Walker, John

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 (Railway sawmills)
Designation:	Timekeeper

Rail employment notes: Employed at No.2 Railway Mill, Dwellingup.

When the railway from Pinjarra to Dwellingup opened in 1910, the WAGR built its own timber mill (notwithstanding the existence of the government-owned State Saw Mills) to supply its sleepers and other timber needs, followed by a No.2 Railway Mill north of Dwellingup (an area now known as at Banksiadale) which opened in 1912. These mills were owned and operated by WAGR, the workers were WAGR employees and were listed on WAGR's Honour Roll.

Given leave from WAGR&T to enlist 3/6/1915.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force
Military unit:	32nd Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	1186
Date of death:	20 July 1916
Place of death:	France
Rank at time of loss:	Sergeant
Age:	31
Burial/memorialisation:	VC Corner Australian Cemetery and Memorial, Fromelles, Lille, Nord Pas de Calais, France

John Walker (known as Johnnie) enlisted in the AIF on 7 June 1915 at Dwellingup and was attested at Blackboy Hill Camp where he also undertook his basic military training. He had no previous military experience and declared his mother, Mrs A Walker to be his Next of kin. He was promoted to the rank of Sergeant on 1 September 1915. Sgt Walker was allotted to 32 Battalion (D Coy) with the regimental number 1186. He departed Australia through Fremantle aboard HMAT *Geelong* and disembarked at Suez on 18 December 1915. In Egypt the various elements of 32 Bn underwent training to weld them into a cohesive Unit. They departed Alexandria on 17 June 1916 aboard HMT *Transylvania* and joined the British Expeditionary Force when they docked at Marseilles on 23 June 1916. The Bn was exposed to active service for the first time on 19/20 July 1916 at Fleurbaix (now better known as the Battle of Fromelles). The action was a complete disaster and the 5th Division lost 5500 officers and men Killed, Wounded, taken prisoner or missing. Sgt Walker has an extensive Red Cross File of some 47 pages. Reading through that file it seems that Sgt Walker had either one or both

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legs blown off in the action. The Bn was ordered to withdraw and he was left on the battlefield. He was posted as Missing in Action (MIA). A Court of Enquiry held on 12 August 1917 changed Sgt Walker's classification from MIA to Killed in Action, 20 July 1916. The files show that the Officer Commanding D Coy 32 Bn wrote to Sgt Walker's brother and sister. He was remembered on the VC Corner Memorial.

Additional/personal information:

First War historian Dr Michael Galvin comments:

> Following the disaster at Fleurbaix 32 Battalion was reformed with South Australian reinforcements and eventually came to be seen as a South Australian battalion.
> For decades there were efforts to reconcile the number of dead from the field without success. Recently it has been discovered that the German Army collected wagon loads of bodies and buried them in mass graves in pits that had been prepared for artillery. Sgt Walker may well have been one of them. The mass graves have since been found and a new cemetery created at Pheasant Wood for individual graves. A number have been identified from identity discs and DNA technology, but thus far not Sergeant Walker.

He was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. His medals and other memorabilia were issued, after the War, to his sister (Mrs Anstey) as both his parents had died in the interim. The AWM holds a photograph, head and shoulders, of Sgt Walker as P09291.144. There is a Kings Park memorial plaque (M303) dedicated to Sergeant Walker by his nephew.

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).

Acknowledgements: Rail employment notes from WAGR records held by State Records Office, Perth, transcribed by J.Austin 2019. Military and personal information researched and prepared by Dr G.M.Galvin. Newspaper notes and collation G.Higham.

----------Lest we forget----------

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