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Smith, Ernest John

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



Villers-Bretonneux Australian memorial (see text)

Rail employment information

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

Rail employment notes: Born 7/3/1893. Joined WAGR 1/8/1910 aged 17 as Junior Porter, Perth.
Porters were in the Traffic Branch but it seems Ernest Smith wanted a different career and transferred to the Locomotive Branch:

Transferred to Cleaner, Wagin 17/5/1911 and Albany 3/10/1911.
("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, Albany 5/12/1913 and transferred to Katanning 21/1/1914.

Granted leave to join AIF 15/2/1916 (Service No.5081). Killed in action 10/6/1918.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	28th Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	5081
Date of death:	10 June 1918
Place of death:	Morlancourt, France
Age:	25
Rank:	Private

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

Ernest John Smith enlisted in the AIF at Blackboy Hill Camp on 24 Feb 1916. On enlistment he nominated his mother Mrs Clara Smith to be his next of kin (NOK) and declared that he had no previous military experience. On completion of his basic military training at Blackboy Hill Camp he was allocated to 13th Reinforcements to 28 Battalion with the regimental number 5081 and departed Australia from Fremantle on 18 Jul 1916 aboard A48 HMAT *Seang Bee*.

He disembarked at Plymouth UK and marched into 7 Trg Bn on 10 Sep 1916. Pte Smith then had a number of medical issues which required his admission to Fargo Military Hospital in England on 18 Oct 1916 for treatment of an inguinal hernia, with return to duty on 26 Oct 1916. He was readmitted to Fargo Hospital suffering from mumps on 26 Nov 1916 but returned to duty on 08 Dec1916. A medical board did not judge that he was fit for active service and he was temporarily placed in 6 Training Battalion. He departed England to join the British Expeditionary Force on 23 April 1918 and entered the NZBD that same day. Pte Smith was taken-on-strength of 28 Bn on 6 May 1918.

He was Killed in Action near Morlancourt on 10 June 1918, his body was never recovered from the battlefield and he 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 Smith was born in Perth, a son of Robert James & Clara Smith. He was the third of eight children of this couple. When asked about his father, Mrs Smith stated that she had separated from her husband in August 1911 and had not seen or heard of him since. This is dubious, as the couple placed a joint family notice:

> SMITH.—Killed in action in France on June 10, 1918, Private Ernest J. Smith (Dick), the dearly loved eldest son of Mrs. C. Smith, late of 283 Hay-street, and Mr. R. J. Smith, Stirling-road, Claremont, loved brother of Mrs. Cardinal, Mrs. Hollis, late Private Charles (killed in action, August 22, 1916), Stanley, Eric Gladys (present address, 185 Beaufort-street), aged 25 years, after two years' service, late of Railways, Albany and Katanning.
>
> SMITH.—On June 10, 1918, killed in action in France, Private Ernest J. Smith (Dick), the dear brother of Maud and Ted Hollis, Lorraine, Ocean-street, Cottesloe Beach, aged 25 years.
> Both *The West Australian* 2/7/1918p1

Prior to departing from Australia Pte Smith made his will in which he bequeathed his estate to his mother other than the proceeds of his insurance policy which he left to his sister, Mrs Maud Hollis. For his service he was entitled to the British War Medal and the Victory Medal together with other memorabilia. Pte Smith's War Gratuity was paid to his mother presumably under the terms of his Will it being part of the estate.

Family tragedy - Pte Ernest Smith's brother 4243 Pte Charles Everard William Smith (born 1896) of 12 Battalion had also enlisted but unfortunately also died. He had been killed in action at Moquet Farm, France, om 19 August 1916.

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----------