McSkimming, James

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:	Locomotive
Designation:	Fireman

Rail employment notes: Born 2/4/1890. Joined WAGR 11/2/1907 aged 16 as Call Boy, Perth. "Call boy" was the most junior job for a young man wanting to join the locomotive crews on the WAGR, involving work around the locomotive shed and also being sent out, on bicycle or on foot, literally to call/wake crews for their rosters, especially when train times changed. The next step up would be Cleaner.

Appointed to Cleaner, Perth 17/9/1909 and transferred to Fremantle 3/3/1910. ("Cleaner" in this case was a position in the Locomotive branch, cleaning locomotives and otherwise employed at a locomotive depot whilst training to be a Fireman, the next step up the ladder.)

Promoted to Fireman, 1/7/1911 and regressed to Labourer, Midland junction 11/9/1911. Re-instated to Fireman, Fremantle 10/10/1911 and transferred to Bridgetown 27/5/1914 and Perth 18/6/1915.

Granted leave to join AIF 11/8/1915 (Service No.2743). Killed in action 2/4/1917.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	51st Australian Infantry Battalion.
Service number:	2743
Date of death:	2 April 1917
Place of death:	Noreuil, France
Age:	27
Rank:	Lance Corporal

Burial/memorialisation: HAC Cemetery, Ecoust St Mein, Arras, Nord Pas de Calais, France

James McSkimming enlisted in the AIF on 17 Aug 1915. On enlistment he declared his father James McSkimming to be his Next of Kin and that he served in the Military Cadets for 18 months. His basic military training was at Blackboy Hill Camp following which he was assigned to 6th Reinforcements to 28 Battalion with the regimental number 2743. He departed Australia on 02 Nov 1915 aboard A38 HMAT *Ulysses*.

On arrival in Egypt he joined the pool of reinforcements in 7 Trg Bn awaiting the expansion of the AIF from 2 to 4 Divisions. Pte McSkimming was taken-on- strength of 13 Trg Bn on 17 Apr 1916 and finally taken-on-strength of the newly formed 51 Battalion from 6th/28 Bn on 31 May 1916. The Bn departed Alexandria on 05 Jun 1916 aboard HMT *Ivernia* and disembarked at Marseilles on 12 Jun 1916 to join the British Expeditionary Force. Pte McSkimming was recommended for a decoration for his bravery on 15 and 16 Aug 1916 at Moquet Farm but it was not progressed beyond the level of

Brigade Commander and he received no award. He was appointed a L/Cpl on 26 Sep1916. On 01 Dec 1916 he reported sick suffering from trench feet and was absent from duty until 12 Dec 1916 but was not fully fit until 19 January 1917 when he re-joined the Bn.

Pte McSkimming was Killed In Action at Noreuil and buried in an isolated, but marked, grave. His remains were moved to the HAC Cemetery Ecoust-St. Mein and a temporary cross erected. The cemetery was later swept by artillery fire and in the post war period the actual graves of 5 members of 51 Bn could not be located. The Imperial War Graves Commission erected a special memorial to those soldiers who are named and an inscription added which reads "Buried in this cemetery but their actual graves are unknown". In this and similar cases a phrase written by Rudyard Kipling was added: "Their Glory Shall Not Be Blotted Out".

Additional/personal information:

James was born in Victoria, a son of John & Jane (nee Muirhead) McSkimming (Vic BDM 19116/1890), the second of four children born there.

The family moved to WA, then Jane McSkimming died in 1900 (WA BDM) and he attended school in North Fremantle.

> McSKIMMING.—In ever loving memory of our dear son and brother, Lance-Corporal James McSkimming, 51st Battalion, killed in action in France on April 2, 1917, on his 27th birthday. … —Inserted by his loving father, brothers, George and Will (on active service), and sisters Agnes and Jean. The West Australian 3/4/1918p1

For his service he was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal which were issued to his father together with other memorabilia. Mr John McSkimming was awarded a military pension of 20/- per fortnight with effect from 24 Jun 1917. John McSkimming died on 02 Sep 1937 aged 83 years and was buried in the same compartment as his late wife (died 1901) at Fremantle Cemetery. The grave was used for a third time for George McSkimming, a brother, who died on 18 Mar 1965. Another brother William served in the AIF as 921 of 25 Bn from 15 Feb 1915 and was discharged on 22 Apr 1919 as a member of 9 Bn.

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----------