Alford, Charles William

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:	Stores
Designation:	Labourer

Rail employment notes: Labourer, No.2 Railway Mill, Dwellingup.

In this period the WAGR operated two sawmills, whose operations were included in the Commissioner of Railway's responsibilities and reports, and their employees who enlisted were included on WAGR Honour Rolls. WAGR records of individual employees, available from the SRO, have not been found for Mr Alford, however designation and other information have been listed from local Honour Boards, the Railway Institute Magazine, and other sources.

Enlisted in 11th Battalion AIF 20/6/1916 (Service No.6470). Killed in action 20/9/1917.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	11th Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	6470
Date of death:	20 September 1917
Place of death:	Belgium
Age:	19
Rank:	Private

Burial/memorialisation: Menin Gate Memorial, Ypres, Flanders, Belgium

Charles William Alford enlisted in the AIF at Blackboy Hill Camp on 20 June 1916 at the age of 18 years. His father Charles Albert Alford gave his approval for the enlistment and was also declared to be his next of kin. He had no previous military experience. Following basic military training he was allocated to 21st Reinforcement to 11 Battalion with the regimental number 6470.

The reinforcements departed Australia through the Port of Fremantle on 10 October 1916 aboard the transport ship HMAT *Suffolk* and disembarked at Plymouth UK on 2 December 1916. Private Alford marched into 3 Training Battalion on 17 December 1916 but his training there was interrupted by a short admission to hospital with mumps. He departed England through Folkestone on 3 May 1917 and joined the British Expeditionary Force when he was taken on strength of 11 Battalion, in the field, on 10 May 1917.

The Battalion was committed to the Third Battle of Ypres where he was acting as a stretcher bearer. On 20 September 1917 he was in a German trench (First Objective) at Glencorse Wood when a German shell dropped into the trench. He died instantly and was buried on the battlefield in the slush. His remains were never found, he has no known grave and so is remembered on the Menin Gate at Ypres (now Ieper).

Additional/personal information:

Charles William Alford was born in Rockingham WA in 1898, the son of Charles Albert Alford & Amy (nee Philby) Alford. His parents had been married in Victoria (BDM Vic 3962/1890) where his sister Phoebe was born in 1891. The family then moved to New South Wales, where a son George A Alford was born in the Narrandera district in 1895. But more wanderings followed, the Alfords moved west – as did so many after the gold finds of the 1890s – before Charles was born in 1898, followed by a sister Jessie who only lived a few months. (BDM NSW & WA)

> ALFORD.—Killed in action, somewhere in France, on September 21, Private Charles Wm. (Buttons), beloved youngest son of C. and A. Alford, Holyoake, and loving brother of Private George (on active service) and Mrs. Phoebe Turner, Mundijong; aged 19½ years. Years will come, time will fly, Every rising sun will set, But our dear Buttons we will never forget. —Inserted by his loving father, mother, brother and sister. *The West Australian* 1/11/1917p1

His father relocated to Victoria around 1920. For his service he was entitled to the British War Medal and the Victory Medal which were issued to his father together with other memorabilia.

His brother George A Alford, also enlisted in 1916, but this would be a disaster as he deserted in England. Desertion seems to have been quite rare, especially considering the mounting death toll, but would have severe consequences.

He had a young daughter, born in 1917 (*The West Australian* 3/8/1917p1) - it's thought he had married Mary Nelson in WA in 1914. He was declared to be an illegal absentee by a Court of Enquiry, having deserted on 3 April 1918. His pay then stopped leaving his wife and baby daughter destitute. His services in the AIF were terminated with the forfeiture of campaign medals, return to Australia at public expense and any other financial benefits. Last reported sighting was in England where he was in civilian clothes. The days of shooting deserters might have passed, but his family faced the consequences.

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----------