List of 18 September 1917. For unknown reasons, perhaps the language mis-translation, his death was recorded as 13 April 1917 and there was considerable confusion but without doubt it was 30 April 1917.

Additional/personal information:

He was the son of John Moncrief Muir and Annie Muir (nee Humphreys) and his birth was recorded at Southern Cross WA in 1892. Two siblings have been noted, brothers named Hugh Monteith Muir born 1894 and William Hope Muir born 1899. Both enlisted, the former as 1777 in 4th Reinforcements to 12th Battalion and the latter as 2508 in 7th /12th Battalion.

In addition to the date of death confusion there was now a problem with his Next of Kin. He had married in the UK and this fact was unknown to Army Records or it seems to his family. His wife was Catherine Josephine Muir and she had a son, Richard Henry Spary. It was not known whether his wife was a divorcee, a widow or never legally married. Despite efforts by the family in Australia to determine where and when he married as late as 1921, they had been unsuccessful. Catherine Muir did produce the required documents to AIF HQ in London and was officially recorded as his Next of kin. The date of the marriage is still unknown but it was before 25 July 1916 as on that date he made a will leaving everything to his wife who he named as Kathleen Josephine Muir. The marriage appears to have been during his period of convalescence. It seems that there was a single piece of correspondence between Kathleen Muir and his parents in September 1917. The correct name is most likely to be Kathleen as in 1918 that name was used in official documents. Pensions were payable to his wife, Catherine (40/- per fortnight) and stepson (20/- per fortnight) with effect from 25 October 1917 and the stepsons to terminate on 23 April 1924.

The Government Railways Benefit Society were also confused and asked for a definite date of death. Further confusion arose after the War when the German Government provided an official death certificate naming him as Christian Muir. The official who wrote the certificate took the words Christian Name and believed his name was Christian. Efforts by the Red Cross to have this amended were unsuccessful and the official German death certificate names him as Christian Muir who died on 30 April 1917.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission had hundreds of sites where soldiers of the British Empire were buried in Germany and it was decided to consolidate these into just 4 cemeteries to allow for adequate care and maintenance. One of these was at Hamburg Ohlsdorf and Pte Muir's remains were re-interned at Hamburg. His family requested that the tombstone be engraved with the words "God Rest His Soul".

For his service he was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. His medals and other memorabilia were issued to his wife but the Memorial Scroll was returned unclaimed. Mrs Muir moved about and it was not always possible to know where she was living but it mostly seemed to be in the Greater London area. In May 1921 Army Records provided his father with

the last known address of Mrs Muir and added the comment that it was not known if she had remarried.

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----------