Holbrook, Thomas Charles

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



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

As the war dragged on and more men were continually demanded, more mature men with families enlisted. This often resulted in young children left as orphans, as here where his two sons were aged 5 and 3 years.

Rail employment information

Employer: Western Australian Government Railways & Tramways

Branch: Way and Works

Designation: Carpenter

Rail employment notes: Joined WAGR 19/9/1912 as Carpenter, Bunbury. Career details have not been located, however the Way and Works Branch (later the Chief Civil Engineer's branch) was responsible for track and structures so a carpenter might have been engaged on building and/or maintaining stations and smaller buildings, bridges, wooden culverts, etc.

Granted leave to join AIF 28/5/1917 (Service No.4342). Died of wounds 19/5/1918.

Military service information:

Conflict: First World War 1914-1918

Service: Australian Imperial Force (AIF)

Military unit: 48th Australian Infantry Battalion

Service number: 4342

Date of death: 19 May 1918

Place of death: France

Age: 35

Rank: Private

Burial/memorialisation: Vignacourt British Cemetery, Vignacourt, Picardie, France

Thomas Charles Holbrook enlisted in the AIF at Bunbury but the date is confusing. His enlistment papers show 29 April 1917 but the attestation date is shown as 11 June 1917. He apparently requested a posting to Australian Engineers but following his basic training he was assigned to 12th Reinforcements to 2nd Pioneer Battalion. Prior to enlistment he had no military experience and his wife Elizabeth became his Next of Kin. The Pioneer reinforcements departed Australia on 30 October 1917 from the Port of Melbourne aboard A60 HMAT *Aeneas* and disembarked at Devonport UK on 27 December 1917 when they marched into the Pioneer Training Depot but Pte Holbrook was transferred to the trainee strength of 32 Bn on 2 January 1918 and remained there until 1 April 1918.

He crossed to France to join the British Expeditionary Force on 1 April 1918 but on 15 April 1918 he was taken on strength of 48 Battalion from the Medical Board Base Depot. He was Wounded in Action (penetrating abdominal wound) on 3 May 1918 and was admitted to 12 Aust Fd Amb and then moved to 51 Casualty Clearing Station. There he underwent surgery and received 800 ml of blood

from another soldier – blood transfusions were relatively new, and rare in a field situation, as the science of matching blood types was not yet developed.. Despite all efforts he Died of Wounds on 19 May 1918 and was buried the following day in the Vignacourt Military Cemetery with the Rev Carsten officiating. The Red Cross provided a report to his family based on a detailed report by the CO of 51 CCS and a witness report by 4316 Pte C T Chamberlain of 48 Bn.

Additional/personal information:

Thomas Charles Holbrook was born in Clapton Middlesex England, but had moved to Western Australia by 1912 when he married Emma Elizabeth Guy. The couple then had two children before Thomas departed.

> HOLBROOK--Died of wounds somewhere in France, on May 19. Tom, dearly beloved husband of Lizzie, and daddy of Douglas and little Toddy, of Frances-street, Bunbury.
> We prayed for your safe returning, , We longed to clasp your band; butt God has postponed the meeting,. Twill be in the better land.
>
> HOLBROOK.-Died of wounds somewhere' in France, on May 19, Thomas Charles Holbrook, of Bunbury. beloved eldest son of Thomas and Mary Holbrook, of Balingup. -Inserted by his loving mother, father, and sister and brother, Frank (on active service). *The West Australian* 13/6/1918p1

Unfortunately his widow Elizabeth Holbrook died on 28 December 1918. The cause is unknown (BDM Blackwood 2/1919) but the care of her two sons, now orphans, passed to a T J Holbrook, relationship unstated but probably their grandfather.

> Mr. and Mrs. T. HOLBROOK and daughter, of Balingup, wish to THANK all kind friends for their expressions of sympathy and floral tributes in their recent sad bereavement, in the loss of their dearly beloved daughter Lizzie, wife of the late T. C. Holbrook, A.I.F. *Bunbury Herald* 4/1/1919p4

Private Holbrook was apparently due to receive a death benefit from the WA Amalgamated Society of Railway Employees but the file does not show details.

For his service he was entitled to the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. The medals and other memorabilia were to become the property of the eldest son but in the care of his guardian until he came of age. The boys were aged 8 years and 6 years at the time the medals became available. Presumably the orphans would have been entitled to military pensions but there is no record of these in Pte Holbrook's personal file.

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----------