

Private William Barrie
Waratah March Volunteer
Service Number 5036



The Barrie Family, from left: Lorna Margaret, Robert, Vera May, Nancy Waratah, Mrs Eliza Bertha Barrie, Jean, William, Pte William Barrie.

William Barrie was born in Congupna, Victoria, in 1878. A miner, he was living in Helensburgh North in 1915 with his wife Eliza and six children, Lorna, Robert, Vera, Nancy, Jean and William when he decided to volunteer for overseas service in the First World War. He chose to join the Waratah Recruitment March at Helensburgh on 15 December 1915 and was cleared for enlistment by the Examining Medical Officer, Captain Selwyn Harrison. Barrie marched with the Waratah volunteers to Sydney where he was enlisted into the Australian Imperial Force at Liverpool on 20 December 1915. After three months of military training at Liverpool Camp, he returned home on a short spell of leave. It is highly likely that the family portrait was taken in March 1916.

On 1 April 1916, Private Barrie (Service No 5036) embarked on board the SS Makarini with the 16th Reinforcements from Sydney. He was disembarked at Suez on 2 May 1916 and sailed on the SS Caledonia to Alexandria and then to Marseilles, France, where he was disembarked on 17 May 1916.

Private Barrie joined the 1st Battalion on 24 July 1916. He was wounded in action (right hand) on 8 April 1917 and was hospitalised. His wife Eliza was sent the following cable "REPORTED PRIVATE WILLIAM BARRIE WOUNDED WILL ADVISE ANYTHING FURTHER RECIEVED." He rejoined his battalion on 10 May. On 29 August 1917, he was given leave to the U.K. returning to duty in Belgium on 19

September. Two weeks later, on October 4, he was involved in an attack on a German pillbox and was listed as "Missing in Action".

Sometime later, probably in December, Eliza Barrie received the following letter and her husband's effects from Sergeant Campbell:

Yorance
19.10.14

Dear Mrs Barrie

I am sending by registered post the private effects of No 5086 Pte Wm Barrie 1st Bn. who was killed in action on the 4th inst while gallantly attacking a German pill box. He was lying dead in the doorway on our arrival & his mates had taken his paybook away from him. A note among his letters asked for his wallet to be sent to you & I am carrying out that wish. I myself am in a different Battalion but I am able to assure you that he was buried the following morning during a lull in the fighting & a cross marks the spot. Our advance that morning was most successful & being killed when so near to our objective was most unfortunate. Censorship regulations preclude naming my regiment. But I ask you madam to accept my deepest sympathy in your sad bereavement. Hoping you receive the parcel safely I remain yours faithfully J. C. Campbell Sgt

Another letter was received from Lieutenant Mortlake:

France

22 10 14

Dear Mrs. Marie

I very much regret to have to advise you that your husband & the Marie is reported to have been killed in action on 4th October last, as one of the older hand who had seen much fighting, he was esteemed by all who knew him, and I can personally testify to his great value as a good & efficient soldier, who was ever ready to do his duty no matter where it lay. I also personally feel his loss the greater as he served me faithfully for many months as my batman, and as his platoon commander I would now ask you to accept my sincere sympathy in your great loss: He died doing his duty to his country.

Yours very sincerely
Mortlake Lt

Distressed and perplexed, Eliza wrote to the Base Records Office on 21 December 1917:

“Dear Sir,

Some few weeks back I received a cable from you stating that my husband No 5036 Pte W Barrie was missing from the 4th October last. I am now sending you copies of two letters that I have received from France by this last mail. Kindly make enquiries as to how the mistake has been made.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs Barrie

Helensburgh

South Coast”

On 2 January 1918, the Base Records Office acknowledged receipt of Mrs Barrie’s letter and requested the letters sent by Sergeant Campbell and Lieutenant Mortlake be forwarded to the office. On 6 February, the Base Records Office sent an advice that “no further official news has yet been received... I shall be glad if you will return this letter to me with a statement as to whether you have obtained any news of the soldier from any other source.” Eliza wrote back

“Dear Sir,

In reply to this Notice I might state I have already written and told you all the news I have had & also sent you the letters I received from France informing me that my Husband was killed on Oct 4th 1917. I have received the letters back from you and was also told that a cable had been sent to London to find out all the particulars. Kindly let me know if it is necessary to send those letters back again.

Mrs E B Barrie

February 9th 1918.”

Understandably, Eliza was anxious to receive a death certificate and then a War Pension. On 4 January 1918, the Grand Order of Oddfellows (Black Diamond Branch, Helensburgh) tried to assist her by sending a letter requesting “a certificate of the death of Private William Barrie No 5036 C Company 1st Battalion [sic] who has been reported missing in action.”

At the end of January 1918, Sgt. Campbell and Lt Mortlake lodged official statements leading to a cable being sent to the Base Records Office on 21 February 1918 saying “Concerning 5036 W. Barrie, 1st Battalion. Your A.R.12556 Nothing to prevent finding deceased.”

On 4 March 1918, the Australian Coal and Shale Employees Federation also sent a letter to the Base Records Office to have the matter finalised.

AUSTRALIAN COAL AND SHALE EMPLOYEES' FEDERATION

ILLAWARRA DISTRICT

John Wonders

March 4th 1918

FROM SECRETARY *Helenburg* LODGE

To Officer in charge
Australian Imperial Force
Base Records office
Melbourne

Dear Sir

dist. to you 8/3
I have been instructed to enquire from you, as to the fate, of one of our Members, William Barrie N° 5036 of the 1st Battalion. his wife has had a letter from, Sergeant F. G. Campbell of the 7th Battalion N° 5355, also one from Lieutenant Mortlake or Mortlock, along with his Watch you so Mrs Barrie, have informed me, has seen both the letters. referred to, which testifies that he (Barrie) was killed in action October 14th 1917 in France. the good Lady, is almost distracted & anxious to get the official information. I take it she would like to receive through you the death Certificate. I may also inform you she is left with (6 six) children, to support who are all equally anxious to know the fate of their father, so by endeavouring, to as early as possible, comply with the above request, you will assist to alleviate the very much troubled minds, of a Mother & her Family.

P.S please when you reply could you advise Mrs Barrie if there is any way for her to get a little more assistance to help her to rear her family
Address yours Mrs William Barrie
Short Street
Helenburg
N.S.W.

It's difficult to understand the workings of the Base Records Office, however, it is likely they were waiting for a Court of Enquiry ruling. Although they had the cable dated 21 February saying there was "Nothing to prevent finding deceased", they wrote to Mrs Barrie on 13 March 1918 saying

B.G.

13th March 1918.

82341

Dear Madam,

In reply to a communication from the Secretary, Helensburgh Lodge, I have to state as your husband, No. 5036 Private W. Barrie, 1st Battalion, is still posted as "missing", a certificate of report of death cannot be issued. A cable message was despatched to A.I.F. Headquarters, London, for this case to be investigated but sufficient time has not yet elapsed for a reply to have been received.

You are advised to submit a clear statement of your case to the Deputy Commissioner of Pensions, Sydney, for consideration under the War Pensions Act. This claim could be made through your local Old Age Pensions agent.

Yours faithfully,

Major.
Officer i/c Base Records.

Mrs. W. Barrie,
Short Street,
HELENSBURGH.

N.S.W.

Nonetheless, a Court of Enquiry held on 22 March 1918, ruled that Private Barrie had indeed been "KILLED IN ACTION" The paperwork, however, wasn't signed off by the Adjutant-General's Office until 3 April 1918.

Meanwhile, Eliza applied for a War Pension which was granted at the rate of 3 pound and 5 shillings per fortnight from 14 March 1918 (\$235.10 per fortnight in today's currency (2013)). The minimum

wage in 1919 was 8 pounds and 12 shillings per fortnight. A Certificate of Death for "the late No 5036, Private William Barrie, 1st Battalion" was sent on 24 July 1918.

Postscript

Every deceased First World War Australian serviceman was entitled to a memorial plaque and memorial scroll supervised by the Graves Services Unit. Eliza's troubles with the Base Records Office arose again in May 1921 when she was advised

7 May 1921,

Dear Madam,

I regret very much that, notwithstanding the efforts of our Graves Services Unit, we have so far been unable to obtain any trace of the last resting place of

The late No 5036, Private Wm. Barrie, 1st Battalion.

And, so that no possible source of information shall be overlooked, I shall be much obliged if you will let me have on loan any letters or communications that contain any reference to the circumstances surrounding his death, particularly the exact locality at which it occurred, or where he was last seen alive. Of course any information you may have received as to his burial would be of the greatest assistance. The reason these steps are being taken is to identify, if at all possible, those bodies that are being recovered but which have nothing on them to definitely establish identification, and thus obviate the necessity of interring them in the new Military Cemeteries under the heading "An Unknown Australian Soldier."

Only those portions of any letters having a direct bearing or reference to the above need be forwarded. They will be carefully preserved and returned without delay.

If you have nothing that will help, would you kindly let us know, so that we can advise the overseas authorities.

Thanking you in anticipation,

Yours faithfully

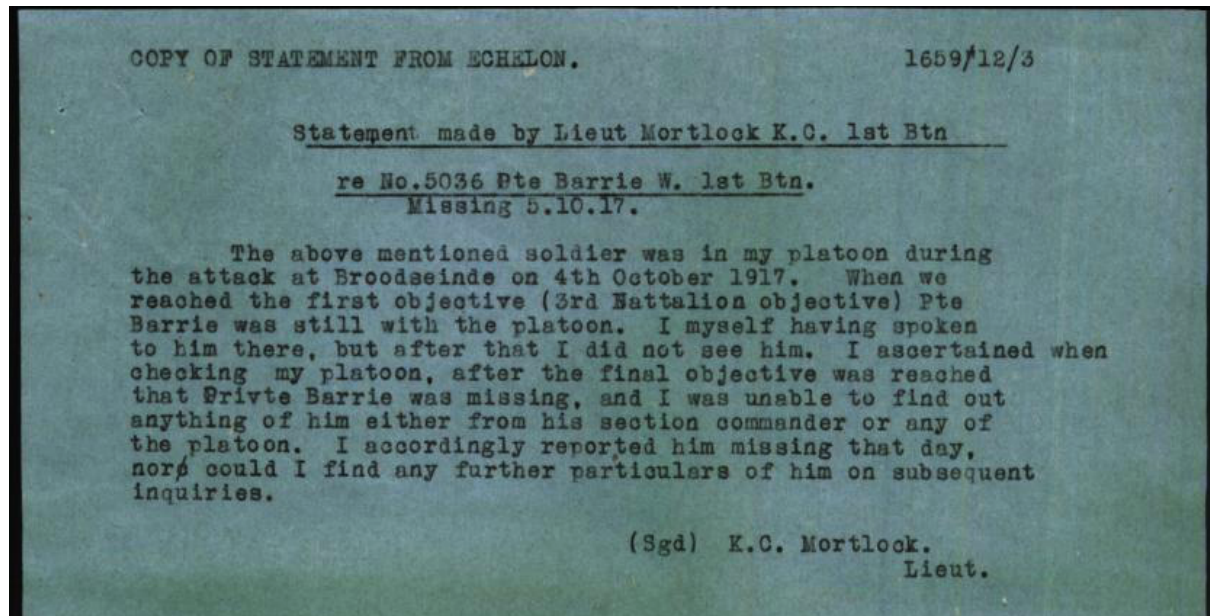
Eliza, now Mrs Collins, replied

"Dear Sir,

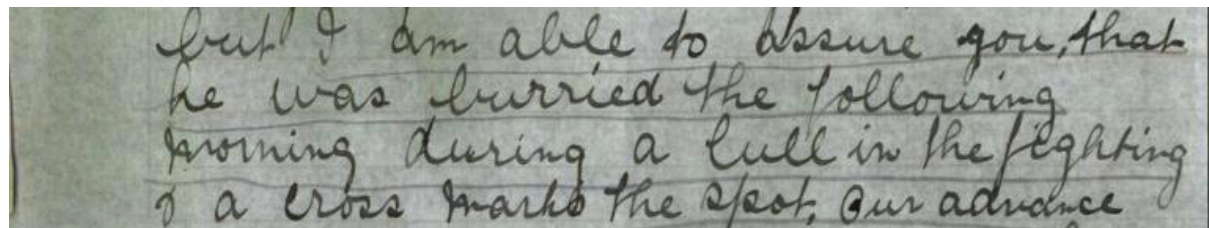
I am sending you the only letter I have in reference to my late husband's death and burial.

Yours faithfully, Mrs E B. Collins (nee Barrie)"

A copy of this letter and official statements were already in William Barrie's file. The place where he died was specifically identified as Broodseinde by Lt. Mortlake in his official report



In his letter, Sergeant Campbell attested that a cross marked the spot where he was buried.



After confirmation from London, the following notation was subsequently added to the file.

