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Sayers, Albert Henry

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

Albert Sayers, and 11 other soldiers, died without reaching the war as their troopship fell victim to the ‘Spanish flu’ pandemic



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

Rail employment information

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

Rail employment notes: Born 1/8/1891. Joined WAGR 8/10/1910 aged 19 as Cleaner, Bunbury. (“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 Busselton 1/3/1911 and promoted to Fireman 22/12/1912. Transferred to Midland Junction 26/1/1914, to Narrogin 19/2/1915 and Brookton 16/12/1915.

Granted leave to join AIF 22/3/1917 (Service No.3215). Died of influenza at Woodman's Point 15/12/1918.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Military unit:	Railway Unit Details
Service number:	3215
Date of death:	15 December 1918
Place of death:	Place not yet found
Age:	27
Rank:	Sapper

Burial/memorialisation: Rockingham Cemetery, Rockingham, Western Australia, Australia

Albert Henry Sayers enlisted in the AIF on 12 March 1917, and was attached to Railway Unit Reinforcements. This group was mainly made up of experienced railway employees who were needed for the restoration and operation of rail systems badly damaged in the war.

He embarked for the Middle East on HMAT *Boonah* from Adelaide on 22 October 1918, but this transport ship did not deliver its cargo as intended. She would be the last troopship to leave Australia, and by the time she arrived in Durban for supplies the war had already ended. On hearing this news the ship turned around, but Durban was already suffering badly from the ‘Spanish flu’ pandemic and the disease came aboard, likely from the stevedores. Cases and then deaths increased as the ship steamed back towards Fremantle where the sickest were offloaded to Woodman Point, including Sapper Sayers.

27 men, and 4 nurses attending them, died from this outbreak on the *Boonah*.

His mother noted that he was ‘One of two Western Australians returned in a dying condition from the Tragedy Ship “Boonah” 12/12/19.’

Additional/personal information:

Albert Sayers was born in Perth in 1891, a son of Carinia (or "Carlo") Sayers and Flora Sayers (nee Thompson). This couple had married in Perth in 1891 and Albert was the eldest of at least six children, the later ones being born in the Busselton district. (BDM 991/1891 et al.)

> SAYERS. — On December 15, 1918, at Quarantine Station, Woodman's Point, W.A., of pneumonic influenza, Pte Albert Henry (Railway Unit), late W.A.G.R., beloved eldest son of F. and C. Sayers, Busselton, dearly loved brother of Laurie (H.M.A.S. Encounter), Les (Palestine), Charles, Rene, Jessie and Molly, and grandson of Mrs. G. H. Fenner, Busselton. *Sunday Times* (Perth) 12/1/1919

The *Boonah* was originally a German freighter, but happened to be in Sydney at the outbreak of war and was seized by Australian authorities and later converted to a troop ship.

A younger brother Laurence Allen Sayers served on HMAS *Encounter*, whilst an uncle Lance Corporal Victor Albert Thompson died of wounds fighting in France in the 51st Battalion.

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----------