Burgess, Frederick William

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

So keen was this young man to enlist that he misrepresented his age and also stated that his parents were not available to give permission. Tragically he died still aged only 17.



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

Rail employment information

Employer:	Western Australian Government Railways & Tramways
Branch:	Locomotive
Designation:	Cleaner

Rail employment notes: Born 21/9/1897. Joined WAGR 28/1/1916 aged 18* as Cleaner, Midland Junction. ("Cleaner" in this case was a position in the Locomotive branch, cleaning locomotives and otherwise employed at a locomotive depot whilst training to be a Fireman, the next step up the ladder.) (It is likely that he misrepresented his date of birth, possibly because by stating 18 he was taken on as a Cleaner at a higher rate than applied to one under 18 who would have been employed as a "Call Boy".)

Granted leave to join AIF 26/6/1916 (Service No.5814). Killed in action 26/3/1917.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	28th Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	5814
Date of death:	26 March 1917
Place of death:	Lagnicourt, France
Age:	17
Rank:	Private

Burial/memorialisation: Villers-Bretonneux Memorial, Villers-Bretonneux, Picardie, France

Frederick William Burgess enlisted at the Blackboy Hill Camp on 3 July 1916 stating that he was 18 years and 10 months old. At the time of enlistment, he declared that his parents "were not in this state" in lieu of parental approval. Later information indicates both statements were false – he was probably 17 years and 1 month at that time, which was too young to enlist and also he could not be sent overseas before 19 years of age.

He had no previous military experience and nominated his mother Mrs Emma May Burgess as his Next of Kin (on embarkation) even though his father was still alive but the enlisting officer made no notation in respect of his father. He trained as a general recruit at Blackboy Hill Camp from 3 July 1916 until 22 July 1916 when he was allocated as a Private to 16th Reinforcements to 28 Battalion with the regimental number 5814. He departed Australia from Fremantle on 13 October 1916 aboard A23 HMAT *Suffolk* and disembarked at Plymouth on 2 December 1916. He was taken on the roll of 7 Trg Bn on 16 December 1916 but admitted to hospital that same day where he remained until 1 January 1917. He continued training until 4 February 1917 when he left England through Folkestone to join the BEF in France at 2 ABDD. Shortly afterwards, on 09 Feb 1917 he was taken-on-strength of

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28 Bn, in the field. He reported sick on 28 February 1917 and was admitted to 5 Fd Amb where he remained until 15 March 1917 when he was fit to re-join his Bn.

The Battalions of 7 Brigade were heavily engaged in the Battle of Lagnicourt at that time. In the relief of 7 Bde by 13 Bde on 26 March 1917 a party of 28 Battalion were subjected to intense shelling in a sunken road which resulted in 17 men being Killed in Action (Pte Burgess included) and 54 Wounded in action. Many of the bodies were not recovered at the time. After the War some 2200 bodies were recovered from the area and buried in the Queant Rd Cemetery, Buissy. Many of the latter recovered were not identified and their graves simply record "Unknown Soldier". Private Burgess may well be amongst them but he has not been identified and is remembered on the Villers-Bretonneux Memorial.

The Australian War memorial at Villers-Bretonneux, France.

Soldiers killed in France are buried and marked by the rows of gravestones seen to left and right.

The wing walls to both sides of the central watch tower record, carved in stone, the names of Australian soldiers killed in France but with no known grave – tragically, more than 11 000 men. The largest number recorded from one unit is from 28th Battalion – some 365 West Australians.



Additional/personal information:

Frederick William Burgess was born in the Albany district in 1899, a son of Charles Frederick and Emma May (nee Baker) Burgess (WA BDM 4271/1899).

> BURGESS. - Killed in action on March 26, Private F. W. Burgess. eldest son of Mr. and Mrs. Burgess of Guildford-road, Victoria Park, and nephew of Mr. and Mrs. W.Holding, aged 17 years and 6 months. Loved by all. A boy, but yet a man. *The West Australian* 17/4/1917p1

His mother stated that he was killed at age 17 ½, which agrees with his birth record.

For his service he was entitled to the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. His father, Charles Frederick Burgess, was now recognized as his Next of kin and the person entitled to receive his campaign medals and other memorabilia under the Deceased Soldiers Estates Act (1918) and these were issued to him. Private Burgess left no Will and this was later the subject of an enquiry in 1964 but no reason was stated. His father and legitimate NOK died on 4 December 1945 at 67 years and was buried at Karrakatta cemetery. His mother who he earlier declared to be his NOK died at the age of 84 years and was buried in the Kojonup cemetery. Pte Burgess was survived by two brothers and a sister.

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)

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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----------

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