074

Crawford, George Edward

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:	Locomotive
Designation:	Labourer

Rail employment notes: Born 22/6/1889. (This recorded date appears to be an error, as Victorian records indicate born in 1878- Vic BDM 18707/1878) Joined WAGR 24/8/1911 aged 22 (?) as Labourer, Midland Junction.
In this era, the "Locomotive" branch of the WAGR, which would later be named the Chief Mechanical Engineer's branch, included the major workshops at Midland (then Midland Junction) employing a wide range of tradesmen to work on locomotives, carriages and freight wagons as they were built or passed through for repairs, and also trained apprentices in many trades and had many other jobs available.

Granted leave to join AIF 5/11/1915 (Service No.8802). Killed in action 1/5/1918.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	4th Field Company, Australian Engineers
Service number:	8802
Date of death:	1 May 1918
Place of death:	Corbie, France
Age:	39
Rank:	Sapper

Burial/memorialisation: Villers-Bretonneux Memorial, France

George Crawford enlisted at Leederville as a Sapper, regimental number 8802 in the 7th reinforcements of 17 Field Company Australian Engineers on 15 November 1915. He departed Australia aboard A20 HMAT *Honorata* through Sydney Harbour. The reinforcement party consisted of just 6 members all from Western Australia. How they travelled to Sydney is not documented. The bulk of the soldiers on the ship were the original members of 34 Battalion (of 3 Division) and the ship sailed directly to the UK with the Engineers disembarking in Alexandria. When he enlisted Sapper Crawford nominated one of his brothers as his next-of-kin – the brother also later enlisted. Both his parents were dead. He stated that he had previous military service of 5 years in the "Fremantle Infantry". On 29 June 1916 he marched into the Divisional Engineer Troop at Tel-el-Kebir. The Troop departed Alexandria on 29 June 1916 aboard HMT *Franconia* for the Engineers Training Depot in the UK.

After training at the Depot, he crossed to France and marched into the Australian General Base Depot at Etaples on 12 January1917 where he remained until 13 February 1917 before returning to the UK base where he remained until 12 November 1917. When back in France, he was taken on strength of 4

Coy Australian Engineers. Between 01 March and 23 March 1918, he was detached to the Australian Corps School but it is not clear whether this was as a student or an instructor. Given the lengthy period that he had spent at the UK Depot it seems most likely that he was called in for instructional duties with the newly formed Australia Corps.

He was Killed in Action on 1 May 1918 in the vicinity of Corbie. There is a note in his file that he was buried in the Chalk Pits British Cemetery 1 ½ miles South of Corbie. There is no Chalk Pits British Cemetery on the register of the CWGC today. In 1924-1925 a large number of cemeteries in the area of Villers-Bretonneux were relocated to the Villers Bretonneux Cemetery and many of the individuals could not be identified. Sapper Crawford is therefore 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:

George Crawford had been born in Victoria, a son of Thomas and Ellen (nee Lawson) Crawford, and was schooled in Victoria before moving to WA apparently with most of his siblings. (Vic BDM 18707/1878 et al)

> CRAWFORD.-Killed in action in France on May 1, 1918. Sapper G. E. Crawford, formerly of Queensland and Midland Junction, Western Australia, beloved brother of Mrs. M. E. Stannard, Queen's Park; Mrs. E. Powell, North Fitzroy; Miss E. Crawford, Victoria Park East; Mr. Chas. Crawford, Queen's Park; Mr R. and Senator T.W. Crawford, of Queensland. - Inserted by his loving sister, Mrs. M. E. Stannard.
>
> CRAWFORD.-Killed in action on May 1, George, the dearly loved brother of Nellie Crawford, of Forrest-street, Victoria Park. Both *Western Mail* 24/5/1918
>
> EastCRAWFORD.—In ever loving remembrance of my dear brother, Sapper George Edward Crawford, 4th Field Co. Engineers, A.I.F., killed in action Villers Bretonneux, April 30 1918. Inserted by his loving sister, Mrs. M. E. Stannard. *The West Australian* 30/4/1919p1

When it became time to distribute service medals and memorabilia, and as his parents were deceased, it was revealed that the eldest brother was Thomas William Crawford, 1865-1948, by then a sugar cane farmer and elected a Senator from Queensland. Senator Crawford had been elected to the Senate as a Nationalist candidate in 1917, but later became a United Australia Party member before finishing as an independent. Thomas Crawford had two sons who served in the AIF one of whom was decorated with the Military Medal and was Mentioned-in Despatches.

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----------