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Matthews, George Thomas

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:	Fettler

Rail employment notes: Fettler, 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. WAGR records of individual employees, available from the SRO, have not been found for Mr Matthews however designation and other information have been listed from WAGR Honour Boards, the Railway Institute Magazine, and other sources.
The mills had extensive systems of rail tracks to bring felled logs to the mill, and then sawn timber to connect with the WAGR. A Fettler was a track worker.

*Comprehensive information on mills and rail operations, with maps, can be found in this book:
Gunzburg, A. and J.Austin: "Rails through the bush": Perth, 2008, Rail Heritage: WA: ISBN 978-0-9803922-2-7

Enlisted in 51st Battalion AIF 1/2/1916 (Service No.707). Killed in action 26/9/1917.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	51st Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	707
Date of death:	26 September 1917
Place of death:	Belgium
Age:	33
Rank:	Private

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

George Thomas Matthews enlisted in the AIF on 1 February 1916 simultaneously with an Army order of 2 February 1916 which authorised the raising of an 11th Brigade of a 3rd Division, of which 44 Battalion was to be a component. Private Matthews was allotted the regimental number 707 in this new Battalion. He gave his father, Thomas Matthews, resident in England as his Next of kin. He had no previous military experience. Training of the 44th Battalion was mostly conducted in and around the suburb of Claremont including the Claremont football oval.

Private Matthews departed Australia through the Port of Fremantle on 6 June 1916 aboard HMAT *Suevic*. The Battalion disembarked at Plymouth on 21 July 1916. On 9 September 1916 Private Matthews was one of a party that was transferred directly to 51 Battalion as reinforcements and continued training with 13 Training Battalion until 2 November 1916 when they crossed to France aboard SS *Henrietta* to join the British Expeditionary Force. Private Matthews was taken on strength

of 51 Battalion in the field on 17 November 1916. In the Battle of Arras, he was Wounded in action on 1 April 1917 (nature of wounds not recorded). Private Matthews subsequently passed through 9 Casualty Clearing Station, 3 Stationary Hospital and 2 Convalescent Depot before finally re-joining 51 Battalion on 5 May 1917.

He was Killed in action at Zonnebeke on 26 September 1917 during the Third Battle of Ypres and buried close to where he fell. His burial site was marked and recorded by a map reference but after the War could not be located by the Graves Registration Unit, he therefore has no known grave and is remembered on the Menin Gate at Ypres (now Ieper).

Additional/personal information:

Thomas Matthews appears to have emigrated without family to WA and there is no record of marriage or children after he arrived here.

His will was held by a Mrs Robertson of 8th Avenue Maylands WA who proceeded to administer his estate. For his service Private Matthews was entitled to the British War Medal and the Victory Medal which were issued directly to his father from Australia House, London together with other memorabilia.

When his Battalion was training in the Claremont area, the ladies from the Town of Claremont embroidered a Regimental banner which was formally presented to the Battalion. This 44 Battalion Unit banner from the ladies of Claremont is one of the very few that made it back to Australia. As at 2021, it is on display in the Claremont Museum after being storage for about 70 years.

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----------