McCarthy, John

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



Gunner ‘Jack’ McCarthy is remembered on the memorial at Midland Workshops.

Rail employment information

Employer:	Western Australian Government Railways & Tramways
Branch:	Locomotive
Designation:	Boilermaker's Assistant

Rail employment notes: Born 1/7/1894. Joined WAGR 29/4/1910 aged 15 as Junior Labourer, Midland Workshops. Appointed to Labourer 1/1/1915 and to Boilermaker's Assistant 3/5/1915.

In this era, the “Locomotive” branch of the WAGR, which would later be named the Chief Mechanical Engineer’s branch, included the mechanical workshops at Midland (then Midland Junction).

Granted leave to join AIF 1/3/1916 (Service No.868). Killed in action 4/10/1917.



Titled “Loco shops send off to Soldiers April 19th 1916” this photo shows the fervour of the time for recruiting. Of these 40 men on the raised balcony, eleven of them including Gunner McCarthy lost their lives. Whatever their job, from car builders to boilermaker’s assistants, they joined a range of WA men volunteering to fight. Workers and management had gone to considerable lengths for the occasion with tree branches, band, flags and the name-bearing banner, while a central shield added a whimsical note with “Loco shops W.A. Easter egg for the Kaiser”. P. Rogers collection.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918

Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	36th Australian Heavy Artillery Group
Service number:	868
Date of death:	4 October 1917
Place of death:	Belgium
Age:	23
Rank:	Gunner

Burial/memorialisation: Ypres Reservoir Cemetery, Ypres, Flanders, Belgium

John had 4 years and 3 months Militia service in the Garrison Artillery at Fremantle. He enlisted in the AIF on 18 October 1916 and was immediately assigned to the 10th Reinforcements to 36 Heavy Artillery Group with the regimental number 868. Gunner McCarthy moved almost immediately to the Artillery Training School at South Head, Sydney. The Artillery reinforcements departed Australia from Sydney on 10 February 1917 aboard RMS *Osterley* and disembarked at Plymouth om 11 April 1917. He staged through Number 3 Camp until 25 May 1917 when he departed through Southampton to join the British Expeditionary Force through Australian General Base Depot and was taken-on-strength of 36 Australian Heavy Artillery Group on 21 September 1917. Less than two weeks later, Gunner McCarthy was Killed in action on 4 October 1917 during the Third Battle of Ypres (Ieper). The circumstances of his death are not recorded but it must have been close to Ypres as he was buried in the Ypres Reservoir Cemetery which is located close to the town.

Additional/personal information:

John McCarthy was the son of Daniel and Margaret (nee Kavanagh) McCarthy, of Silas St., East Fremantle, Western Australia. He was born in Fremantle and attended Christian Brothers College there.

> McCARTHY.—Killed in action on October 4, Gunner J. McCarthy, youngest son of Mr. and Mrs. McCarthy, 170 King-street, brother of Bert (returned). He died for his country. *The West Australian* 5/11/1917p1

> McCARTHY.— Killed in action on October 4, Gunner Jack McCarthy, beloved grandson of D. McCarthy (Crimean veteran), nephew of Mr. and Mrs. W. Dempsey, and fond cousin of William, Ernest, Kevin, Kathleen, and Dorothy Dempsey, of Cottesloe. Remember he who yields his life Is a soldier and a man. *The West Australian* 7/11/1917p1

He was entitled to the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. Army records had significant difficulty in tracing his parents to issue the medals but they were ultimately issued to his mother. In the post war period part of his service documents were forwarded to the Artillery Group at Fremantle.

His gravestone reads: ‘Beloved son of Daniel and Margaret McCarthy. Grandson of Cpl D McCarthy’. The mention of the grandfather is unusual but the family was obviously close and the second notice in the newspapers indicates the older man was proud of his service in the Crimean War (1853-1856). This is confirmed in 1923 when the grandfather dies (aged 92):

> MILITARY FUNERAL
> McCARTHY. - The Friends of the late Mr. Daniel McCarthy, late of the W.A. Government Railways, the last of the Crimean veterans in this State who belonged to the 63rd. Regiment, are respectfully invited to follow his remains to the place of interment, the Roman Catholic Cemetery, Karrakatta. The Funeral is appointed to leave the residence of his son-in-law. Mr. W. Dempsey, Killegrew, 39 Boreham-street, Cottesloe, at 2.30 o'clock TO-MORROW (Friday) AFTERNQON, per road. Friends wishing to attend the Funeral may proceed by the 3 o'clock train leaving Perth and the 2.50 train leaving Fremantle. BOWRA and O'DEA, Undertakers, 195 Pier-street, Perth. Tel. A4308. *The West Australian* 2/8/1923p1

Gunner McCarthy had an elder brother 3416 Pte Thomas Daniel Bertram McCarthy of 11 Battalion AIF who was Wounded in action at Pozieres too seriously to continue fighting and returned to Australia in October 1916. He died in 1950 at the age of 58 years and was buried at Fremantle Cemetery.

The family and workmates appear to have referred to John as 'Jack' and to Thomas Daniel Bertram as 'Bertram'.

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----------