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Pirani, Ernest John

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



Villers-Bretonneux memorial

Rail employment information

Employer:	Western Australian Government Railways & Tramways
Branch:	Locomotive
Designation:	Apprentice, Fitter

Rail employment notes: Born 17/10/1896. Joined WAGR 8/1/1912 aged 15 as Junior Labourer, Midland Workshops. Appointed to Apprentice Fitter 10/3/1913.

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.

Granted leave to join AIF 30/9/1915 (Service No.3924). Killed in action 25/7/1916.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	11th Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	3924
Date of death:	25 July 1916
Place of death:	France
Age:	19
Rank:	Private

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

Ernest John Pirani was aged 18 years and 10 months when he enlisted in the AIF on 31 Aug 1915. Being under age he produced a document signed by his father giving approval for him to enlist. On that document he stated that his mother was dead and also initialled that entry. This was later shown to be false. He nominated his father, John Pirani as his Next of kin and stated that he had 13 months service with the 88th Infantry Regiment and produced a certificate from that regiment noting the return of all equipment and approving his enlistment in the AIF. His basic training was conducted at Blackboy Hill Camp and on completion he was allocated to 12th Reinforcements to 11 Battalion with the regimental number 3924. Before departing for overseas service, he had a studio photograph taken in uniform and the is held by the AWM as P04427.001 and may be seen on his AWM webpage.

Private Pirani departed Australia through the Port of Fremantle on 22 November 1915 aboard RMS *Mongolia*. On arrival in Egypt he joined the pool of reinforcements as the AIF Divisions in Egypt were restructured. Pte Pirani was taken on strength of 11 Battalion on 2 March 1916. The Battalion sailed from Alexandria on 29 March 1916 aboard HMT *Corsican* and disembarked at Marseilles on 5 April 1916 to join the British Expeditionary Force. The Battalion moved in short stages to take part in

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the Battle of Pozieres. In an assault on the main German lines he was Killed In Action and his body lay in “no mans land” for a time. At that time there was confusion over casualties date of death. The Battalion recorded most as between 22 and 25 July 1916. He was initially posted as Missing In Action (MIA). A witness, 3313 Pte Devine, 11 Bn stated that he died on 25 Jul 1916 and Pte Devine recovered his paybook and identity disc which he handed to Battalion HQ. Private Pirani was buried where he fell by a Corporal from the Pioneer Platoon of 9 Battalion AIF.

There was no Court of Enquiry to establish a date of death but in a notification to Army HQ dated 16 October 1916 his classification was amended from MIA to Killed In Action on 25 July 1916. His remains were never found by the Graves Registration Unit after the War; he has no known grave and so is remembered on the Villers-Bretonneux Memorial.

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:

Ernest Pirani was born in Armadale Victoria, a son of John and Isabella (nee Walton) Pirani. (Vic BDM 24899/1896). However but the family moved west when he was young, as did many people after the 1890s gold finds in WA, and he attended North Kalgoorlie state school.

> PIRANI.—In sad but loving memory of my dear friend, Private Ernest John Pirani, who was killed in action on July 25, in France (B Co., 11th Battalion). Though death divides fond memory clings. — Inserted by his sincere friend, Ruby Counsel, West Guildford. *The West Australian* 20/11/1916p1
>
> PIRANI.—Killed in action, on the 25th July, 1916, at Pozieres, Private Ernest John Pirani, dearly beloved son of Mrs. and Mr. J. Pirani, and brother of Ivy, Elsie, and Norman. His country called - He gave his life, his all. *Kalgoorlie Miner* 21/11/1916p4

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. A military pension was awarded to his mother (whom Ernest had alleged was already deceased in 1915). Mrs Isabella Pirani was awarded a pension of 14/- per fortnight commencing on 16 Feb 1917. Mr John Pirani, the NOK, died on 27 Jun 1940 at the age of 78 years. His mother thed pension recipient lived to the age of 87 years and died on 08 Jun 1951. Both parents are buried in the Kalgoorlie Cemetery.

Private Pirani had a cousin, Carl Pirani who enlisted as 218 of 16 Battalion on 4 Sep 1914 was discharged on 10 May 1915 and Died of Illness (Diabetes mellitus) at Wooroloo in West Australia on 26 Apr 1918. Carl Pirani stated he was Jewish on enlistment and was buried in the Jewish Orthodox Section of the Karrakatta cemetery. (Ernest Pirani enlisted as a Church of England.)

Private Pirani has a memorial plaque (L16A) in Kings Park dedicated by his family in 2006 juxtaposed with his cousin Carl which was dedicated by his mother.

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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----------