Thompson, James

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

In the First War, it was often said that young men signed up for the ‘excitement’ of going overseas, which few would normally achieve. In this case, the soldier had emigrated to WA then only found work in a track gang. After 5 summers along the track in outback WA, the army may have seemed appealing, despite the risk.



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

Rail employment information

Employer:	Western Australian Government Railways & Tramways
Branch:	Way and Works
Designation:	Repairer

Rail employment notes: Born 12/7/1884. Joined WAGR 28/8/1911 aged 27 as Repairer, 172 Mile. (“Repairer” was a track maintenance worker in a gang responsible for upkeep of an allocated section of railway line. A typical gang might include between 3 and 6 Repairers with one Leading Hand Repairer and a Ganger in charge.)

Transferred to Yoweragabbie 16/11/1911, Yalgoo 31/8/1912, Pindar 2/10/1913 and Wurarga 7/5/1914 – these locations are all abandoned sidings on the former railway between Mullewa - Mt Magnet - Meekatharra. Granted leave to join AIF 29/3/1916 (Service No.6342). Killed in action 11/4/1917.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	16th Battalion.
Service number:	6342
Date of death:	11 April 1917
Place of death:	France
Age:	32
Rank:	Private

Burial/memorialisation: Villers-Bretonneux Memorial, France

James Thompson was born in Burnley, Lancashire and migrated to Australia. He began his enlistment in Dalwallinu and completed it at Blackboy Hill Camp on 23 Mar 1916. He had no previous military experience and nominated his wife, Mrs Mary Ellen Thompson, as his Next of kin. Following his basic training he was allotted to the 20th Reinforcements to 16th Battalion with the regimental number 6342. He departed Australia through Fremantle aboard A 23 HMAT *Suffolk* on 13 October 1916 and disembarked at Plymouth on 02 Dec 1916. He moved with the reinforcements aboard SS *Princess Clementine* to join the BEF on 28 Dec 1916 through 4 ADBD. He was taken on strength of 16 Bn on11 Feb 1917. In the assault on Bullecourt on 11 April 1917 he was listed as Missing in Action. A Court of Enquiry held in the field on 20 October 1917 determined that he was actually Killed in Action. His remains were never recovered, he has no known grave, and he is remembered on the Villers-Bretonneux Memorial.

Additional/personal information:

Thompson had been born in England before emigrating to Australia aged 27. He appears to have married and had a daughter before arriving in WA. His widow received a pension of 40/- per fortnight with effect from 9 September 1917 and his daughter Alice a pension of 20/- per fortnight from the same date.

Mrs Thompson remarried to a Patrick Lynch recorded at BDM 429/1919. First War historian Dr Michael Galvin comments:

> It is quite likely that Patrick Lynch was number 6291 of 16 Bn. Both men were born outside of Australia, both trained at Blackboy Hill at the same time and both were members of 20th/16 Bn. Very possible that they became mates and Patrick Lynch called on widow Thompson after the War and this evolved into a marriage. I have seen this before in other Battalions especially where one of the mates opens written communication with the widow.

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----------