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Summerton, Herbert Clark

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:	Cleaner

Rail employment notes: Born 19/11/1895. Joined WAGR 18/9/1911 aged 15 as Junior Labourer, Midland Junction. Appointed to Cleaner, Kalgoorlie 8/2/1914.

("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 Brunswick Junction 31/1/1915 and to Midland Junction 5/10/1915.

Granted leave to join AIF 27/7/1916 (Service No.6818). Killed in action 6/10/1917.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	11th Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	6818
Date of death:	6 October 1917
Place of death:	Broodseinde Ridge, Belgium
Age:	23
Rank:	Private

Burial/memorialisation: Menin Gate Memorial, Ypres, Flanders, Belgium

Herbert Clarke Summerton enlisted in the AIF at the same time as his brother Thomas George Summerton on 1 August 1916. On enlistment he nominated his mother Bridget Summerton as his next of kin. He had no previous military experience. His basic military training was conducted at Blackboy Hill Camp and on 22 November 1916 he was allocated to 22nd Reinforcements to 11 Battalion and assigned the regimental number 6818.

He departed Australia on 9 November 1916 aboard HMAT *Argyllshire* and disembarked at Devonport UK on 10 January 1917 and marched into 3 Training Battalion that same day. His training was interrupted by a short admission to the Fargo Military Hospital. On 5 April 1917, he was struck off the strength of 3 Training Battalion and departed England through Folkestone to join the British Expeditionary Force in France. Private Summerton was taken-on-strength of 11 Battalion, in the field, on 24 April 1917.

The Battalion became engaged in the Third Battle of Ypres (now Ieper, in Belgium) and on 6 October 1917 he was Killed in action by a shell fragment. His Red Cross File contains a number of eye witness reports of his death including those of 6762 Griffiths and 1761 Flannagan. He was buried on the battlefield just to the rear of the trench and the position marked but no map reference was recorded. His place of burial was recorded as Broodseinde Ridge adjacent to the Ypres-Menin railway. After the

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War the Graves Registration Unit were unable to locate his remains so he has no known grave and he is remembered on the Menin Gate memorial at Ypres (now Ieper).

Additional/personal information:

Herbert George Summerton was a son of John Summerton and Mary Bridget Summerton (nee Fields). Nine children's births are registered to this couple between 1885 and 1904 around the Perth region but strangely, Herbert's birth is not recorded – at least, not as Herbert. However there is a "James Rubert Summerton" recorded, and it must be remembered that much interpretation of hand-written records is involved. Family notices when they first appeared have two versions:

> SUMMERTON.—Killed in action in France on October 6, Private Rupert [Herbert] Clark (Bert), late fireman W.A. railway, Kalgoorlie and Brunswick, third beloved son of Mr. and Mrs. J. Summerton, of Charles-street, Midland Junction, loved brother of Private T. G. and Jim, Rose, Elsie, Roy, Vera, Kit, and little Mevielle Lloyd George, one month 17 days before his 21st birthday. … —Inserted by his dear mother, father, and family. The West Australian 24/11/1917p1
>
> SUMMERTON.—In fond memory of Private Hubert Clark, killed in action on October 6, 1917. His duty done. – Inserted by his loving friend Olive. The West Australian 27/11/1917p1.

Because official notification was often delayed, it was common for notices to be placed on the anniversary, but by then the spelling has changed to "Herbert":

> SUMMERTON.—In loving memory of our dear son and brother, Private Herbert Clark (Bert), killed in action in the Battle of Flanders on October 6, 1917, brother of Private T. G. Summerton, on active service. … Inserted by his loving parents, brothers and sisters, Charles-street, Midland Junction. The West Australian 5/10/1918p1
>
> SUMMERTON.—In sad loving memory of my dear friend, Private Herbert Clark (Bert), killed in action in the battle of Flanders, on October 6, 1917. … Inserted by his sincere friend Olive. The West Australian 7/10/1918p1

Army and War Memorial records show he was enlisted as Herbert Clarke Summerton.

Private Summerton was entitled to the British War Medal and the Victory Medal and in 1921 when Army Records enquired of his mother if there was anyone with a superior claim to his campaign medals, she nominated his father Mr J Summerton. The medals and other memorabilia were then issued to his father. On 4 June 1917 Private Summerton had made his Will and bequeathed all his property to his mother.

Pte Summerton's brother Thomas George Summerton served in 11 Battalion as number 6819 and returned to Australia on 1 Jun 1919. Their mother Mary Bridget Summerton, Herbert's nominated next of kin, died aged 78 in 1942.

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----------