MacKay, Walter

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:	Length Runner

Rail employment notes: Born 25/6/1886. Joined WAGR 29/6/1911 aged 25 as Repairer, Sandstone. ("Repairer" was a track maintenance worker in a gang responsible for upkeep of an allocated section of railway line. A typical gang might include between 3 and 6 Repairers with one Leading Hand Repairer and a Ganger in charge. The WAGR Annual report for 1914/15 showed they employed 882 Repairers at 8 shillings per day, with many at very small settlements or tent camps.)

Transferred to Length Runner, Cue 10/3/1916.

Granted leave to join AIF 19/7/1916 (Service No.2950). Died of wounds 24/10/1917.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	51st Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	2950
Date of death:	24 October 1917
Place of death:	Place not yet found
Age:	32
Rank:	Private

Burial/memorialisation: Wimereux Communal Cemetery, Wimereux, Nord Pas de Calais, France

Walter MacKay enlisted in the AIF on 10 Jul 1916 at Perth. On enlistment he nominated his mother Mrs Catherine MacKay, resident in Scotland as his Next of Kin as his father was deceased. He had no previous military experience. His basic military training was at Blackboy Hill Camp where he was initially allocated to 8th Reinforcements to 51 Battalion but on 04 September 1916 he was advanced to 7th Reinforcements to 51 Battalion with the regimental number 2950. He departed Australia from Fremantle on 09 Nov 1916 aboard A8 HMAT *Argyllshire* on 09 Nov 1916 and disembarked at Devonport on 10 Jan 1917 where he marched into 13 Training Battalion that same day.

Following intensive training he departed England for France through Folkestone on 10 April 1917 and joined the British Expeditionary Force at 4 ADBD. From this Depot he was taken-on-strength of 51 Battalion on 1 May 1917. Pte MacKay made his Will on 15 Jun 1917 in which he left his estate to a brother, resident in Scotland. The Battalion entered the Third Battle of Ypres but on 16 October 1917 in the vicinity of Zonnebeke while in the reserve trenches he was Wounded in Action by gas shelling. He entered the medical evacuation chain and was moved to 53 General Hospital where he Died of Wounds (gas poisoning) on 24 October 1917. Pte MacKay was buried in the Wimereux Communal cemetery.

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Additional/personal information:

Walter MacKay had been born in Ross Shire Scotland and migrated to Australia at the age of 25 years.

For his services he was entitled to the British War Medal and the Victory Medal which were issued to his mother together with other memorabilia direct from Australia House, London. After his death it was revealed that he had an illegitimate daughter, Marion MacKay Bryce, in the care of his mother in Scotland. (Children born without their parents being married were still relatively rare at that time – she was presumably born in Scotland).

Military pensions were issued to his mother at 40/- per fortnight and his daughter at 20/- per fortnight both effective from 31 December 1917. There was no additional inscription added to his gravestone other than the basic details provided by Imperial War Graves Commission.

Pte MacKay had a brother who served as 2959 Pte John Mackay, 51 Battalion, 10 July 1916 to 12 February 1920.

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).

----------Lest we forget----------