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Mettam, Harold William

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:	Apprentice Blacksmith

Rail employment notes: Born 24/7/1897. Joined WAGR 16/9/1912 aged 15 as Apprentice Blacksmith, Midland Workshops.
In this era, the "Locomotive" branch of the WAGR, which would later be named the Chief Mechanical Engineer's branch, included the major workshops at Midland (then Midland Junction) employing a wide range of tradesmen to work on locomotives, carriages and freight wagons as they were built or passed through for repairs, and also trained apprentices in many trades.

Granted leave to join AIF 4/3/1916 (Service No.26948). Died of wounds 12/8/1918.



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 Harold Mettam paid the ultimate price and 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.

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Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	11th Australian Field Artillery Brigade
Service number:	26948
Date of death:	12 August 1918
Place of death:	France
Age:	21
Rank:	Bombardier

Burial/memorialisation: Daours Communal Cemetery Extension, Daours, Picardie, France

Harold William Mettam enlisted in the AIF on 7 March 1916. He gave his age as 19 years which made him eligible to be sent overseas although he was probably 18 at the time. He declared that his father was deceased and nominated his mother Margaret Mettam to be his NOK. At Blackboy Hill Camp he was assigned to 50 Depot Company. He had previous military training of 3½ years in 38 Battery, Australian Field Artillery and was directed to Victoria for service in Artillery. He was given the regimental number 26948 with the rank of Gunner.

He departed Australia, from Melbourne, on the roll of 5th Reinforcements to 24 Howitzer Brigade aboard HMAT *Port Sydney* on 7 September 1916. He disembarked at Plymouth UK on 20 October 1916 before crossing to France and was taken-on-strength of 24 Howitzer Brigade. On 30 May 1917 he was transferred to 4th Divisional Ammunition Column. The Australian Artillery underwent a number of reorganizations in 1917-1918 and on 12 March 1918 he was transferred to 11 Field Artillery Battery. On 23 July 1917 he was gassed and evacuated to the UK for hospital treatment. He rejoined his Unit in France on 08 December 1917. Gunner Mettam was promoted to the rank of Bombardier on 12 June 1918. (In artillery units, a 'Gunner' was equivalent to a Private, whilst a 'Bombardier' was equal to a Corporal).

During the advance from Amiens 11 Field Battery was operating from a site between Corbie and Sailly-le-Sec when he suffered a Gunshot wound. Bombardier Mettam was evacuated to 10 Field Ambulance on 12 August 1918 and later moved to 55 Casualty Clearing Station where he died. The following day he was buried in the Daours Communal Cemetery Extension with Chaplain Cogan officiating.

Additional/personal information:

Harold Mettam was a local man, born in North Fremantle in 1897, a son of Arthur Mettam and Margaret Mettam (nee Duckworth). It appears the family moved to WA in the 1890s, as did many families after the gold finds, because the births of two of his siblings are registered in Victoria in 1888 and 1890.

Harold attended school in James Street, Perth, and served in the Citizen Force Artillery. He took up an apprenticeship as a blacksmith with the WAGR. He was part of a large family, and as in many families, he was not the only one to volunteer:

> METTAM.—Died of wounds in France, on August 12, Gunner Harold William Mettam, second youngest son of Mrs. Margaret Mettam, and the late Arthur William Mettam, of Mt.Lawley, and brother of Arthur (on active service), Alfred (on active service), Clara, Mrs. A.Andrews, Mrs. E. Smith, Clarence and Walter; aged 21 years. *The West Australian* 25/8/1918p1

His headstone shows the names of his parents and that he was a native of Fremantle. For his service he was awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal which were issued to his mother. Mrs Mettam was awarded a military pension. Margaret Mettam died in 1950 at the age of 83 yrs.

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Harold's elder brother Arthur William Mettam also enlisted and sailed with Harold on the *Port Sydney* as no. 26947 in the same 5th Reinforcements to 24 Howitzer Brigade. He was awarded the Military Medal (MM) and survived the war.

A second brother, Alfred Mettam, enlisted and embarked earlier in 1915 as Gunner Mettam no. 5706 in 11th Reinforcements to 3rd Field Artillery Brigade. He also survived fighting and returned to Australia in December 1916.

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----------

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