Pentilla, Christopher Sidney

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:	Lineman

Rail employment notes: Born 7/8/1889. Joined WA Government Railways 10/2/1910 aged 20 as Lineman, Northam. Transferred to Mt Barker 4/12/1911, Narrogin 22/2/1912, Midland Junction 15/4/1915 and Karalee 7/5/1915. Granted leave to join AIF 14/5/1915. Died of illness at Gibraltar 8/10/1915.

The WAGR had an extensive system of lines to maintain, with telegraph wires following every railway line for messages and safe-working, plus their own electric distribution in some built-up areas.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	16th Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	2540
Date of death:	8 October 1915
Place of death:	Gibraltar
Age:	26
Rank:	Private
Burial/memorialisation:	Gibraltar (North Front) Cemetery, Gibraltar

Christopher Sidney Pentilla enlisted at Southern Cross on 22 May 1915. On enlistment he gave his occupation as electrical linesman but the embarkation document shows him as an electrician. He had no previous military experience and nominated his mother as his Next of kin as his father had died in 1896. His training was at Blackboy Hill Camp where he was allocated to 7th reinforcements to 16th Battalion with the regimental number 2540. He departed Australia through the Port of Fremantle aboard A51 HMAT *Chilka* on 18 June 1915 after the barest of training. On arrival in Egypt he was transferred to Gallipoli and taken on strength of 16 Battalion.

Unfortunately he was not long in the fighting in the Dardanelles before the conditions got the better of him and he reported sick and was transferred to 16 Casualty Clearing Station at Mudros (on the Greek island of Limnos) with a provisional diagnosis of Pneumonia. He was transferred to HMHS *Gascon* on 27 September 1915 which sailed for the UK. His condition deteriorated and he was taken ashore to the Military Hospital Gibraltar on 8 October 1915 and died that same day. The death was recorded as Enteric (Fever). His classification was therefore Died of Illness (DOI). Private Pentilla was buried the following day in Gibraltar (North Front) Cemetery also known as Garrison Gibraltar Cemetery with Reverend L J Matthews officiating.

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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*

Additional/personal information:

Private Pentilla was the son of Christopher and Mary Ann Pentilla (neé Larkin) who married in Northam in 1886. He appears to have been the second eldest of six children. Christopher senior died in 1896 at the age of 38 leaving Mrs Pentilla with the children, the youngest born also in 1896, no doubt a serious struggle until she remarried in 1902 to Patrick Maher.

Mr Maher may have also died while the children were still young as he is not mentioned in family notices*:

> PENTILLA.-On October 8. at Gibraltar, of enteric fever, after two months in trenches, Christopher Sydnev Pentilla, beloved son of Mrs. P. Maher, and brother of Minnie, Jean, and Charles. Loved by all who knew him.
> -Inserted by his loving sister-in-law, Lily Pentilla. (*Western Mail* 26/11/1915p31)

It appears Christopher Pentilla was very active in the community during his 3 years based at Narrogin in the Great Southern:

> "Worker" readers in the city and Northam district will learn with regret of the death of our fine sportsman, Chris Pentilla. He was a fine footballer and cricketer, and always played the game as a true sportsman. He was one of the most prominent players on the G.S.R., and for three years steered Railways to premiership honors. Last year. Midland Junction secured Chris, but owing to a more serious game to be played he left to do his turn for us against the Turk. After ten weeks in the trenches he developed fever, and this proved fatal. Some of the boys Chris led on the football field are now lying for ever on the cruel plains of Turkey, and now their old captain has joined in their last game.(*Westralian Worker* 3/12/1915p4)

For his service he was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal all of which were issued to his mother together with the Memorial Scroll and Plaque. She requested that the following be inscribed on his headstone: NOT GONE FROM MEMORY NOR FROM LOVE GONE TO OUR FATHER'S HOME ABOVE.

*Searches of BDM records reveal more than one man named Patrick Maher died in the intervening years and it has not yet been possible to determine which may be relevant.

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).

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----------