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Humphries, William

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

William Humphries was a professional soldier, surviving some 14 years service in the British army but then enlisting again with the AIF, where unfortunately he was killed on his second term in French trenches.



William Humphries is remembered on a Midland Railway Co. Honour Board which may be seen at the Railway Museum in Bassendean.

Rail employment information

Employer:	Midland Railway Company of Western Australia Ltd
Branch:	Civil
Designation:	Labourer

Rail employment notes: Employed as a labourer by the Midland Railway Company of WA. This company built, owned and ran the railway from Midland to Walkaway, near Geraldton, until they sold the complete operation to the state government in 1964.

Individual employee records for this company have not been found, however fallen employees have been researched from Honour Boards and other sources. The company always ran on a very tight budget and employees such as Mr Humphries were often casuals.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	28th Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	4755
Date of death:	3 November 1916
Place of death:	France
Age:	31
Rank:	Corporal
Burial/memorialisation:	Warlencourt British Cemetery, Warlencourt-Eaucourt, Arras, Nord Pas de Calais, France

William Humphries enlisted in the AIF on 5 April 1916. On enlistment he nominated his mother, resident in England as his Next of kin. He had been born in London and migrated to Australia aged 27 years. He gave a history of 13 years' service in the British Army (2 Battalion, Border Regiment) followed by 4 years as a reservist. When War was declared he was "called back to the Colours"- i.e. the British government actively pursued men who were still in a reserve period after their active service to rejoin the British army until expiry of their reserve term. (The Imperial Reserve soldiers who were recalled sailed from Australia on the First Convoy from Albany.) His mother stated that he had served in France after this recall.

When finally discharged in 1916 he returned to Australia where he enlisted in the AIF (the Australian pay rate was higher and he would be transported back to Australia at government cost if he survived).

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The AIF clearly recognized that he was a trained and experienced soldier as he was allocated to 12th Reinforcements to 28 Battalion with the regimental number 4755 and departed Australia on the transport ship HMAT *Aeneas* on 17 April 1916 just 12 days after enlistment. He disembarked in Egypt and transferred to SS *Tunisian* which departed Alexandria on 29 May 1916 and berthed at Marseilles on 5 June 1916 to join the British Expeditionary Force. He served in the Anzac Battalion at Marseilles until he was taken-on-strength of 28 Battalion on 1 August 1916, in the field.

Private Humphries was posted as MIA sometime between 3 and 6 November 1916 at Flers. A Court of Enquiry held on 26 July 1917 determined that he had been KIA on 3 November 1916. An eye witness (1597 Cpl G M White 28 Bn) later gave an account of him being struck by machine gun bullets which were probably fatal. Corporal White believed the date to be 5 November 1916 but for official records his date of death is 3 November 1916. He is buried at Warlencourt British Cemetery

Additional/personal information:

William Humphries was born in Chelsea, London UK, a son of James and Jemima Humphries.

He is buried at Warlencourt British Cemetery and his gravestone has the following inscription: "Son of James and Jemima Humphries of 5 Holbury St Chelsea, London England". For his AIF service he was entitled to the British War Medal and the Victory Medal which were issued to his mother together with other memorabilia. It would seem that he was also entitled to the 1914-1915 Star but his mother would have had to apply to the War Department, London for that to be issued.

Mrs Humphries was granted an Australian War Pension of 40/- per fortnight with effect from 23 June 1917 for William's Australian service.

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----------