Knapton, Archibald Arthur

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:	Traffic
Designation:	Porter

Rail employment notes: Born 26/3/1882. Joined WAGR 22/8/1899 aged 17 as Junior Car Cleaner, Fremantle. Transferred to Porter, Fremantle 27/2/1900, to East Fremantle 24/3/1900, Cottesloe Beach (later renamed Mosman Park) 18/8/1902, Fremantle 23/2/1903. ("Porter" was a very general category in the WAGR and Fremantle, a busy goods station and terminus of suburban passenger trains, probably had at least 6-8 porters)

To Ticket Collector, Fremantle 12/10/1904, reverts to Porter, Fremantle 27/10/1908 and North Fremantle 2/5/1910.

Archibald spent some 16 years working for the WA Government Railways, all around Fremantle, which was unusual in lower grades where people were often transferred frequently, or had to move to achieve promotion. It is possible that he remained in Fremantle because of the family situation.

Granted leave to join AIF 30/11/1915 (Service No.1951). Killed in action 30/7/1917.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	44th Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	1951
Date of death:	30 July 1917
Place of death:	Belgium
Age:	35
Rank:	Private

Burial/memorialisation: Menin Gate Memorial, Ypres, Flanders, Belgium

Archibald Arthur Knapton enlisted in the AIF on 16 November 1915. On enlistment he stated that he had no previous military experience and declared both his parents to be deceased and nominated his brother George Knapton to be his Next of Kin. Subsequently the brother was uncontactable and his sister Mrs Maud McCleary was declared to be his NOK. His basic military training was at Blackboy Hill Camp following which he was allocated to 3rd Reinforcements to 51 Battalion with the regimental number 1951. He departed Australia from Fremantle aboard A48 HMAT *Seang Bee* on 20 July 1916 and disembarked at Plymouth on 09 September 1916.

As the Third Australian Division was being formed and trained in England he was directly taken-on-strength of 44 Bn from 3rd/51 Bn. Pte Knapton departed England for France on 25 Nov 1916 through Southampton where he joined the British Expeditionary force. He remained on the 44 Bn roll but was detached to a Railway Construction party on 16 February 1917. He was Killed in Action on 30 July

1917 and the circumstances concerning his death are unrecorded, however military historian Dr G.M.Galvin has noted:

> Although he is shown as a casualty in 44 Bn he was working on a railway construction party. The rail lines were prime targets for German long range artillery and by July 1917 they had aircraft available to accurately locate them. Although we cannot be certain, there is a high chance that he was killed by a high explosive shell aimed directly at his party. Supporting this theory is the lack of a body. The Germans knew only too well that railways were critical to supplying the front line in Belgium.

His body was not recovered, he has no known grave but he is remembered on the Menin Gate Memorial.

Additional/personal information:

Archibald Knapton was a local man, born and schooled in Fremantle. His name was registered at birth as Archibald Arthur Herbert Knapton but the 'Herbert' appears to be forgotten thereafter. He was the youngest of four children registered to George & Elizabeth Jane (nee Murdoch) Knapton (BDM 22762/1882), who had married in Fremantle in 1868. It appears that George died in 1884 and Elizabeth died on 12/02/1914 (MCB) although she then used the name Lily Knapton.

> KNAPTON-On July 30, 1917, killed in action in France, Private A A Knapton (Archie) late of Fremantle, and loving brother of Mrs B McCleery, Mount Hawthorn.
>
> KNAPTON-Killed in action in France, July 30 17 Private A A Knapton 44th Battalion, late of North Fremantle Railways -Inserted by his sincere friend Q Dohcrty. Both *Western Mail* 24/8/1917p27
>
> KNAPTON.—In loving memory of my brother, Archie (Private A. A. Knapton), killed in action somewhere in France on July 30, 1917, youngest son of the late Mrs. L. Knapton, of Fremantle. Son and mother reunited. Greater love hath no man than this. —Inserted by Mrs. B. McCleery, Mount Hawthorn. *The West Australian* 30/7/1918p1

He had drafted a Will on 11 Feb 1916 appointing a Mr P W Doherty as executor but no further details are known. For his service he was entitled to the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. Under the terms of the Act the medals should rightly have been issued to his brother George Albert Knapton but George had departed Australia as 258 Private George Knapton of 5th West Australian Mounted Infantry to fight in the Boer War in South Africa. He took his discharge in South Africa and as far as can be determined never returned to Australia and was uncontactable.

Army Records decided to issue his campaign medals and other memorabilia to Augusta Maude Knapton, the elder of Archibald's sisters, in trust. (She by that time had married Benjamin McCleary and used the name Maude McCleary). She signed a Statutory Declaration to that effect and they were issued to her together with other memorabilia. The cover for the AWM Circular which families were requested to complete after the war states that it was to be completed by his brother but the text appears to have been written by a Rev. R.Hanlin and signed by his sister.

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----------