

William Henry Loftus Byrns

Private William Byrns

18th Battalion, AIF

Service Number: 1777

Born: 1880, Bingara, NSW

Died: 4 August 1916, Pozieres France

William Byrns was born at Bingara in 1880, the son of William and Ellen Jane Byrns. After leaving school, Byrns worked for a time as a fettler for NSW Railways. On enlistment, he was employed as a labourer with J J McCarthy at Jamberoo. His widowed mother had moved to Penrith around 1909 and later married William Best. At the time of her son's enlistment she was living in Castlereagh Street Penrith.

Byrns enlisted on 31 May 1915 and was allocated to the 2nd Reinforcements, 18th Battalion. He left from Sydney on board HMAT Kanowna on 19 June 1915. On 22 August 1915 he landed on the Gallipoli peninsula. His battalion was immediately assigned to the defence of Hill 60. Byrns received a gunshot wound to the shoulder and was evacuated to Mudros on board HS Gloucester Castle on 25 August 1915. He was admitted to No 2 Australian General Hospital, Ghezireh and was later at the Mena House Convalescent Hospital in Cairo. Byrns was stationed in Egypt until his transfer aboard HT Scotian on 10 May 1916 to France.

His battalion's first major action came at Pozieres in mid-1916 as part of the wider Battle of the Somme, being committed twice in July and August. Byrns was killed in action on 4 August 1916 during the first major battle at Pozieres. He has no known grave. In a letter home a few months earlier Byrns remarked 'I am sending you these photos, as you may not see me again'. His mother's husband, William Best died just a few months after her son. She died in June 1921. Four months later, Byrns' sister, Mrs J H Purcell wrote to the government stating that she had received her brother's scroll as she was his only living relative. Mrs Purcell was living in Derby Street Penrith at the time. In August 1917, his mother's poignant memorial in the Nepean Times read in part: 'Far away, on the field of battle, there 'midst the shot and shell, In defence of those he loved dearly, My darling son fell'.

Memorial Details:

- Honour Roll, Villers-Bretonneux, France
- Honour Roll, Memory Park, Penrith

Source:

- [National Archives of Australia](#) Search: B2455, BYRNS W H L
- Australian War Memorial First World War Nominal Roll
- Australian War Memorial Roll of Honour
- Penrith City Library Biography

Trove:

- [Nepean Times](#): 23 October 1915, p2 c1
- [Nepean Times](#): 23 September 1916, p3