106

Fitzpatrick, Michael Joseph Francis

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:	Way and Works
Designation:	Chainman

Rail employment notes: Born 13/10/1878. Joined WAGR 16/8/1901 aged 22 as Chainman, Perth. Transferred to Northam 29/7/1907.

The Way and Works Branch (later the Chief Civil Engineer's branch) was responsible for track and structures. A Chainman is a surveyor's assistant and there would have been regular work for surveyors setting out or checking tracks, structures, bridges, etc.

Enlisted in 51st Battalion AIF 20/9/1916 (Service No.3160). Killed in action 26/9/1917.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	51st Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	3160
Date of death:	26 September 1917
Place of death:	Moquet Farm, Belgium
Age:	41*
Rank:	Private

Burial/memorialisation: Menin Gate Memorial, Ypres, Flanders, Belgium

Michael Joseph Francis Fitzpatrick enlisted in the AIF on 20 Sep 1916 in Perth and underwent his basic training at Blackboy Hill Camp. His place of birth was Happy Valley South Australia. He stated that both parents were deceased and he nominated a friend Michael Campbell as his Next of Kin. He had no previous military experience. At the conclusion of his basic training he was posted to 8th/51Bn with the regimental number 3160 and departed Australia aboard A35 HMAT Berrima from the port of Fremantle. He disembarked at Devonport on 16 February 1917 and marched into 13 Trg Bn on 3 March 1917. His reinforcement party departed Southampton on 16 June 1917 for France where they were taken on strength of 51 Bn on 4 July 1917, in the field. Private Fitzpatrick was Killed in Action at Moquet Farm on 16 September 1917. His body was never recovered, he has no known grave, and he is remembered on the Menin Gate Memorial at Ypres (now Ieper).

Additional/personal information:

*His age at death is given in Army records as 41, however his WAGR records indicate 38.

In Army records he stated that his place of birth was Happy Valley, South Australia – this area is now a suburb on the south side of Adelaide.

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There was a delay in circulating notice of his death, given that his body could not be located. Accordingly the only notices found were published were on the first anniversary in 1918:

> FITZPATRICK—A tribute to the memory of our mate, Michael Joseph Francis, 51st Battalion, killed in action in Belgium on September 26, 1917. … Inserted by M C. and E. W. *The West Australian* 26/9/1918p1
>
> FITZPATRICK.—In memory of our gallant friend, Private Michael Joseph Francis, killed in action in Belgium, September 26, 1917. … Inserted by Mr. and Mrs. H. B. Staines and family, and Mr. and Mrs. H. Williams and Mr.E. T. Woods. *The West Australian* 27/9/1918p1

The "M.C." mentioned in the first notice may have been his friend Michael Campbell whom he had listed as Next of Kin.

For his service he was entitled to receive the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. Army Records undertook substantial work to trace relatives. It was established that both parents were deceased but there was, allegedly, a brother James Fitzpatrick. South Australian records do show a James Fitzpatrick born in the Adelaide district in 1875 (SA BDM 145/414), who might have been the elder brother, but nothing is conclusive.

All efforts to locate James Fitzpatrick, brother of Michael Joseph Francis Fitzpatrick yielded no result and all efforts were abandoned on 20 Feb 1923. (File note). His campaign medals and other memorabilia were then placed in a section of Army Records termed "Untraceables".

There is a totally unexplained file in the AWM (PP13/1 C10911) relating to the late Private Fitzpatrick bearing the name Edith Mary O'Shaughnessy with validity dates 1917-1921. It is not possible to read this file on line so the relationship between these two people is unknown.

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----------