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Gast, Charles Chandler

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 24/9/1880. Joined WAGR 1/4/1909 aged 28 as Boilermaker's Assistant, Midland Workshops.
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.

Granted leave to join AIF 11/7/1916 (Service No.2909). Died of wounds 26/4/1918.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	51st Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	2909
Date of death:	26 April 1918
Place of death:	France
Age:	37
Rank:	Corporal
Burial/memorialisation:	Longpre-les-Corps Saints British Cemetery, Longpre-les-Corps Saint, Abbeville, Picardie, France

Charles Chandler Gast enlisted in the AIF on 10 July 1916. On enlistment he nominated his mother Mrs Harriet Gast as his Next of Kin as his father was dead. He had no previous military experience. His basic training was at Blackboy Hill Camp following which he was assigned to 7th Reinforcements to 51Battalion with the regimental number 2909. Before departure he made his will on 7 Nov 1916 nominating his mother as his sole beneficiary. He departed Australia from Fremantle aboard A8 HMAT *Argyllshire* on 9 November 1916 and disembarked at Devonport on 10 January 1917. On arrival in England he marched into 13 Training Battalion before departing overseas on 20 April 1917 for France where he was taken on strength of 51 Battalion from the 7th reinforcements on 25 April 1917 as a member of the British Expeditionary Force. Pte Gast was granted UK leave between 10 Feb 1918 and 04 Mar 1918.

He was appointed a Lance Corporal on 8 March 1918 and promoted to the rank of Corporal the following day. On 26 April 1918 as the German advance of 1918 was turned, he was Wounded in Action, suffering Gunshot wound to the left leg and thigh. Cpl Gast was evacuated to 55 CCS but died that same day. He was buried in the small Longpre-le-Corps Saints, British Cemetery.

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Additional/personal information:

Charles Gast was born in Bangerang in north-west Victoria, and attended school also in Victoria. His parents were John and Harriet (nee Chandler) Gast and he was one of six children born to this couple between 1874 and 1885 (Vic.BDM).

His father John Gast died in Victoria in 1885 at the age of 35. It is not known when Charles and other members of the family moved west.

> GAST.—Died of wounds, somewhere in France, on April 26, Corporal Charles C. (Wagga) Gast, dearly loved son of Mrs. H. Gast, and dearly loved brother of Mr. and Mrs. A.Walker, Mrs. C.Duncan, Clayton-street, Bellevue and Sergeant J. C. Gast (returned, 11th) Fremantle, loving uncle Private W.J.Walker (on active service), L., F. C., R., F.,A., D. Walker, M., F. K. Duncan. He died as he lived, a life of loving sacrifice. *The West Australian* 15/5/1918p1

> GAST.—Died of wounds somewhere in France, April 26, Corporal Charles C. (Wagga) Gast, esteemed comrade of Private Frank C. Beard (on active service). *The West Australian* 15/5/1918p1

Cpl Gast was decorated with the French Croix de Guerre which was promulgated in the London Gazette of 17 Aug 1918. There is no specific description of why the award was made other than for conspicuous service. For his service Cpl Gast was entitled to the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. His mother, as his NOK, received the BWM and the booklet "Where Australians Rest" before she died at the age of 69 on 9 January 1921. The correspondence between Army Records and the family was mostly conducted by his sister, Mrs Catherine Duncan. Mrs Gast had been offered the choice of a public presentation of the Croix de Guerre or to receive it by post. She elected the latter and signed a receipt for the decoration on 15 May 1919.

Following the death of his mother the elder brother Joseph assumed the role of NOK and it was he who received the Victory Medal and the Memorial Plaque.Harriett Gast was buried at Karrakatta and when Catherine Duncan died, aged 40, on 24 Aug 1925 she was buried in the same compartment as her mother. Joseph Gast died on 30 Aug 1952 at the age of 69 and was cremated.

The family paid for an inscription on his grave stone which reads: "Loved Son of Mrs Harriet Gast of Bellevue, West Australia Age 37".

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----------

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