



Letter to “Vi” –

“Here ... you are a few miles back from the lines the guns are still roaring and you have only to go outside the door any time to see aerial fights going on. Shots bursting everywhere around the airships of the enemy miles above the ground. I have seen dozens brought down our own and Fritz’s and a thrilling sight it is when at last the airman is hit by the flying shrapnel and down he comes sometimes the craft in flames sometimes not, always however to a fearful death ... you see the conquered suddenly lose control of their machine which crumple up and come down like a plummet and to be smashed to matchwood ...”

Extract from Cons 3403, item 1919/621,
Probate file of James Thomas Barnard

The Wills of Western Australian Soldiers from the First World War provide sometimes unexpected glimpses into the lives of those who served and died during this conflict. Grants of Probate and Letters of Administration files transferred by the Supreme Court of Western Australia to the care and custody of the State Records Office of Western Australia over 20 years ago, comprise not only the legal documentation of those who were killed in battle, but sometimes surprising historical records. These help us document the personal, poignant and true experience of war and its effect back home on loved ones in Australia.

'REMEMBRANCE' WW1 SOLDIERS' WILLS

In partnership with the Returned Services League of Australia WA (RSL) and the Supreme Court, the State Records Office will identify and digitise all WW1 Soldiers' Wills and make them available through a database and an online exhibition. They will also be linked to archives held within the Australian War Memorial and the National Archives of Australia.

By transforming 100 year old documents into 21st century formats and making them accessible, the lives of the Australian military personnel who died will be preserved for posterity and offered to current and future generations so they can engage with them in ways that are meaningful to them.

Currently, the Soldiers' Wills exist within large consignments of wills dating from 1832-1947, and are not easily identifiable by researchers and the general public.

This project will involve volunteers from the RSL identifying the Wills, entering service details about each person in a database, linking them to the National Archives of Australia and Australian War Memorial databases and transcribing significant letters and other archival documents.

From this initial research stories will be developed and placed online, along with digitised images. There will also be potential for the developed stories to be used in other ways, such as for educational, performance, documentary film and cross-media storytelling purposes.

Visit www.sro.wa.gov.au for more information.



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Culture and the Arts**
State Records Office of Western Australia



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