McDougall, James McQueen

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:	Repairer

Rail employment notes: Repairer, Glenlynn, Ways & Works Branch. ("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 such as Glenlynn, or tent camps.)

16th Battalion AIF (Service No.6548). Killed in action 11/4/1917 aged 41.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	16th Australian Infantry Battalion.
Service number:	6548
Date of death:	11 April 1917
Place of death:	France
Age:	39
Rank:	Private
Burial/memorialisation:	Villers-Bretonneux Memorial, France

James Mc Queen McDougall migrated to Australia from Scotland at the age of 34 years. He enlisted in the AIF on 17 April 1916 and underwent basic training at Blackboy Hill Camp following which he was assigned to 21st Reinforcements to 16th Battalion as number 6548. He had no previous military training and his wife, Ruth McDougall, was his Next of Kin.

He departed Australia through the Port of Fremantle on 13 October 1916. The records of this voyage are confusing. One set shows their ship to be HMAT *Suffolk* and another HMAT *Port Macquarie* but whatever ship landed at Plymouth on 12 December 1916 and he moved immediately to 4 Training Battalion. Following further training and strengthening Private McDougall left the UK via Folkestone aboard SS *Princess Victoria* on 8 February 1917 and marched into a temporary depot the next day. He departed the Depot and was taken on strength of 16 Battalion on 13 February 1917. The 4th Brigade of which 16 Battalion was a component, attempted to breach the massive German defences at Bullecourt on 11 April 1917. In place of an artillery barrage it was proposed to use tanks to crush a pathway through the wire. The tanks proved to be totally unreliable and easy targets for German artillery and the attack was a total failure. There were great numbers of casualties Killed in Action, Wounded in Action, taken Prisoner of War, or Missing.

The fighting around Bullecourt on 11 April 1917 was a Black day for the AIF.

The 16th Battalion was the worst affected - they went into the Battle with 20 Officers and 797 Other Ranks. At the post-battle roll call they were missing 17 Officers and 623 Other Ranks (Reported by Capt C Longmore in the book "The Old Sixteenth"). Many were dead, while the German forces also had taken many prisoners.

The failure of the attack has been subject to endless analysis but it seems there was no preliminary artillery barrage and they relied on the new weapon "the tank" to crush a pathway through the enormous belts of wire – which didn't work.

The town of Bullecourt erected a memorial to those killed or lost in 1917. The memorial depicts an AIF soldier of that time in full field dress and equipment, as shown right.
Photo Dr G.M.Galvin.



At the roll call after the attack Pte McDougall was posted as Missing (in action). A Court of Enquiry held on 30 October 1917 changed his classification to Killed in action, 11 April 1917. This was communicated to his Next of Kin but a well-meaning soldier claimed that he was still alive. This confusion caused distress to his family but the finding of the Court was confirmed. His remains were never recovered and he is remembered on the Villers-Bretonneux Memorial.

The Australian War memorial at Villers-Bretonneux, France.

Australian soldiers killed in France, whose bodies could be found for relocation, are buried and marked by the rows of gravestones seen to left and right.

The wing walls to both sides of the central watch tower record, carved in stone, the names of Australian soldiers killed in France but with no known grave – tragically, more than 11 000 men. The largest number recorded from one unit is from 28th Battalion – some 365 West Australians.



Personal information:

James McDougall (or MacDougall) was born and schooled in Hamilton, Scotland, before coming to WA. His wife recorded that he was 39 at the time of his death, however the AWM show 41.

For his service Pte McDougall received the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. The medals and other memorabilia were forwarded to his Next of kin, his widow). A determination of pension entitlements of 40/- per fortnight to his wife, 20/- to his son Alexander and 15/- to the son Ronald was made with effect 20 Nov 1917. Ruth McDougall died in 1945 at the age of 72 years.

Post War it was revealed that he was a champion shot in the Bridgetown rifle club prior to enlistment.

Further information

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----------