Ottey, Thomas 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:	Tramways
Designation:	Clerk

Rail employment notes: Born 20/9/1880. Joined Tramways 1/7/1913 aged 32 as Clerk, Perth. Granted leave to join AIF 27/7/1916 (Service No.5909). Died of illness 28/2/1917.

(The tramways of Perth and adjoining suburbs were compulsorily purchased by the WA Government in 1913 and were placed in the management and responsibility of the WA Government Railways. The records of employees, including the honour roll after the war, reflected this combined operation.)

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	27th Australian Infantry Battalion.
Service number:	5909
Date of death:	28 February 1917
Place of death:	France
Age:	36 (see below)
Rank:	Private

Burial/memorialisation: St Sever Cemetery Extension, Haute-Normandie, France

Thomas Alexander Ottey enlisted in the AIF on 29 May 1916 and entered 90 Recruit Company at Blackboy Hill Camp for basic military training. On enlistment he declared that he had no previous military experience and that his mother Mrs H Ottey of Toowoomba was his Next of Kin and that his father was deceased. The army recorded his age as 32, however he had previously been recorded by the WAGR&T as born 1880 so he may have misrepresented his age to join up – this was not uncommon.

On completion of basic training, he was assigned to 16th Reinforcements to 27th Battalion which departed Australia from Fremantle on 30 October 1916 aboard A16 HMAT *Port Melbourne*. Private Ottey was appointed to be a Lance Corporal, but this was for the voyage only. He landed at Devonport on 23 December 1916 and proceeded to 7 Training Battalion which he entered on 29 December 1916. Following further training he departed the UK on SS *Invicta* for France on 8 February 1917 where he marched into 2 Australian Divisional Brigade Depot on 9 February 1917. Two days later he was taken-on-strength of 27 Bn. Pte Ottey developed pneumonia and presented sick at 5 Field Ambulance on 18 February 1917 but was moved to 45 CCS that same day. On 19 Feb 1917 he was moved by Railway Ambulance Train to 11 Stationary Hospital which he entered on 20

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Feb 1917. His condition worsened and he was declared dangerously ill before he died of illness (Pneumonia) on 28 February 1917. Private Ottey was buried with full military honours that same day.

Additional/personal information:

He was a son of William Ottey and Kemly (or Kenly) Omeara whose marriage was registered in Victoria (Vic BDM 3852/1865). At the time of Thomas' death his mother was in Queensland and it seems some siblings were also, however it is not known where the children were born..

There was some confusion in relatives back in Australia about his death. He died and was buried in France with a known grave. People back in Australia often got confused about the hospital site - they might see a hospital name (in English) and that the cable officially notifying of death originated in London and mistakenly join the two.

Tom Ottey was not married but it appears he was engaged before he embarked:

> OTTEY.—On February 28. 1917, Private Tom Ottey. died in England. 16th reinforcements. 27th Battalion. You are always in my thoughts, dear Tom. It is sweet to breathe thy name, In life I loved you dearly In death I'll do the same —Inserted by his beloved fiancee Gladys Hayward.
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> OTTEY—On February 28, died of pneumonia in London, Private Tom Ottey late of 16th reinforcements, and late member of the office staff of the Western Australian Government Tramways. Gone is a comrade we loved so sincere. Still is the voice we longed to hear. Our memory shall cherish our dear old friend. It is good to breathe his name. In life we honoured him dearly In death we shall do the same. —Inserted by the members of the office-staff of the Western Australian Government Tramways. Both *The West Australian* 12/3/1917p1

Newspapers from Queensland, where his mother lived, indicate it was a double tragedy for the family with his mother dying less than a month later:

> OTTEY.—On March 20, at the Freemasons' Hotel, Herries-street, Mrs. Kenley Ottey, relict of the late William Ottey, chemist, Castlemaine, Victoria; and mother of Mrs. James Freeney. Aged 75.
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> OTTEY.—On February 28, at Stationary Hospital No. 116, London, Lance-Corporal T. A. Ottey, of Dental Corps, 27th Battalion, Perth, West Australia, of pneumonia. Aged 30.
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> Both *The Toowoomba Chronicle* 21/3/1917p4

For his service he was entitled to receive the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. As his mother died shortly after him and his Next of kin reverted to Mrs M McMahon, one of his sisters, it was most likely her who received the medals and other memorabilia.

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----------