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Pritchard, James Rhys

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:	Locomotive
Designation:	Call Boy

Rail employment notes: Born 24/5/1900. Joined WAGR 20/1/1916 aged 15 as Call Boy, Collie. "Call boy" was the most junior job for a young man wanting to join the locomotive crews on the WAGR, involving work around the locomotive shed and also being sent out, usually on bicycle, literally to call/wake crews for their rosters, especially when train times changed. The next step up would be Cleaner.

Granted leave to join AIF 22/1/1917 (Service No.6869). Died of illness in England 2/4/1918.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	28th Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	6869
Date of death:	2 April 1918
Place of death:	England
Age:	18
Rank:	Private

Burial/memorialisation: Rhondda (Trealaw) Cemetery, Rhondda, Wales, United Kingdom

James Rhys Pritchard enlisted in the AIF on 15 January 1917 with the written approval of his sister who was also his guardian. His sister Gladys Symes was also listed as his Next of Kin (NOK). James had migrated to Australia from Wales at the age of 10 years. His basic training was conducted at Blackboy Hill Camp following which he was allocated to 20th Reinforcements to 28 Battalion with the regimental number 6869.

He departed Australia aboard A30 HMAT *Borda* on 29 Jun 1917 and disembarked at Plymouth UK on 25 August 1917. Pte Pritchard marched into 7 Training Battalion the following day where he remained until 08 November 1917 when he was transferred to 6 Training Battalion for unknown reason. While on the roll of 6 Trg Bn he went AWOL between 25 Jan 1918 and 03 Feb 1918 when he returned of his own volition. At the subsequent disciplinary hearing he was found guilty and sentenced to 14 Days Confinement and the loss of 36 days' pay.

While still at 6 Trg Bn he presented sick on 25 March 1918 and was admitted to 1 Australian Dermatological Hospital at Bulford in England where he died on 2 April 1918 (officially Died of injuries, or DOI) the cause of death being recorded as bilateral pneumonia. He was buried on 9 April 1918 following a service in the family home in Glamorganshire with his brother, uncles and cousins in attendance and the Rev D G Evans officiating. His burial site was Trealaw cemetery.

Additional/personal information:

James Pritchard had been born in Wales but had migrated to Australia at the age of 10 years with his father (also named James Rhys Pritchard) and two sisters, although at least one brother remained in Wales and his mother's fate is not clear.

> PRITCHARD.—In loving memory of our dear brother, Private James Pritchard, who died of pneumonia in England, on April 2, 1918. Though lost to sight, to memory ever dear. Inserted by Gladys and Annie. *The West Australian* 2/4/1919p1

The family in Wales informed the AIF representative present that it was their intention to exhume his casket in 3 months and have it confined to a family grave. It is not known whether this actually occurred as CWGC still records his original burial site. The family paid for an inscription on his grave which reads: Diogel Y' Mreichiau'R Iseu which may mean "Safe in the arms of Jesus".

For his service he was entitled to receive the British War Medal as his sole entitlement. Pte Pritchard was never taken-on-strength of 28 Battalion and remained 20th/28 Bn. Army records tried valiantly to determine who should receive the campaign medal. This was a complicated matter as his father was still living at the time and resident in Collie WA. He also had a living brother in Wales as was evident from the burial report. There were two sisters whose claim ranked below the father and brother. The only mention of the father was that he had claimed the War Gratuity. Army Records continued to try and sort the matter but there is no evidence that the medal was issued and all correspondence ceased in 1930.

Pte Pritchard had a Will made on 13 Sep 1917 in which he bequeathed half of his estate to his guardian sister, Mrs Gladys Symes and the other half to another sister Annie Pritchard who apparently resided with his father in Collie. A Death Certificate was requested to allow the Will to be carried out.

In a further insult, his personal effects were lost at sea when the SS *Barunga* was sunk.

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----------