Downs, Charles Edwin

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:	Traffic
Designation:	Shunter

Rail employment notes: Shunter, Kalgoorlie. Traffic Branch. 11th Battalion AIF. Killed in action 25/2/1917 aged 26.

Charles Downs' individual railway employee record has not been found at SRO, however the WAGR Honour Roll and his mother's and sister's notes after his death indicate he had worked as a guard, and as a shunter, at Kalgoorlie and Midland (then Midland Junction).

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	11th Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	5381
Date of death:	25 February 1917
Place of death:	France
Age:	26
Rank:	Private

Burial/memorialisation: AIF Burial Ground, Flers, Picardie, France

Charles Edwin Downs began his enlistment into the AIF with a medical examination at Kalgoorlie and completed the process at Blackboy Hill Camp on 13 January 1916. He nominated his mother, resident in London as his NOK. He had no previous military experience. He underwent basic military training at Blackboy Hill Camp and on 22 Mar 1916 he was allocated to 17th reinforcements to 11th Battalion with the regimental number 5381. Private Downs departed Australia on A60 HMAT *Aeneas* on17 April 1916. On the day of departure, he made his Will in which he nominated his mother as his sole beneficiary. The records show that his ship called at Suez on14 May 1916 but does not show the date of arrival in the UK. In England he marched into 3 Training Battalion where he remained until he departed for France to join the British Expeditionary Force from Folkestone aboard *Princess Clementine* on 16 January 1917. He passed through 1 ADBD for just 3 days before being taken-on-strength of 11 Bn, in the field, on 20 January 1917. He was Killed in action on 25 February 1917 during a period of intense shelling. Private Downs was buried on the field in a temporary graveyard and the site marked. After the War his remains were relocated to the AIF Burial Ground 1 Km NNW of Flers.

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*

Additional/personal information:

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Charles Downs was born at Stirling in Scotland before moving to Hertfordshire in England where he was schooled. He migrated to Australia at the age of 19, finding work with the WAGR. It was a railway family – his sister Maud also migrated to WA and was married to Joseph W.White who was the Station Master at Wongan Hills in 1917:

> DOWNS.- Killed In action, somewhere in France, Charles Edwin Downs, B Company, 1lth Battalion, dearly loved brother and brother-in-law of Maud and Joseph White, of Wongan Hills. *Western Mail* 13/4/1917p30

His mother appears to have remained in the UK and sometime after 1917 she remarried, to be known as Mrs Mary Beavan. She paid for an inscription on his headstone which reads: **Too Far Away Your Grave to See but Not Too Far to Think of Thee.**

For his service Private Downs was entitled to the British War Medal and the Victory Medal which were issued to his family together with other memorabilia direct from Australia House London. His mother was granted a standard pension which was reduced to 15/- per fortnight at review in 1917 and cancelled completely in 1918 with the annotation that she was now of sufficient means of support. In addition to his property distributed under the terms of his will, his mother received a death benefit from his membership of the WA Society of Railway Employees.

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----------