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Stewart, Ernest

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:	Traffic
Designation:	Checker

Rail employment notes: Born 26/1/1890. Joined WAGR 6/10/1910 aged 20 as Goods Porter, Perth Goods.
("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. Perth Goods was an extensive yard with sheds and sidings, located approximately where the Perth underground busport now operates between Wellington Street and the through line to Fremantle.)

Appointed Checker 2/9/1912.

Granted leave to join AIF 23/4/1917 (Service No.3924). Died of wounds 12/5/1918.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	51st Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	3924
Date of death:	12 May 1918
Place of death:	In hospital, England
Age:	28
Rank:	Private
Burial/memorialisation:	Portsdown (Christ Church) Military Cemetery, Portsdown, Hampshire, England, United Kingdom

Ernest Stewart enlisted in the AIF in Perth on 29 June 1917. On enlistment he nominated his mother Mrs Phoebe Stewart as his Next of kin and stated that he had no previous military experience. Military training was commenced at Blackboy Hill Camp and on 14 August 1917 he was allocated to 11th Reinforcements to 51 Battalion with the regimental number 3924. He made his Will on 20 August 1917 in which he made his mother the sole beneficiary.
Private Stewart departed Australia from Fremantle aboard HMAT *Aeneas* on 30 October 1917 and disembarked at Devonport UK on 27 December 1917. He entered the Training Battalion on arrival and remained there until he departed England on 1 April 1918 from Dover and landed at Calais where he marched into 4 Medical Base Depot that same day to join the British Expeditionary Force. Private Stewart was taken-on-strength of 51 Battalion on 6 April 1918.

On 25 April 1918 he was Wounded in action during the Battle of Villers-Bretonneux in which he suffered Gunshot wounds to his face and arm. He entered the medical evacuation train and passed through 25 Field Ambulance, 5 Casualty Clearing Station and reached 9 Geneeral Hospital at Rouen

on 30 April 1918, when he was evacuated to England by Hospital Ship and admitted to the Alexandria Hospital at Cosham. However he Died (Died of wounds) on 12 May 1918 from septicaemia secondary to the wounds received on 25 April 1918. He was buried at Portsdown (Christ Church) Military Cemetery, Hampshire on 15 May 1918 with the Reverend Bruce Pearson officiating. He received a full military funeral, with a bugler present, a firing party and his coffin was draped in a Union Jack. A representative of AIF Headquarters was present.

Additional/personal information:

Ernest Stewart was a local boy, born in Fremantle, a son of Thomas Stewart and Phoebe (nee Place) Stewart. It was a large family with Ernest being the seventh of ten children registered, and might have become even larger but the father died in 1903. (BDM 168/1890 et al.)

> STEWART.-On May 12, of wounds received in action, Private Ernest Stewart, aged 28 years. One of the best. -Inserted by his loving mother and brothers, Vic and Tom. *The West Australian* 21/5/1918p1
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> STEWART.—Killed in action on May 12, 1918, Private Ernie Stewart, late of Subiaco, beloved brother of Mrs. Fred. Simmons, of Fremantle. His duty nobly done. *The West Australian* 23/5/1918p1

The limited number of siblings mentioned in family notices suggests some of the children had not survived to adulthood.

> STEWART.—In proud and loving memory of our son and brother, Ernest Stewart, Private, 51st Battalion, who, from wounds received at Villers Bretonneux, France, died at Alexander Hospital, Cosham, England, on May 12, 1918. His duty done. Inserted by his mother and brothers, 31 Rowland·street Subiaco.
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> STEWART.—In loving memory of Ernest Stewart, died of wounds, May 12, 1918. Inserted by his brother and sister-in-law, Will and Phyllis.
>
> STEWART.—In loving memory of my dear brother Ernie, who died of- wounds, Cosham Hospital, England, May 12, 1918. … Inserted by Mrs. F. Simmons and niece Doris.
> All *The West Australian* 12/5/1919p1

For his service he was entitled to the British War Medal and the Victory Medal which were issued to his mother along with other memorabilia. There is a presumption that his mother received a military pension as there is a file PP2/8, R7901 which ran until 1940 which is the year his mother died. The file is not available on line. Mrs Stewart was also entitled to a benefit under an insurance policy held by her son with the MLC organisation.

The family paid for an inscription on his tombstone which reads: “Death is the Gate of Life”. Private Stewart has a memorial tablet in Kings Park (M443) which was dedicated by his mother. Mrs Phoebe Stewart (his mother and next of kin) died at the age of 85 years on 8 March 1940 and was buried in Karrakatta cemetery.

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----------