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Statham, John Lee

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

John Statham died the unpleasant death from gassing – and left his wife with 3 boys aged under 7 years.



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

Rail employment information

Employer:	Western Australian Government Railways & Tramways
Branch:	Traffic
Designation:	Guard

Rail employment notes: Born 8/2/1889. Joined WAGR 11/3/1911 aged 22 as Casual Porter, Perth.

("Porter" was a very general category in the WAGR – some had specific roles such as a receiving goods porter, some were general hands while some learnt safe-working and could assist with signals, etc. Mr Statham will have had to pass courses in safe-working as he became a guard.)

Transferred to Shunter, Perth Goods 18/1/1912 and promoted to Head Shunter, Kalgoorlie 30/9/1913. Appointed to Guard, Merredin 23/12/1913.

Granted leave to join AIF 28/6/1916 (Service No.6952). Died of wounds 3/10/1917.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	11th Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	6952
Date of death:	3 October 1917
Place of death:	Place not yet found
Age:	28
Rank:	Private

Burial/memorialisation: Wimereux Communal Cemetery, Wimereux, Nord Pas de Calais, France

John Lea Statham enlisted in the AIF on 20 Jun 1916. On enlistment he declared his wife Mrs Bertha Statham to be his next of kin. He had no previous military experience. His basic training was at Blackboy Hill Camp followed by attendance at the Non-commissioned Officers (NCO) School at the Belmont racecourse. Pte Statham was assigned to 23rd Reinforcements to 11 Battalion with the regimental number 6952 and appointed as a Sergeant unpaid (for the voyage only).

Sergeant Statham departed Australia from Fremantle on 23 December1916 aboard the transport ship HMAT *Berrima* and disembarked at Devonport UK on 16 February 1917 to march into 3 Training Battalion on 18 February 1917 where he reverted to his substantive rank of Private. Following further training he departed the UK through Southampton on 22 May 1917 to join the British Expeditionary Force. He was taken on strength of 11 Battalion on 15 June 1917, in the field. The Battalion was then engaged in the Third Battle of Ypres. In the area of Zonnebeke he was wounded in the ankle and severely gassed on 2 October 1917. He was evacuated to 3 Field Ambulance and then by Ambulance

Train to 2 Australian General Hospital at Wimereux where he died from the effects of the gas on 3 October 1917. Private Statham was buried that same day in the Wimereux Communal Cemetery.

Additional/personal information:

He was born in Port Sunlight on Merseyside in England and had migrated to Australia at the age of 21 years. It appears that he married Bertha in the UK but then after arriving in WA the couple had three children before John died – John in 1912, Alfred in 1914 and Frederick in 1916. The youngest will not have remembered much of his father.

> STATHAM.- Died of wounds and gassed on October 3, 1917, in France, Private John Lee Statham, of Bayswater, late guard of Merredin, and dearly beloved husband of Bertha, and father of little Jackie, Alfred, and Freddie. aged 28 years. -Inserted by his loving wife and children. English papers please copy. *The West Australian* 16/10/1917p1

For his service he was entitled to the British War Medal and the Victory Medal which were issued to his widow together with other memorabilia. There is no mention of a military pension for his widow and children in his file.

Bertha Statham married Fred Tillett (BDM Perth 82/1919). Fred had enlisted in the AIF in 1916 but was discharged two weeks later with defective eyesight due to cataracts. Mrs Bertha Tillett died at the age of 39 years on 28 Jul 1928 and was buried at Karrakatta. Pte Statham had left a will but it was not until 1933 that a solicitor at Moora requested a death certificate for the late Private Statham to allow for an application of probate. There is no explanation of why it was 15 years after the death of the beneficiary that an application for probate was made.

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----------