

Malaria was a scourge during World War 1 and affected soldiers in many different ways. Those going to New Guinea, where malaria was rife, were especially prone to the mosquito borne disease. James was one such person.

James William Bannister was born William James Bannister on 29th February 1880 at Fleetwood, Lancaster, the son of Alfred and Agnes Bannister, nee Muir. He came to Australia in 1911 after serving 8 years with the Hampshire Regiment, enlisting in 1901, service number 6103.

On 11 August 1914 he joined the AN&MEF and on his enlistment papers he stated he was 32 years old (he was in fact 34), was single and a kitchen man by trade. He gave his mother, Mrs Agnes Bannister, 25 Grosvenor Street, South Seas, Hants, UK, as his next of kin.

He served with the AN&MEF for 206 days, and it was during this period of service that he suffered his first bouts of Malaria.

On 13th March 1915, he enlisted in C Coy, 17th Battalion, AIF (Service Number 1060) and left for the Middle East on the THEMISTOCLES on 2nd May 1915. Whilst on Gallipoli, he was promoted to Corporal, on 14th August 1915. Shortly afterwards, on 4th September he suffered a serious bout of Malaria and on 4th November he returned to Australia aboard the KAROOLA and was discharged as medically unfit on 20th Jan 1916 after several Medical Boards.

James then adopted his mother's maiden name, and re-enlisted as James William Muir (Service Number 2983) into the 5th Reinforcements of the 31st Battalion. He sailed for Suez aboard the ANCIJSES and then on to Plymouth aboard the FRANCONIA where he spent two months at a Musketry School. On 6th October 1916 he joined the Battalion where his service number was changed to 2983A. This often happened when there was more than one soldier with the same service number (there was some 27 soldiers who commenced their AIF service with the number 2983).

On 8th of January 1917, James died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head at Cardonette, just north of Amiens, France. He was on Billet Guard from 4 am and was supposed to wake the cooks at 5.30 but failed to do so. One witness to the Court of Enquiry stated that he had heard a gunshot at 5.20 and another 5 minutes later. At the enquiry, his Commanding Officer, Capt Douglas Walker, stated:

"He had paraded to me yesterday seeking for a Court Martial on account of some fancied scandal which he claimed existed in the Bn. About himself. I told him I had heard nothing of it and on enquiry in my Coy could hear nothing of the supposed "scandal"."

James left a letter addressed to his mother, which said:

"Dear Mother

Just a few lines to let you know I have joined my battalion again after a few months away. I have got a bit of cold but nothing out of the ordinary as it is the majority have the same. That affair that I was telling you about has gone through here the terrible dirty lying slander which I swear is not true. I am trying to get tried by Court Martial but the O.C. Coy says he is not going to place me in front of C.O. until he investigates first, which I don't know how long I am very depressed through same always being on my mind and I don't get much sleep, don't worry about same. I wouldn't trouble if

the end comes soon this is worse than a branded Cain every body's believing same and it is all over the place, Has Bart come home on leaf from the line I expect so, how is Molly doing and little Blossom. I expect they are well and Jess. I think I had better close with love to all the old family circle with best of love and a good New Year Greetings.

Believe me to remain your loving son, James."

It could well be that James 's persistent malaria had developed into cerebral malaria and brought on a psychosis. Whist not acknowledged at the time, more recent studies have found links between cerebral malaria and PTSD and other psychological disorders to soldiers who have returned from service where malaria is endemic.

James is buried at Allonville Cemetery, Picardie, France and is remembered on Panel 118 at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra.