Bowden, Matthew William

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



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

Rail employment information

Employer:	Western Australian Government Railways & Tramways
Branch:	Traffic
Designation:	Clerk

Rail employment notes: Born 5/6/1874. Joined WAGR 1/7/1896 aged 22 as Clerk, Fremantle Goods. Transferred to Kalgoorlie Goods 17/9/1902, resigned 17/8/1907.
Re-employed as Porter, East Northam 11/10/1909 and promoted to Clerk, Perth Goods 25/2/1910. Transferred to Clerk, Wagin 30/12/1910.

Enlisted in 28th Battalion AIF 5/12/1916 (Service No.6541). Killed in action 20/9/1917

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	28th Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	6541
Date of death:	20 September 1917
Place of death:	Ypres, Belgium
Age:	43
Rank:	Private
Burial/memorialisation:	Buttes New British Cemetery, Polygon Wood, Zonnebeke, Ypres, Flanders, Belgium

Matthew William Bowden enlisted in the AIF at Perth on 5 December 1916. He nominated his wife Helen Bowden as his NOK. He had no previous military experience. His basic military training was conducted at Blackboy Hill Camp following which he was assigned to 19th/28 Bn with the regimental number 6541. Pte Bowden was appointed an acting L/Cpl for the voyage to England. He sailed aboard A28 HMAT *Miltiades* from Fremantle on 29 January 1917 and disembarked at Devonport on 27 March 1917. He marched into 7 Trg Bn the following day for continuation training and reverted to Private. His training was interrupted by admission to hospital for 2 weeks suffering Mumps.

On 16 July 1917 he departed England from Southampton where he joined the British Expeditionary Force at 2 ADBD and then was taken-on-strength of 28 Bn, in the field, on 31 July 1917. The AWM holds a photograph E00685 taken on 8 September 1917 which shows a group of 28 Bn soldiers doing physical exercises at Renescure, behind the lines. The same photograph labelled as E00685K holds the key to identify individual soldiers and Pte Bowden is labelled as Number 16. The Bn entered the frontlines during the Third Battle of Ypres where Pte Bowden was Killed in action on 20 September 1917. He was buried on the

battlefield together with a number of other soldiers. His Red Cross File contains an eye witness report by a Cpl H Robinson which reports that Pte Bowden was blown up by a high explosive shell and died instantly. After the War his remains were located by the Graves Registration Unit and identified by his identity disc. Pte Bowden was re-buried at the Buttes New British War Cemetery at Polygon Wood.

Additional/personal information:

Matthew Bowden was born in Corowa in New South Wales but it appears his family migrated together to WA, as did many people after the gold finds of the 1890s.

He married Helen (or Ellen) May Burns in the Fremantle district in 1900, ref BDM registration 796/1900.

> BOWDEN.-Killed in action, in France, on September 20 Private Matthew William Bowden, beloved husband of Helen M. Bowden, and father of John Bowden, of 330 Barker road, Subiaco (late of Wagin), only son of Mr. and the late Mrs. M. Bowden, of Brookton; brother of Mrs. H. Fisher, Coomberdale; Mrs. A. McLennan, East Fremantle; and the late Mrs. L. J. Reilly, of Coomberdale; aged 43 years. *Western Mail* 19/10/1917p33

or his service Pte Bowden was entitled to the British War Medal and the Victory Medal which were issued to his widow together with other memorabilia. Mrs Bowden received a war pension of 40/- per fortnight and their adopted son, John, 20/- per fortnight both effective from 10 December 1917. Pte Bowden had made his Will in his paybook (undated) in which he made his wife his sole beneficiary.

His widow married to a Charles Simmons in 1926 (BDM Perth 1387/1926). Mrs Simmons died at the age of 72 years on 22 May 1945.

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----------