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Wheeler, Harry

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:	Boilermaker

Rail employment notes: Born 4/1/1893. Joined WAGR 2/3/1908 aged 15 as Apprentice Boilermaker, Midland Workshops. Appointed to Boilermaker 1/7/1913. Transferred to Kalgoorlie 20/1/1914 and Midland Workshops 5/5/1914. Granted leave to join AIF 15/8/1914. Killed in action 27/2/1917.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	11th Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	371
Date of death:	27 February 1917
Place of death:	France
Age:	24
Rank:	Private
Burial/memorialisation:	AIF Burial Ground, Flers, Picardie, France

Harry Wheeler enlisted in the AIF at Blackboy Hill Camp on 2 September 1914. On enlistment he nominated his father Mr William A Wheeler as his Next of kin. He had 3 years' experience in the militia prior to enlistment. His basic training was conducted at Blackboy Hill following which he was assigned to 11th Battalion with the regimental number 371. The Battalion boarded A11 HMAT *Ascanius* at Fremantle but did not depart to join the other ships of the First Convoy at sea until 2 November 1914 where they had a strong naval escort. The soldiers disembarked in Egypt and moved into Mena camp for further military training. There was further (intensive) training in Egypt before the Bn moved to Mudros aboard HMT *Suffolk* and then participated in the Gallipoli Landing on the morning of 25 April 1915. Private Wheeler was unharmed at the Landing and remained as an active member of the Bn until 19 August 1915 when he suffered a Gunshot wound to a finger which severed a tendon. He was evacuated to the Stationary Hospital on Lemnos and from there to Egypt on HMAT *Ulysses.* Landing at Alexandria he remained under medical care until he returned to Gallipoli on 5 September 1915. Private Wheeler was determined to be unfit for duty on the basis of debility on 2 November 1915 and was evacuated to Malta. He recovered and returned to Egypt on 23 January 1916 where he re-joined the Battalion and trained with the waiting reinforcements. On 29 March 1916 the Battalion boarded HMT *Corsican* and disembarked at Marseilles on 5 April 1916 to join the British Expeditionary Force. On arrival Pte Wheeler was assigned to Base Details where he remained until 4 September 1916 when he re-joined 11 Bn in the field. He was hospitalised with a septic heel between 17 Nov 1916 and 04 Dec 1916. The Battalion went into action again after the terrible winter of 1916-

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1917 and shortly afterwards he was Killed in action on 27 February 1917 when an artillery shell fell amongst his ration party. His Red Cross File contains a number of eye witness reports of his death. The 5 men killed by that shell were all buried on the field, identified as Turks Dump, near Flers which had been turned into a small burial field. After the War the Graves Registration Unit moved his remains to the AIF Burial Ground 1 Km NNW of Flers.

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*

Additional/personal information:

For his service Pte Harry Wheeler was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal which were issued to his father together with other memorabilia.

A family notice after his death revealed that his father had also enlisted:

> WHEELER.-On February 27, killed in action in France. Private Harry Wheeler, B Company, 11th Battalion, dearly beloved only son of Mrs. and Corporal W. A. Wheeler (on active service, Railway Corps), of Amhurst road, West Midland.
> Greater love hath no man than this. (*The West Australian* 17/3/1917p1)

His father, however, returned safely from the war and died in 1949 at the age of 80 years.

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----------