Bunter, John Joseph

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

Wounded in the disastrous fight at Bullecourt



Memorial erected at Bullecourt – see text

Rail employment information

Employer:	Western Australian Government Railways & Tramways
Branch:	Way and Works
Designation:	Repairer

Rail employment notes: Repairer, Ways & Works Branch. 16th Battalion AIF. Killed in action 26/9/1917.

At the time of enlistment, John Bunter gave his occupation as "farm hand", however his employer and designation above are taken from the WAGR's Roll of Honour published after the war.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-191
Service:	Australian Imperial Force
Military unit:	16th Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	5681
Date of death:	26 September 1917
Place of death:	Belgium
Age:	28
Rank:	Private

Burial/memorialisation: Hooge Crater Cemetery, Passchendaele, Flanders, Belgium

John Joseph Bunter (AKA Jack Bunter) began his enlistment in the AIF at Geraldton and completed it at Blackboy Hill Camp on 18 January 1916. He had no previous military experience and nominated his father (W J Bunter) as his Next of kin. At Blackboy Hill camp he underwent basic military training and was allocated to 18th Reinforcement to 16th Battalion with the regimental number 5681 before departing Australia aboard A48 HMAT *Seang Bee* from Fremantle on 18 July 1916.

Private Bunter disembarked at Plymouth UK on 9 September 1916 and marched into 4 Training Battalion the following day. From there he later crossed to join the British Expeditionary Force in France and was taken on strength of 16th Battalion on 30 October 1916. Over the winter period he qualified as a Lewis Gunner to use these small, very successful machine guns. The Battalion went into action at Bullecourt on 11 April 1917 with disastrous results. He was Wounded in action (face and eye) and was evacuated to 49 Casualty Clearing Station, then 11 Stationary Hospital before being evacuated to the UK and admitted to St George Hospital.

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The fighting around Bullecourt on 11 April 1917 was a Black day for the AIF.

The 16th Battalion was the worst affected - they went into the Battle with 20 Officers and 797 Other Ranks. At the post battle roll call they were missing 17 Officers and 623 Other Ranks (Reported by Capt C Longmore in the book "The Old Sixteenth"). Many were dead, while the German forces also had taken many prisoners.

The failure of the attack has been subject to endless analysis but it seems there was no preliminary artillery barrage and they relied on the new weapon "the tank" to crush a pathway through the enormous belts of wire – which didn't work.

The town of Bullecourt erected a memorial to those killed, wounded and taken POW on 11 April 1917. The memorial depicts an AIF soldier of that time in full field dress and equipment (right). Photo Dr G.M.Galvin.



Following recovery from his wounds he was given furlough for the period 6-21 July 1917 before crossing to France and rejoining his Battalion on 15 August 1917 as they prepared for frontline duty in the Ypres Sector. Eye witness reports on 26 September 1917 show that he was bringing rations forward in the area of Zillebeke when he was killed instantly by artillery shell fire. A party from a Pioneer Battalion buried his body close to where he was killed.

Additional/personal information:

John Bunter was born in the Geraldton district, attending Moonyoonooka school nearby. After the War the grave was located and his remains moved to the Hooge Crater Cemetery. The family paid for an inscription on his tombstone which reads: "He Died A Hero Brave And True Loved By All He Knew". His mother was granted a pension of 40/- per fortnight.

His brother 5680 Private C H Bunter was also seriously Wounded in action at Bullecourt and was taken Prisoner of War. He required a right above knee amputation and a left below knee amputation while a POW. The Dutch Red Cross arranged repatriation to the UK before the end of the War.

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).

Acknowledgements: Rail employment notes from WAGR records held by State Records Office, Perth, transcribed by J.Austin 2019. Military information researched by Dr G.M.Galvin. Family information added by G.Higham.

----------Lest we forget----------

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