Cooke, Leonard Charles MC

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



Plaque in May Drive, Kings Park

Rail employment information

Employer: &	Western Australian Government Railways Tramways
Branch:	Traffic
Designation:	Assistant Station Master

Rail employment notes: Born 22/12/1889. Joined WAGR 6/11/1905 aged 15 as Call Boy, Bunbury. Appointed Cadet Bunbury 1/10/1906 but resigned 31/5/1907. Re-employed as Porter, Bunbury 27/7/1913 and promoted to Assistant Station Master, Balingup 4/2/1914 (The Assistant Station Master typically was in charge of a station on the afternoon shift from 4pm to midnight). Granted leave to join AIF 19/8/1914. Killed in action 7/10/1917.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force
Military unit:	11th Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	882
Date of death:	7 October 1917
Place of death:	Broodseinde, Belgium
Age:	27
Rank:	Lieutenant
Burial/memorialisation:	Grave not found; Remembered on Menin Gate Memorial, Ypres, Flanders, Belgium

Leonard Cooke enlisted as a Private, 882 in 11 Battalion on 10 September 1914. He gave his age as 24 years and 9 months. His previous military service was recorded as 3 years in the WA Infantry Regiment at Bunbury. His occupation was stated as labourer (military historians advise that recruiting authorities were not interested in a potential recruit's occupation, unless something they needed) . Following a short training period, he departed Fremantle aboard A11 HMAT *Ascanius* on 31 October 1914. This ship then joined the First Convoy at sea and sailed to Egypt. There was further (intensive) training in Egypt before the Bn moved to Mudros and then participated in the Gallipoli Landing on the morning of 25 April 1915. Heavy fighting on Gallipoli created casualties in the ranks and he was promoted to be a Corporal on 23 May 1915 and then to Sergeant on 15 August 1915. He participated in the Gallipoli campaign until 5 September 1915 when he was Wounded in action by suffering a massive laceration to the buttocks. Following this wounding he was evacuated from the medical facilities on the beach to Mudros and then the evacuation chain took him to Alexandria where he was taken aboard a Royal Navy Hospital Ship to the United Kingdom. In England he was initially treated in the Hampstead Military Hospital and then through a chain of convalescent units until he was again passed to be fit for active service. He rejoined the Battalion on 10 March 1916 in Egypt just prior to the movement to the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) via Marseilles. He saw service in the terrible

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battles for Pozieres and Moquet Farm. These battles thinned the ranks of officers in the Battalion and he was appointed a Second Lieutenant on 5/8/1916 and then raised to the rank of Lieutenant on 21/11/1916. His initial appointment was Platoon Commander in D Company and later HQ Signals Officer. He attended no course of instruction for his officer appointments and both were made in the field. The Battalion rested and took on reinforcements over the winter of 1916-1917 before engaging in conflicts of 1917. The Battalion was actively engaged at Noreuil and in the Second Battle for Bullecourt. It was at this time on 15 May 1917 he was engaged in an action which resulted in him being awarded the Military Cross (MC). He received a personal letter from General Birdwood, which his family proudly passed to the newspaper (*Northam Advertiser* 1/8/1917p3)

> *1st -Anzac -Corps,*
> *9th May, 1917*
>
> *Dear Cooke, — 1 write to congratulate you most heartily upon the Military Cross, which has been awarded to you for the great endurance and courage which you displayed in the operations at Louveral from the 10th to the 17th April, when you maintained communications between company, battalion and brigade headquarters, though the lines were being continually cut by shell fire. The results of your good work assisted very materially in the success of the operations, and I thank you very much for it.*
>
> *With good wishes, — Yours sincerely, W. Birdwood*

The award was promulgated in the London Gazette, 15/6/1917 and the Commonwealth of Australia Gazette, 4/10/1917.

In the closing phases of the battle (7 October 1917) he was inside a captured German Pill Box when it took a direct hit from a very heavy calibre artillery shell. Both he and Major Steele DSO DCM, the Commanding Officer, were killed instantly. There is some confusion as to their burial site but one witness reported that they were buried in an area which was later to become Aeroplane Cemetery. Their graves were marked but following hostilities could not be identified. In 1922 the Graves Registration Unit reported that there was "No trace on research" and further searching was abandoned. Aeroplane Cemetery remains a strong possibility as it was very close and holds the remains of 1105 Commonwealth servicemen of whom 636 are unidentified. He is remembered on the Menin Gate Memorial, Belgium.

Additional/personal information:

Leonard Cooke appears to have been the second of about six children of John Henry and Emily (nee Wisbey) Cooke, all births being registered at Bunbury.

He has a memorial plaque in Kings Park, M101A – sadly it is alongside a plaque M101 to his brother, 7097 Corporal W J Cooke 16 Battalion who Died of wounds at Hebuterne on 31 Mar 1918 and is buried at Doullens Community Cemetery Extension Number 1.

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 and collation by G.Higham.

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