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Thorne, James Stanley

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

While deaths in war were sometimes referred to as “glorious”, James Stanley’s loss was not glorious – very drunk, he fell asleep on a road and was run over.



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

Rail employment information

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

Rail employment notes: Born 12/3/1889. Joined WAGR 7/12/1912 aged 23 as Porter, Korrelocking.

(“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. In a small location such as Korrelocking they would have been a general hand, however at Northam or Spencers Brook they may have assisted with signals and passed the necessary safeworking exam to become a signalman.)

Transferred to Northam 1/7/1914 and Spencers Brook 17/8/1914. Promoted to Signalman, Guildford 26/1/1916.

Granted leave to join AIF 27/11/1916. (Service No.3219). Killed in railway accident in England 4/4/1918.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	46th Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	3219
Date of death:	4 April 1918
Place of death:	France
Age:	29
Rank:	Private

Burial/memorialisation: Vignacourt British Cemetery, Vignacourt, Picardie, France

James Stanley Thorne enlisted in the AIF on 27 November 1916 when he declared his mother Mrs Sarah Thorne to be his next of kin (NOK) (his father was dead) and that he had no previous military experience. Private Thorne was born in the UK and migrated to Australia at the age of 20 years. After minimal training at Blackboy Hill Camp, he was assigned to 8th Reinforcement to 46 Battalion with the regimental number 3219 and departed Australia through the Port of Fremantle on 29 Dec 1916 aboard HMAT *Persic*.

On the voyage to the UK he had a minor brush with military discipline when he was convicted of gambling contrary to standing orders. *Persic* docked at Devonport on 3 March 1917 and he entered 12 Training Battalion the following day where he remained until 19 June 1917 when he crossed to France

through Southampton to join the British Expeditionary Force. In France he was admitted to a base depot until 8 July 1917 when he left to march into 46 Battalion and was taken on strength, in the field. Pte Thorne was an inpatient between 3 August and 14 August 1917 with fever before re-joining his Unit and serving during the Third Battle of Ypres.

He was given UK leave from 11 March 1918 until 3 April 1918. On the next day, 4 April 1918 he absented himself without leave and with another soldier (3221 Vince 46 Bn) retired to a bar where he became substantially intoxicated. On the way back to his billet he fell asleep on a roadway where he was run over by a lorry of a salvage company and suffered massive, fatal head injuries. His body was taken to the nearby 4 Field Ambulance where he was pronounced dead. A formal Court of Enquiry was convened and it was found that he died of accidental injuries and he was the responsible party. Private Thorne was buried in the Vignacourt British Cemetery on 8 April 1918 with the Rev D F Coulter, attached to 20 CCS officiating.

Additional/personal information:

The news of his death, and the circumstances of it, must have been very difficult for the family.

Not surprisingly, no family notices were found in WA papers.

For his service he was entitled to the British War Medal and the Victory Medal together with other memorabilia which were issued to his mother, resident in Wales. A brother of Pte Thorne served in 28 Bn AIF according to his mother and returned safely to Australia.

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----------