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Sharpe, George

A West Australian railway employee killed while on military service for their country

George Sharpe had a tough life – abandoned by his mother after birth, he enlisted and was in France barely 2 months before he was killed. Army Records spent longer debating who could receive his medals, than he spent in the army.



Memorial at Railway Workshops Midland (D.Graham/panoramio)

Rail employment information

Employer:	Western Australian Government Railways & Tramways
Branch:	Locomotive
Designation:	Cleaner

Rail employment notes: Born 22/6/1893. Joined WAGR 27/10/1913 aged 20 as Cleaner, Kalgoorlie. ("Cleaner" in this case was a position in the Locomotive branch, cleaning locomotives and otherwise employed at a locomotive depot and on locos whilst training to be a Fireman, the next step up the ladder.)

Granted leave to join AIF 13/4/1916 (Service No.5657). Killed in action 2/3/1917.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	28th Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	5657
Date of death:	2 March 1917
Place of death:	Warlencourt, France
Age:	24
Rank:	Private
Burial/memorialisation:	Warlencourt British Cemetery, Warlencourt-Eaucourt, Arras, Nord Pas de Calais, France

George Sharpe commenced his enlistment in the AIF in Kalgoorlie and was attested at Blackboy Hill Camp on 4 April 1916. On enlistment he nominated his guardian Mrs Hagar Washington of North Perth as his next of kin (NOK) and declared that he had no previous military experience. Following basic military training at Blackboy Hill Camp he was allocated to 15th Reinforcements to 28 Battalion and departed Australia from Fremantle on 22 Sep 1916 aboard A52 HMAT *Surada*.

On arrival at Plymouth UK on 21 Nov 1916 he disembarked and marched into 7 Trg Bn for continuation training. On 13 December 1916 he left England through Folkestone aboard SS *Victoria* and joined the British Expeditionary Force at 2 ADBD the following day. Private Sharpe moved quickly through the Base Depot and was taken-on-strength of 28 Bn, in the field, on 28 Dec 1916.

He was Killed in Action on 2 March 1917 near the Warlencourt sector of the Flers line. He was buried in an isolated grave half a mile North of Warlencourt and the position marked. After the war The War

Graves Registration Unit located his battlefield grave and his remains were reinterred at the Warlencourt British Cemetery. A personal inscription was added to his gravestone which reads: “He Died Like He lived Noble and Brave”.

Additional/personal information:

A Will was extracted from his paybook in which he bequeathed his entire estate to his guardian, Mrs H Washington. A military pension of 20/- per fortnight was paid to his guardian effective from 25 May 1917, annotated to cease on 21 May 1919.

For his service he was entitled to receive the British War Medal, the Victory Medal and the person entitled to those campaign medals under terms of the Deceased Soldiers Estate Act (1918) would also receive a Memorial Scroll and the Memorial Plaque. When contacted by Army Records to determine such entitlements Mrs Washington stated that George Sharpe had been born in her house in an Adelaide suburb and that his mother abandoned him shortly after birth and that there had never been a mother-son relationship and that she had become his foster mother and raised him.

He had two foster sisters but there was no blood relationship. Acting on that information Army Records determined that the entitled person under the Act was Mrs Hagar Washington, but she unfortunately died intestate on 03 Oct 1921 at the age of 60 years. A foster sister of Pte Sharpe, Mrs Keebers was then determined to be the entitled person as there were no foster brothers. A second foster sister, Mrs G C Dewar, older than Mrs Keebers was later identified and the required papers for her to receive the medals and associated mementos were drafted.

For the first time a husband of Mrs Washington, namely Alfred Charles Washington, telegraph linesman of Southern Cross was identified. Alfred and Hagar had been married in South Australia in 1889 (ref.159/673) and apparently had both come to Western Australia.

On 27 Mar 1922 he declared in a Statutory Declaration that there were no living blood relatives of George Sharpe and that he would care for the medals and return them to Army Records should a person with a superior claim ever emerge. Alfred Washington died on 21 July 1938 and was buried in the same compartment at Karrakatta cemetery as Hagar Washington.

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----------