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

O'Keeffe, Maurice

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

Rail employment information

Employer:	Western Australian Government Railways & Tramways
Branch:	Stores
Designation:	Mill Foreman

Rail employment notes: Employed at No.2 Railway Mill, Dwellingup. Enlisted in AIF (Service No. 7280). Killed in action 8/8/1918.

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 O'Keefe, however designation and other information have been listed from local Honour Boards, the Railway Institute Magazine, and other sources.

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

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	16th Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	7280
Date of death:	8 August 1918
Place of death:	France
Age:	33
Rank:	Lance Corporal

Burial/memorialisation: Heath Cemetery, Harbonnieres, Picardie, France

Maurice O'Keeffe enlisted at Blackboy Hill Camp on 29 November 1916 and began his recruit training in 95 Depot Company. He declared that he had no previous military experience and nominated his wife Pearl Martha O'Keefe to be his Next of Kin. He was later assigned to 24th Reinforcements to16th Battalion which departed Australia on 28 February 1917 aboard HMAT *Miltiades* which reached Devonport UK on 27 March 1917.

While at sea Pte O'Keeffe presented to the sick quarters with Venereal Disease. He received treatment on board and then at several land-based facilities. His total non-effective service due to VD was 42 days. Private O'Keeffe departed the UK through Southampton on 13 August 1917 to join a base depot and was then taken-on-strength of 16 Battalion, in-the-field on 31 August 1917. Private O'Keeffe was appointed to be a Lance Corporal on 1 July 1918.

The records show that he was Killed in action on 8 August 1918 by shell fire and died instantly from wounds to his head and body. He was buried in a grave 500 yards South East of Morcourt by a burial party from 4th Pioneer Battalion. Others in the grave were 4 members of 16 Bn, 4 from 4 Pnr Bn and

a solitary soldier from the Tank Corps. The grave was marked and identified by map reference. After the War the bodies were exhumed and re-buried by the Australian Graves Registration Unit in the Heath Cemetery.

Additional/personal information:

Maurice Corby O'Keeffe was the son of Henry O'Keeffe and Elizabeth Hurley O'Keeffe (nee Corby) and was born in South Melbourne (Vic BDM 19465/1885), but later moved to WA, as did many people after rapid expansion of gold fields in WA.

WA BDM records show Maurice C. O'Keeffe was married in 1910 to Miss Pearl Martha May Deering, in the Perth registration district. Four children are known to have been born to the couple.

> O'KEEFFE.—Private Maurice O'Keeffe, killed in action, August 8, 1918, dearly beloved husband of Pearl O'Keeffe, and fond father of Dorothy, Pearl, Willie, and Roy O'Keeffe, late of No. 2 State Mill, Dwellingup.
>
> O'KEEFFE.—In loving memory of my dearly beloved son Maurice, killed in action in France, August 8, fourth son of the late Henry and Mrs. O'Keeffe, Murray-street, Perth; aged 33. At rest.
>
> Both *The West Australian* 2/9/1918p1

It seems from these and other press notices that news of his promotion to Lance Corporal had not reached the family at the time of his death.

His family paid for an inscription on his gravestone which reads: "Greater love hath no man that he lay down his life for his friends". L/Cpl O'Keeffe had drawn up a Will on 27 May 1917 leaving his estate to his wife and appointing his brother Henry as his trustee. The official cable from London to his Next of kin advising of his death shows his correct rank and was despatched on 3 September 1918 but the family had obviously already heard of him being killed. For his service he was entitled to the British War Medal and the Victory Medal which were issued to his wife.

Mrs O'Keeffe was entitled to a pension. Details about her pension are contained in series PP18/1 file R5794 but the file has not been digitized to be available online. L/Cpl O'Keefe has a memorial tablet (M102) in Kings Park which was dedicated by his widow. Mrs Pearl O'Keeffe died in 1970 at the age of 84 years and was buried in a family grave at Karrakatta Cemetery.

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----------