Gathercole, John

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:	Electrical Lineman

Rail employment notes: Electrical Lineman, Ways & Works Branch, Midland Junction. 15th Battalion AIF (Service No.7000). Killed in action 28/9/1917.

The WAGR had an extensive system of lines to maintain, as they built telegraph wires following every railway line for messages and safe-working, plus their own electric distribution in some built-up areas.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	16th Australian Infantry Battalion.
Service number:	7000
Date of death:	28 September 1917
Place of death:	Belgium
Age:	23
Rank:	Private

Burial/memorialisation: Menin Gate Memorial, Ypres, Belgium

John Gathercole enlisted in the AIF on 9 October 1916 and completed his basic training at the Blackboy Hill Camp. He had no previous military experience and nominated his father, William, as his Next of Kin. He was allocated to 23rd Reinforcements to 16th Battalion and given the regimental number 7000 before he sailed from Fremantle aboard A35 HMAT *Berrima* on 23 December 1916. He disembarked at Devonport UK on 16 February 1917 and joined Infantry Details before marching into 4 Training Bn on 24 Feb 1917. Following further training in that Bn he departed the UK to join the British Expeditionary Force through Southampton on 29 May 1917. The following day he entered 4 ADBD where he remained until 21 June 1917 when he was taken on strength of 16 Bn, in the field.

He was then engaged in the Third Battle of Ypres and was Killed in Action on 28 September 1917 by shell fire. Members of his own Company buried his body; the site was recorded as ¼ mile North of Polygon Wood and1½ South of Zonnebeke and marked with his regimental details. A report on his death and burial was prepared by 6972 Pte H J Carter. After the War the site could not be identified and his remains were never recovered and he is remembered on the Menin Gate Memorial.

Additional/personal information:

He had been born in London and migrated to West Australia at the age of 15 years.

GATHERCOLE.—Killed in action, somewhere in France, on September 28, 1917, Private J. Gathercole only son of Mr. and Mrs.Gathercole, and brother of Mrs. Washer, Boulder, and Ettie, aged 21 years and 9 months. —Inserted by his sorrowing father and mother, and sisters. *The West Australian* 30/10/1917p1

The Graves Registration Unit had an enormous task trying to find graves in the churned-up region in front of Passchendaele and did not abandon the task until 1926. However Pte Gathercole has no known grave. The Red Cross received an enquiry about his whereabouts from Miss Y Brooker of High St Kingsland, London. Her letter seems to indicate that they corresponded frequently and since he had not been to London on his deployment she may have been a friend from before he moved to Australia at age 15. For his service Pte Gathercole was entitled to the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

It seems that this soldier's father enlisted as 948 Pte W Gathercole as a member of the 1st Remount Unit on 28 September 1915 and was discharged medically unfit on 28 Nov 1916. He had understated his age by 5 years on enlistment.

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----------