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McTavish, John Alexander

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:	Junior Porter

Rail employment notes: Born 24/6/1893. Joined WAGR 4/10/1909 aged 16 as Junior Porter, Perth. Transferred to Subiaco 23/7/1912.
("Porter" was a very general category in the WAGR – some had specific roles such as a receiving goods porter, some were general hands while some learnt safe-working and could assist with signals, et. Perth, a very busy station, probably had at least 10 porters. A junior porter was under 21 years and therefore paid less.)

Granted leave to join AIF 19/8/1914 (Service No.79). Wounded at Gallipoli and died 10/8/1915.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	11th Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	79
Date of death:	10 August 1915
Place of death:	Gallipoli, Dardanelles, Turkey
Age:	22
Rank:	Private (Bugler)

Burial/memorialisation: Lone Pine Memorial, Gallipoli Peninsula, Canakkale Province, Turkey

John Alexander McTavish enlisted in the AIF on 17 August 1914 at Helena Vale which is probably the name for Blackboy Hill at that early date. He had 6 years of Cadet and Militia service, mainly as a bugler. In later correspondence it is revealed that he had his own bugle from the age of 13 years. His Next Of Kin was his mother Mrs Rose Emily McTavish. His basic training was at Blackboy Hill Camp following which he was allotted to A Company, 11 Bn with the regimental number 79 as the Bugler.

The Bn (in part) boarded A7 HMAT *Medic* at Fremantle on 31 Oct 1914 Medic then joined the first convoy which had earlier departed from Albany with a substantial Naval escort to provide cover against the German Light Cruiser *Embden* which was thought to roaming the Indian Ocean. Suez was reached on 5 December 1914 and the troops disembarked the following day and established camp at Mena with other elements of the 3rd Brigade. Training continued in Egypt until 02 Mar 1915 when the Battalion moved by rail to Alexandria, boarded HMT *Suffolk* and sailed for Mudros on Lemnos Island. There was a delay of 7 weeks while the troops practiced the use of scrambling nets and maintained fitness with route marches on the Island.

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On 25 April 1915 11th Battalion as part of the 3rd Brigade landed at Anzac Cove and suffered considerable casualties. Bugler McTavish survived the Landing and the early offensive actions. The last great offensive action on Gallipoli commenced on 6 August 1915. On that day Pte McTavish suffered a Gunshot wound to a shoulder and a compound fracture of the humerus. He was evacuated to 1 CCS and then taken aboard HMHS *Sicilia* which later sailed for Alexandria. Pte McTavish Died Of Wounds on 10 August 1915 and was buried at sea with Rev Steele officiating. He is remembered on the Lone Pine Memorial.

Historian Dr Michael Galvin explains:

"In the early days of the Great War there was a tendency to use the word Bugler so that it was synonymous with Private. This was a carryover from 19th Century British Regiments where someone was appointed to be the bugler and would hold that position for years. With the huge casualties of the Great War it was impossible and Commanding Officers did not require a bugler at their elbow to sound "charge" or "withdraw" when it was a static war. Young McTavish was close to the last of his kind."

Additional/personal information:

John McTavish was born in North Melbourne in Victoria, a son of John and Rose (nee Lee) McTavish (Vic BDM 23526/1893). His name was registered in Victoria as John Alexander Thomas McTavish but he seems to have ignored the third forename in later life. The family must have moved west after the 1890s gold finds as he attended Claremont State School.

For his service he was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. When Army Records enquired about his father it was revealed that the father had left home in 1914 and was never seen again. Efforts to trace him by means of newspaper notices and police enquiries proved fruitless. The decision was therefore to award his campaign medals and other memorabilia to his mother which duly happened. Mrs McTavish was awarded a military pension of £1-15-0 per fortnight commencing 07 Oct 1915. Rose Emily McTavish died on 24 Mar 1936 at the age of 67 years and was buried in the Karrakatta Cemetery.

Pte McTavish's brother William also served in the AIF as 4860 Pte W McTavish of the Australian Army Medical Corps between 17 Aug 1914 and 12 Mar 1918.

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----------