Austerberry, Francis Frederick

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



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

Frank Austerberry volunteered first into the Army, then changed the next year to the Air Force where he was shot down over Europe. He left a wife pregnant with a daughter he would never see,

Rail employment information

Employer:	Western Australian Government Railways
Branch:	Accounts & Audit
Designation:	Clerk

Rail employment notes: Born 21/9/1913. Joined WAGR 10/7/1929 aged 15 as Junior Clerk, Accounts & Audits Branch, Perth. Appointed Clerk 21/9/1934. Enlisted in RAAF 27/4/1942. Killed in action in Holland 28/10/1944.

Military service information

Conflict:	Second World War 1939-1945
Service:	Royal Australian Air Force
Military unit:	No.90 Squadron (RAF)
Service number:	415958
Date of death:	28 October 1944
Place of death:	Netherlands
Age:	31
Rank:	Flight Sergeant

Buried/commemorated: Bergen-op-Zoom War Cemetery, Netherlands

Francis ‘Frank’ Austerberry first enlisted in the Australian Army on 27 February 1941. He was allocated service number W18849 as a private in the 11th Battalion. At that time he quoted his next of kin as his father Frederick Austerberry.

However, the next year he changed to the Royal Australian Air Force. He was discharged from the army on 25 April 1942 and enlisted in the RAAF the following day, with new service number 415958 (DVA). He was then seconded to the (British) Royal Air Force and moved to England.

His next of kin is recorded by the RAAF as Jean Austerberry, his wife, however this marriage is not recorded in WA and was likely after he moved to England.

Squadron 90 of the RAF had several incarnations but by 1944 it was flying the Avro Lancaster, a 4-engine heavy bomber mainly on night time raids over Germany and German-occupied areas.

Frank Austerberry was killed in operations over Holland, and likely on such a night bombing raid in a Lancaster, on 28 October 1944.

Additional/personal information:

Francis Austerberry was born on 21 September 1913, in Victoria Park (BDM 1734/1913 & DVA), the youngest child of Frederick & Frances (nee Hodges) Austerberry. He was their only son although he had at least three elder sisters.

After his death it seems the family may not have had immediate details – if a plane was shot down over Europe, it was not possible for Allied forces to retrieve the body or even to confirm the crash and deaths. There no family notices in the immediate aftermath, the first notices found were from cousins five months later:

> AUSTERBERRY.- Treasured memories of our dear Nephew and Cousin, Frank (F/Sgt, RAAF), killed in air operations over Holland, October 28 1944; beloved nephew of Danny and cousin of George, Bernie, Robert and Olwyn Davis. *The West Australian* 13/3/1945p1

But soon after that came what may have been a surprise

> AUSTERBERRY (nee Jean Wootton). By cable.-On June 4 at Rugby. England, to Jean and the late Flight-Sgt F.F. (Frank) Austerberry, of the RAAF, England – a daughter. *The West Australian* 26/6/1945p1

Family notices by Frank's parents and siblings appeared for several years on the anniversary date – by then the Air Force may have been able to locate the downed plan and confirm casualties, e.g.

> AUSTERBERRY (F. Sgt.) F. F.— In fond and loving memory of our dearly loved only son Frank, killed in air operations over Flushing Holland, October 28th,1944. Inserted by Mr. and Mrs.F. Austerberry. *Daily News* (Perth) 28/10/1948

It is not known whether the family in WA ever met Frank's widow and daughter.

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----------