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Roberts, Alfred William

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:	Traffic
Designation:	Junior Porter

Rail employment notes: Born 28/5/1895. Joined WAGR 2/9/1912 aged 17 as Junior Porter, Perth Goods. Transferred to Perth station 6/11/1912 and back to Perth Goods 5/2/1913.

Granted leave to join AIF 27/7/1915. Killed in action 20/7/1916.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force
Military unit:	32nd Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	1356
Date of death:	20 July 1916
Place of death:	Fleurbaix, France
Age:	21
Rank:	Corporal
Burial/memorialisation:	VC Corner Australian Cemetery and Memorial, Fromelles, Lille, Nord Pas de Calais, France

Alfred William Roberts was a serving member of 86th Regiment of Infantry (part-time militia) when he enlisted in the AIF on 19 July 1915. He was assigned to D Company of 32nd Battalion with the regimental number 1356 and nominated his widowed mother (Emily Roberts) as his Next of kin. He was kitted out at Blackboy Hill Camp and then moved to Adelaide aboard SS *Indarra*. He continued training in South Australia at Mitcham Military Camp and Morphettville racecourse before departing Australia aboard HMAT *Geelong* from Port Adelaide on 18 November 1915 having been appointed a Lance Corporal on 16 August 1915.

The Battalion landed at Suez on 16 December 1915 and underwent further training at both an individual and formation level before departing Alexandria on 17 June 1916 aboard HMT *Transylvania* to join the British Expeditionary Force. While in Egypt L/Cpl Roberts underwent circumcision for phimosis resulting in him being absent from duty between 13 January 1916 and 5 March 1916. Promotion to Corporal followed on 26 May 1916. He landed at Marseilles on 23 June 1916 and moved to the Armentieres sector for training in front line skills. On 19/20 July 1916 his Brigade was flung into the disastrous Battle of Fromelles in which he was Killed in action. None of the 410 Australian bodies on the battlefield could be identified and they are remembered on the VC Corner Memorial at Fromelles as they have no known graves.

Additional/personal information:

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Alfred was born in Adelaide, South Australia but the family must have moved while he was young as his schooling was in Ballarat Victoria (AWM). A family notice shows he had at least 3 siblings, and he had not moved to WA alone:

> ROBERTS.—On July 20, in France, Corporal Alf. Roberts, dearly beloved son of Mrs. and the late Mr. W. Roberts, of 98 Salisbury-st., Subiaco, brother of Mrs. L. Totter, Mrs. J. McLagan, and Bert. My dear son, loved by all who knew him. (*Western Mail* 8/9/1916p50)

AWM holds a studio photograph **(DA11276)** of (then) Private Roberts in uniform. The photograph is undated but was probably taken in Perth or Adelaide as he is shown not wearing AIF collar badges or colour patches. Following his death his mother received a pension; she died in 1932 and is buried in Karrakatta Cemetery.

Corporal Roberts is remembered on a memorial plaque in Kings Park (M492) which was dedicated by his mother.

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----------