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Smith, Arthur George

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:	Striker

Rail employment notes: Born 1/8/1893. Joined WAGR 13/7/1911 aged 17 as Junior Labourer, Midland Workshops. Appointed to Striker 4/5/1915.

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. A striker works with a blacksmith.

Granted leave to join AIF 29/7/1915 (Service No.1640). Killed in action 20/7/1916.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	32nd Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	1640
Date of death:	20 July 1916
Place of death:	France
Age:	22
Rank:	Private
Burial/memorialisation:	VC Corner Australian Cemetery and Memorial, Fromelles, Lille, Nord Pas de Calais, France

Arthur George Smith enlisted in the AIF in Perth on 26 July 1915. He had no previous military experience and quoted his mother Charlotte Smith as his next of kin (NOK) but this was changed to Abram (sometimes referred to as Abraham) Smith when it was discovered that his father was still living. Arthur had been born in Chesterfield (UK) and migrated to Australia at the age of 10. His military training was conducted at Blackboy Hill Camp following which he was allotted to 1st Reinforcement to 32 Battalion with the regimental number 1640.

Pte Smith departed Australia through the Port of Fremantle aboard A2 HMAT *Geelong* on 18 Nov 1915 and disembarked at Suez on 18 Dec 1915. He was taken on strength of 32 Bn on 01 Jan 1916. The Bn then engaged in individual and formation training in Egypt. He departed Egypt aboard *Transylvania* on 17 Jun 1916 and landed at Marseilles on 23 Jun 1916 to join the British Expeditionary Force. The 5th Division including 32 Bn quickly entered active service at Fromelles.

The attack on the German lines was a disaster (probably the worst of the Great War involving the AIF). There was great confusion in the administration. Pte Smith was initially shown as Missing in

Action on 20 July 1916 but this was altered to Wounded in action and Prisoner of War (WIA and POW) that same date and later when the German reports came to hand, he was declared Killed in action on 20 July 1916. No identified bodies were recovered from the battlefield and all those Killed in Action on 19/20 July 1916 are remembered at VC Corner Memorial.

Additional/personal information:

Arthur Smith had been born in Derbyshire in England before emigrating to Australia, apparently with his family.

His identity disc was recovered from the German Army and forwarded to his father in 1920. Pensions were granted to his parents but the original documentation has been lost. Correspondence from the Amalgamated Society of Railway Employees dated 25 Apr 1917 is recorded but again is incomplete.

For his service he was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, British War Medal and the Victory Medal together with other memorabilia. Abram Smith signed for the Star, British War Medal and the Memorial Scroll. Abram Smith died on 01 Nov 1921 aged 59 year and was buried at Karrakatta. The Victory Medal and Memorial Plaque were then issued to Mrs Charlotte Smith. She continued to receive the military pension until she died on 25 May 1952, aged 82 years and was buried at Karrakatta in the same compartment as Abram (KA 0235).

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----------