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Hill, Rowland Joseph

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

The sadness in some families is hard to imagine – Rowland Hill and his brother were both lost within a month in France.



Memorial at Railway Workshops Midland (D.Graham/panoramio)

Rail employment information

Employer:	Western Australian Government Railways & Tramways
Branch:	Way and Works
Designation:	Labourer

Rail employment notes: Born 25/11/1889. Joined WAGR 26/10/1910 aged 20 as Labourer, Midland Junction.

The Way and Works Branch (later the Chief Civil Engineer's branch) was responsible for track and structures so employees were engaged on building and/or maintaining stations and smaller buildings, bridges, wooden culverts, etc all over the system. This branch had a workshop at Midland, west of the well-known main (mechanical) workshops.

Granted leave to join AIF 30/4/1915 (Service No.3537). Wounded at Pozieres and died 14/8/1916.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	51st Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	3537
Date of death:	14 August 1916
Place of death:	Moquet Farm, France
Age:	25
Rank:	Private

Burial/memorialisation: Becourt Military Cemetery, Albert, Picardie, France

Rowland Joseph Hill enlisted in the AIF on 29 September 1915. On enlistment he nominated his mother Mrs Mary Jessie McDonald as his Next Of Kin (NOK) and declared his father to be deceased. He had no previous military experience. His basic military training was at Blackboy Hill Camp following which he was allocated to 8th Reinforcements to 28 Battalion with the regimental number 3537. Private Hill departed Australia on 17 Jan 1916 aboard A30 HMAT *Borda*.

On arrival in Egypt he continued to train with the reinforcement pool until he was taken-on-strength of 51 Battalion on 3 March 1916 as the AIF Divisions in Egypt were expanded and re-organized. Private Hill sailed on HMT *Ivernia* from Alexandria on 05 Jun 1916 and landed at Marseilles on 12 Jun 1916 to join the Britih Expeditionary Force. Pte Hill made his Will on18 Jun 1916 in which he left his total estate to his mother. The Bn moved to the front lines and entered the Battle for Moquet Farm where Pte Hill was Wounded in Action. He was evacuated to 12 Field Ambulance where he Died of Wounds

on 14 August 1916 and was buried at the Becourt Military Cemetery, Becordel-Becourt, 2 Km East of Albert.

Additional/personal information:

Rowland Hill was born and attended school in Echuca in Victoria, a son of Alf Hill and Mary Jessie (nee Mason) Hill. (Vic BDM 30709/1889). He had at least two younger siblings, sister Esther and brother Alfred John Hill who would later follow him into the army.

It appears that his father Alf Hill died and his mother remarried to a Mr McDonald, however the details have not been located.

The Hill family lost their two sons in quick succession:

> HILL.-In loving memory of our sear son and brother, Private R. J. Hill. A Company, 51st Battalion, who fell at Pozieres. August 14, 1916, beloved only brother of Private Hill, C Company. 28th Battalion, missing since July 29, 1916, at Pozieres. … -Inserted by his sorrowing parents, sister and brother.in-law.
> HILL.-In ever loving memory of my dearly loved friend Rowland J. Hill, died of wounds in France, August 14, 1916. … -Inserted by his dearly loved friend, Lily Drysdale, West- Guildford.
> Both *The West Australian* 14/8/1917p1

For his services Rowland was entitled to the British War Medal and the Victory Medal which were issued to his mother together with other memorabilia. The brother of Pte Hill served as 1729 Pte A J Hill of 28 Bn and was Killed in Action at Pozieres on 29 July 1916. Their mother received a total pension of 46/- per fortnight with effect from 21 Jan 1917 for the loss of her two sons. She paid for inscriptions on the gravestones of both sons which read: "Greater Love Hath No Man Than This". Mrs McDonald died on 25 November 1937 aged 72 and was buried at Karrakatta cemetery.

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----------