075

Crossfield, Robert

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:	Boilermaker's Assistant

Rail employment notes: Born 16/11/1877. Joined WAGR 14/5/1902 aged 25 as Holder Up, Fremantle Workshops. Transferred to Boilermaker's Assistant, Fremantle Workshops 1/7/1903 and resigned 10/9/1904. Re-employed as Boilermaker's Assistant, Midland Workshops 1/11/1911 and transferred to Northam 21/2/1916.

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 Fremantle (until 1904) and then Midland Junction (now Midland) 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.

Granted leave to join AIF 1/5/1916 (Service No.5821). Discharged from AIF 4/4/1918 but died at the Wooroloo sanatorium 17/8/1918.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	27th Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	5821
Date of death:	17 August 1918
Place of death:	Wooroloo, Western Australia
Age:	40
Rank:	Private

Burial/memorialisation: Wooroloo Cemetery, Wooroloo, Western Australia

Robert Crossfield enlisted in the AIF at Perth on 29 May 1916. His Next of Kin was his only sister Mrs Mimie Solly of South Australia as both parents were dead. He had previously served in the Artillery at Fremantle for 18 months. His training was conducted at both the Belmont racecourse and Blackboy Hill Camp. He was initially allocated to 17th Reinforcement to 28 Battalion but this was amended to 16th/27 Bn on 5 September 1916 and he was allocated the regimental number 5821 before departing Australia aboard A16 HMAT *Port Melbourne* on 30 October 1916. He disembarked at Devonport England on 28 December 1916 and marched into 7 Trg Bn the following day. Pte Crossfield continued training in the UK until 20 June 1917 when he crossed to France through Southampton to join the British Expeditionary Force where he was taken on strength of 27 Bn.

In France he was Wounded in Action twice and evacuated to the UK on both occasions. His general health deteriorated and he passed through a number of medical establishments before being admitted

to 2 AAH (Harefield) where a Medical Board determined that he was unfit for military service and should be returned to Australia. Pte Crossfield departed the UK aboard *Balmoral Castle* on 1 February 1918, his medical condition on boarding was recorded as Chronic Rheumatism and Bronchial Catarrh. He disembarked at Fremantle on 18 March 1918 where further medical examination resulted in him being discharged on 21 March 1918. Subsequently it was determined that his underlying problem was Tuberculosis and he was admitted as a former AIF member to Wooroloo Sanitorium where he died on 17 August 1918. His death certificate records his cause of death to be Pharyngeal TB secondary to Pulmonary TB. He was buried in the cemetery attached to the Sanitorium and his death was recorded by the Imperial War Graves Commission as a result of war service. The death is shown as Died of Illness.

Additional/personal information:

It appears that Private Crossfield was born in South Australia in 1877, actual name may have been Rowland Crossfield, a son of Rowland Nicholson Crossfield. His sister's actual name was Mary Ellen Crossfield born 1875, and she married Sidney Solly in 1898. Rowland Crossfield senior died in 1881 while his wife's history has not been found. This information relies on transcriptions of old hand-written records, available online by courtesy of Genealogy SA, and spellings are often uncertain.

By 1902 Robert had moved to WA, as did many people after the 1890s gold finds.

Following his discharge from the AIF he was awarded a pension of 30/- per fortnight commencing on 05 Apr 1918. For his service he was awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal and these were issued to his sister (the Next of Kin) along with other memorabilia as the sole surviving member of his family.

> CROSSFIELD.—On the 18th August, at Wooroloo Hospital, W.A., Robert Crossfield dearly beloved only brother of Mrs. S. Solly, of Yorketown, aged 41 years. *The Advertiser* (Adelaide) 24/8/1918p8
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> Mr. and Mrs. R. Poole desire to THANK Dr. Mitchell, Orderly Gill, sisters and soldiers of the Sanatorium Wooroloo, for their untiring kindness to Private Robert Crossfield (late 27th Battalion) and to ourselves; also Mrs. Treen (Midland Junction) and Private Sid Miller, of Base Hospital, Fremantle. *The West Australian* 27/8/1918p1

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----------