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Stapleton, William Walter

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:	Cleaner

Rail employment notes: Born 1/2/1895. Joined WAGR 3/11/1913 aged 18 as Cleaner, Northam. ("Cleaner" in this case was a position in the Locomotive branch, cleaning locomotives and otherwise employed at a locomotive depot whilst training to be a Fireman, the next step up the ladder.)

Transferred to Merredin 20/12/1913.

Granted leave to join AIF 6/2/1915 (Service No.161). Killed in action 26/3/1917.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	28th Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	161
Date of death:	26 March 1917
Place of death:	Place not yet found
Age:	21
Rank:	Private

Burial/memorialisation: Queant Road Cemetery, Buissy, Nord Pas de Calais, France

William Walter Stapleton enlisted in the AIF on 08 Feb 1915. On enlistment he nominated his mother Mrs Mary Stapleton as his next of kin (NOK). His basic military training was conducted at Blackboy Hill Military Camp following which he was assigned to 28 Bn with the regimental number 161. The Battalion undertook a ceremonial parade through the streets of Perth on 3 June 1915 prior to embarking on A11 HMAT *Ascanius* on 09 June 1915 and departing from Fremantle for Egypt where the main party disembarked on 03 July 1915.

After guard duties and training the Battalion departed Alexandria for Gallipoli on 04 September 1915 aboard SS *Ivernia*. Following active service on Gallipoli 28 Bn returned to Egypt via Lemnos arriving on 10 Jan 1916. Following a short period of training and taking on reinforcements the Bn sailed from Alexandria on 16 Mar 1916 aboard A32 *Themistocles* and disembarked at Marseilles on 22 Mar 1916 to join the British Expeditionary Force. He was found guilty of disobeying a lawful command at Field General Court Martial on 04 May 1916 and sentenced to Four Years Penal Servitude which was later commuted to 90 days Field Punishment Number 2.

He was also Wounded in Action and evacuated to England for treatment. In January 1917 he was wounded with a self-inflicted wound and fined the loss of 50 days pay which when combined with his period under close arrest resulted in a total of 65 days loss of pay.

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In the assault on Lagnicourt he was Killed in Action on 26 March 1917.An eye witness to his death, 5326 Pte T Brown 28 Bn stated that Pte Stapleton was one of a number of casualties killed from a high explosive shell. He was originally posted as Missing in Action 26 March 1917 but this was amended to Killed in Action by memorandum dated 2 July 1917. His body was buried in a ditch by the side of the road but later exhumed and relocated to Queant Road Cemetery, Buissy but the actual burial site remains unknown. The Imperial War Graves Commission erected a tombstone with his regimental particulars marked "Known to be buried in this Cemetery".

Additional/personal information:

William Stapleton was born in Cootamundra in New South Wales but the family moved west when he was young and he attended Picton Junction school.

> STAPLETON .- Killed in action somewhere in France on March 26, Private W. W. Stapleton, A Company,-28th Battalion, aged 22 years. … Inserted by his loving uncle and aunt, E. and M Coolahan, cousin, Sergeant Signaller A, Coolohan. (on active service, 28th Battalion)
> *The West Australian* 23/7/1917p1
>
> STAPLETON.-Killed in action; March 26, 1917, in France, previously reported missing, Private William Stapleton, 28th Battalion, late of Merredin Loco. over two years on active service; dearly-loved, youngest son of E. and M. Stapleton, Picton Junction. -Inserted by his. loving father and mother.
>
> STAPLETON -Killed in action on March 26, 1917, in France, previously reported missing. Private William Stapleton, 28th Battalion, late of Merredin Loco. dearly-loved, brother of May Gibson, Clara Prosser, and Frank (New South Wales). -Inserted by his loving brother and sisters.
> Both *Western Mail* 27/7/1917p26

His family paid for an inscription on the tombstone which reads: "He Died for Those He Loved My Boy Willie". For his service he was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. The campaign medals and other memorabilia were nominally issued to his father but all receipts were signed by his mother. Mrs Stapleton received a military pension of 14/- per fortnight effective from 13 Jun 1917. Pte Stapleton's father, Stephen, died on 04 May 1920 aged 61 years. His mother died on 27 Jul 1942 aged 81 years.

The family purchased an "empty" grave for Pte Willie Stapleton in the Bunbury Cemetery and erected a marker there – overseas travel was rare except on military service so the family then had a site to commemorate him close to home. This was not unusual, although in Private Stapleton's case it meant he had two grave markers, both over empty spaces.

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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