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Gunst, Frederick Samuel

A West Australian railway employee killed while on military service for their country


Villers-Bretonneux Memorial

Rail employment information

Employer:	Western Australian Government Railways & Tramways
Branch:	Locomotive
Designation:	Cleaner

Rail employment notes: Born 24/3/1896. Joined WAGR 17/3/1915 aged 18 as Junior Porter, Osborne. Transferred to Cleaner, Collie 14/12/1915. ("Cleaner" in this case was a position in the Locomotive branch, cleaning locomotives and otherwise employed at a locomotive depot whilst training to be a Fireman, the next step up the ladder.)

Granted leave to join AIF 28/1/1916 (Service No.5106). Killed in action 11/4/1917.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	4th Light Trench Mortar Battery
Service number:	5106
Date of death:	11 April 1917
Place of death:	France
Age:	21
Rank:	Private

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

Frederick Samuel Gunst enlisted in the AIF at Collie on 24 January 1916 and following basic training at Blackboy Hill Camp was assigned to 16th Reinforcements to 16 Battalion with the regimental number 5106. He departed Fremantle on 31 March 1916 aboard A9 HMAT *Shropshire*.

Following arrival in Egypt he marched into 4 (Brigade) Training Battalion on 24 April 1916 before the Battalion reinforcements sailed aboard HMT *Ionian* from Alexandria on 7 June 1916 and landed in France on 14 June 1916, then being taken on strength of 16 Battalion on 19 July 1916. He was Wounded in action at Moquet Farm on 10 August 1916 and suffered shell shock. Following treatment at 7 Field Ambulance he returned to duty on 15 August 1916. On 30 August 1916 he was wounded in action (second occasion) and admitted to 3 Canadian Field Ambulance before returning to duty on 2 September 1916.

He was transferred to 4 Light Trench Mortar Battery on 29 October 1916. Military historian Dr Michael Galvin comments:

> Light Trench Mortar Batteries were integral to the Divisional structure. They were under Divisional control and known to the normal infantry as "shoot and scoot buggers". Using the standard Stokes mortar a good team could get 12 bombs into the air before the first one hit and exploded. They team then scampered off at great speed before the German Counter Fire Battery got a fix on them and put

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some High Explosive shells onto their position. The Infantry hated them because they knew that once the LTMB had done its work they would be in for some solid artillery fire.

4 Light Trench Mortar Battery went into action in the First Battle of Bullecourt, a disaster for the AIF.

The fighting around Bullecourt on 11 April 1917 was a Black day for the AIF.

The 16th Battalion was the worst affected - they went into the Battle with 20 Officers and 797 Other Ranks. At the post-battle roll call they were missing 17 Officers and 623 Other Ranks (Reported by Capt C Longmore in the book "The Old Sixteenth"). Many were dead, while the German forces also had taken many prisoners.

The failure of the attack has been subject to endless analysis but it seems there was no preliminary artillery barrage and they relied on the new weapon "the tank" to crush a pathway through the enormous belts of wire – which didn't work.

The town of Bullecourt erected a memorial to those killed or lost in 1917. The memorial depicts an AIF soldier of that time in full field dress and equipment, as shown right.
Photo Dr G.M.Galvin.



During this battle Private Gunst was killed in action on 11 April 1917. His body has not been recovered, he has no known grave but is remembered on the Villers Bretonneux Memorial.

The Australian War memorial at Villers-Bretonneux, France.

Australian soldiers killed in France, whose bodies could be found for relocation, are buried and marked by the rows of gravestones seen to left and right.

The wing walls to both sides of the central watch tower record, carved in stone, the names of Australian soldiers killed in France but with no known grave – tragically, more than 11 000 men. The largest number recorded from one unit is from 28th Battalion – some 365 West Australians.



Additional/personal information:

Frederick Gunst was born in Victoria in 1896, a son of Samuel and Emily Lydia (nee Boys) Gunst. He was the ninth of ten children registered in Victoria, but more were to come!

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The Gunst family moved to WA about 1900, and 2 more 2 children Irene and Cyril were born in Bunbury. The names in family notices suggest several did not survive to adulthood, as often happened at the time.

> GUNST.—Killed in action on, April 11, 1917, somewhere in France, Private Frederick Samuel, dearly beloved fourth son of Mr.and Mrs. Samuel Gunst, of Bunbury, and brother of Willie (Singapore) Rude and Bernie (Victoria), Cyril and Ivy (Bunbury), and Mrs. D. S: Livingstone, 123 Fitzgerald-street, West Perth, aged 21 years. He died for his King and country. -Inserted by his sorrowing parents and sisters. Victorian papers please copy.
>
> GUNST.—Killed in action, somewhere in France, on April 11, 1917, Private Fred S Gunst Dearly loved by all -Inserted by R. W. Both *The West Australian* 3/5/1917p1
>
> GUNST.— In fond and loving memory of our dearest son and brother, Fred, killed In action somewhere in France April11, 1917. … *South Western Times* 11/4/1918p2

Further information

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----------