Cousins, Douglas John

A West Australian railway employee who died after volunteering for military service for his country



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

Rail employment information

Employer:	Western Australian Government Railways
Branch:	Locomotive
Designation:	Cleaner

Rail employment notes: Born 13/1/1920. Joined WAGR 16/11/1936 aged 16 as Junior Worker, Locomotive Branch, Midland Junction. Appointed Cleaner ("Cleaner" in the WAGR was a position in the Locomotive branch, cleaning and otherwise working around locomotives whilst training to be a Fireman, the next step up the ladder) 2/2/1938 and transferred to Wyalkatchem 29/9/1938 and to Southern Cross 4/6/1941. Left to join AIF and died in military camp, Geraldton 4/7/1941.

Military service information

Conflict:	Second World War 1939-1945
Service:	Australian Imperial Force
Military unit:	13th Field Company Royal Australian Engineers
Service number:	n/a
Date of death:	4 July 1941
Age:	21
Place of death:	Victoria District Hospital, Geraldton
Rank at time of death:	n/a
Buried/commemorated:	Buried in Geraldton Cemetery



Douglas Cousins' grave headstone in Geraldton Cemetery. The headstone is centred on a large cross atop the tomb, while a small bishop's mitre completes the Christian symbols. P.Melling

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Douglas Cousins left his WAGR employment in June 1941 to join the AIF and proceeded to Geraldton where the 13th Field Company were encamped. But it appears he contracted meningitis in or en route to Irwin military camp, Geraldton, and he died on 4 July 1941 in hospital in Geraldton. Unfortunately Meningitis was a disease not uncommon in military camps when numerous young men are concentrated from different areas.

His death was noted in a paragraph in the *Geraldton Guardian and Express* Sat 5/7/1941p3:

> "Death of a Soldier. — The death occurred in the Victoria District Hospital last night of Sapper Douglas John Cousins, who was attached to the engineers' camp on the Irwin River. The deceased had only been with the unit for ten days, five of which he spent in hospital. It was learnt today that the deceased's relatives reside at Northam and that the military authorities are making arrangements for the funeral."

However, although the press and his family regarded him as having joined the AIF, extensive research in military records has shown his enlistment was not completed before he became too ill so that he was not yet a soldier, in military terms.

His burial confirms this – Geraldton cemetery has a separate military section but Douglas Cousins is buried in a civilian grave highlighted by Christian rather than military symbols.

Additional/personal information:

Douglas' father Henry Cousins had married Annie Myra Kilpin in Northam in 1908 and family notices indicate they had 4 sons and 3 daughters. Mrs Cousins died in 1923 and Henry married again in 1924 to Pearl Mildwaters (nee Seddon). Pearl had been married previously to Edgar Mildwaters who died soon after their marriage but left Pearl with a daughter Joyce whom Pearl now brought into the 'blended family' until Joyce married in 1936. Henry, also known as Harry, died in October 1934, leaving Douglas and siblings to the care of his stepmother.

Douglas Cousins' birth was registered in the Northam district in 1920 (BDM 51/1920), however it appears his parents later moved north to Pithara, in the Shire of Dalwallinu.

His death was recorded in family notices placed by his stepmother:

> COUSINS, Private Douglas John; on July 5, at Geraldton. of meningitis, third son of the late Harry and Anne Cousins, of Pithara. loved stepson of Pearl Cousins, 73 Parker-street, Bassendean.
>
> MRS. PEARL COUSINS, late of Pithara and now of Bassendean, desires to thank all officers and men of the 13th Field Company of the Royal Australian Engineers at Irwin Camp for their kindness to her late son (Private Douglas John Cousins) during his recent fatal illness. *The Irwin Index* newspaper 12/7/1941p2

And a short article in the *Wongan-Ballidu Budget* 11/7/1941p1

> Much sympathy is extended to Mr. and Mrs. C. Cousins, of Pithara, who received news from Geraldton on Saturday to say that their youngest brother (Doug.) had passed away, the cause of death meningitis. He. was only twenty-one and was the youngest son of the late Mr. And Mrs. Cousins, who had lived in the Pithara district for many years before their deaths. Others to mourn their loss and to whom our sympathy is extended are his brother, Percy (R.A.A.F.), Kath, May and Bill.

Douglas' elder brother Flight Lieutenant Percy Edward Cousins joined the Royal Australian Air Force, being then moved to Britain to fly with the RAF, but returned safely after the war.

Abbreviations: WAGR= Western Australian Government Railways (and 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 research by Dr G.M. Galvin. Newspaper and local research by G.Higham and P.Melling.

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