Fry, Thomas Leonard

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 (the Locomotive Branch at that time included the large Workshops at Midland)
Designation:	Boilermaker

Rail employment notes: Born 5/12/1889. Joined WAGR 12/3/1906 aged 16 as Apprentice Boilermaker, Midland Workshops. Promoted to Boilermaker, West Midland 4/5/1912.
West Midland was the location of the Way and Works branch workshops where rail crossing and other heavy metalwork was done so boilermakers would have been needed.
Transferred to Midland Workshops 5/5/1913, to Perth 2/2/1914 and again to Midland Workshops 29/2/1916.
Granted leave to join AIF 25/9/1916 (Service No.7473). Killed in action Sailly-Le-Sec 30/3/1918.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	44th Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	7473
Date of death:	30 March 1918
Place of death:	France
Age:	27
Rank:	Private

Burial/memorialisation: Villers-Bretonneux Memorial, Villers-Bretonneux, Picardie, France

Thomas Leonard Fry enlisted in the AIF at Blackboy Hill on 25 September 1916. On enlistment he declared his wife Sarah Anne Fry to be his Next of Kin and stated that he had no previous military experience. Following completion of basic training on 30 December 1916 he was allocated to 24th Reinforcements to 11th Battalion but this was changed on 3 Feb 1917 to 25th /16 Bn. He departed Australia through Fremantle aboard A30 HMAT *Borda* on 29 June 1917 and disembarked Plymouth UK on 28 August 1917 and marched into 4 Training Bn the next day. He changed training Battalions on 3 November 1917 when he was moved to 13 Training Bn. He joined the BEF when he departed the UK for France on 4 December 1917 to join 3 ADBD which he departed on 9 Dec 1917 to join 44 Battalion and was taken on strength of that Bn the following day. He was Killed in Action when 44 Bn were in the front line between Amiens and Albert.

His Red Cross file gives several versions of how he died but most credibility must be given to that provided by 1056 Pte R T Kenny 44 Bn, an eye witness. His report states that on 30 March 1918 Pte Fry was hit by a burst of machine gun fire causing 3 abdominal wounds, one to both a leg and hip. He

died quickly and was buried 1500 yards South of the village of Heilly. 2355 Pte Lean 43 Bn oversaw the burial. Although the grave was marked by the Pioneer Bn it could not be located after the War and Private Fry is remembered on the Villers-Bretonneux Memorial.

Additional/personal information:

Thomas Fry was born in Adelaide, South Australia before moving to WA where he married Sarah A Curran in 1911. The couple registered at least two children, daughters Alice M K Fry born 1913 and Myrtle A Fry born 1916.

> FRY--Killed in action somewhere in France, March 30. Private Thomas Leonard Fry, dearly beloved husband of Sarah Fry, and dearly beloved father of little Maisie and Myrtle. 192 Park-street, Subiaco. - Inserted by his loving wife and two little daughters. *The Western Mail* 26/4/1918p19

Thomas came from a family who contributed more than their fair share to the war effort:

> FRY. -Killed in action, somewhere in France, on March 30, 1918, Private Thomas Leonard Fry, beloved eldest son of Mr. and Mrs. Tom Fry, Hubert-street. Guildford, brother of Mrs. A. Lean, Violet, Kate, Charles, Herbert, and brother-in-law of A. Lean (all on active service), in his 27th year. *The West Australian* 19/4/1918p1

Unfortunately it seems that the widow's health deteriorated, possibly the loss of her husband leaving her with two young children proved too much. When the army came to distribute Thomas' medals (about 1921/22) it was then revealed that the state Children's Department had placed his children in the care of their paternal grandmother (Mrs Fry, Senior) who was also their legal guardian.

By law, these medals and other memorabilia should have been distributed to his wife who was also his Next of Kin and the sole beneficiary under the terms of his will. The family wrote to the Army to establish a case that his wife was not a fit and proper person to receive his service medals. The family stated that they had no idea of her whereabouts and that she had not been sighted since the end of the War. A Miss V Fry of 7 Hubert St Guildford swore a statutory declaration concerning the whereabouts and condition of Sarah Anne Fry. A brother also wrote again using the phrase "not a fit and proper person". There is a reference to "nerve trouble" but the nature of this trouble is unknown.

The Army decision was that medals and memorabilia should go to Miss Alice M K Fry then aged 9 years. All items were acknowledged by Mrs Fry (Senior) and annotated as "in trust for soldier's children" or as "guardian of A M K Fry". Private Fry was entitled to the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

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----------