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Frankish, Robert Walter-Wetherall

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



Peace Memorial at Railway Workshops, Midland

Rail employment information

Employer: Western Australian Government Railways

Branch: CME

Designation: Fireman

Rail employment notes: Born 16/4/1916. Joined WAGR 3/3/1936 aged 19 as Cleaner, Locomotive Branch, Bunbury. ("Cleaner" in this case 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), Transferred to Margaret River 19/1/1937 and to Northam 9/5/1938.

Promoted to Fireman 8/1/1939. Enlisted in RAAF 19/7/1941.

Military service information

Conflict: Second World War 1939-1945

Service: Royal Australian Air Force

Military unit: No.1658 Conversion Unit RAF

Service number: 415130

Date of death: 18 September 1943

Place of death: England

Rank at time of death: Flight Sergeant

Age: 27

Buried/commemorated: Harrogate (Stonefall) Cemetery, Harrogate, North Yorkshire, England

Robert Frankish enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) on 19 July 1941. At that stage of the war, the need for air crews was greatest in Europe and Robert, like many other RAAF personnel, was transferred to the UK and attached to the Royal Air Force (RAF).

'Conversion Unit' was a RAF group for training crews and ground staff to work with a different aircraft type. In this case No.1658 was a "heavy conversion" unit, i.e. it trained crews to work with the then-new large 4-engine bombers, mainly the Halifax type from the Handley-Page Company. No.1656 was nominally based at RAF Lindholme airbase in South Yorkshire.

Flight Sergeant Frankish died in an aircraft accident in England on 18 September 1943. He was buried in Stonefall cemetery near Harrogate in Yorkshire.

Additional/personal information:

Robert Frankish was born in Maylands WA in 1916, a son of Robert Wetherall Frankish and Nora Frankish (nee McDermott) who had married in Perth in 1915. (BDM)

Robert was single when he enlisted. He came from a large family, which contributed many men to the Australian forces during the Second War:

> FRANKISH. – Flight Sgt. R. W. W. (R.A.A.F,) On September 18, 1943 result of aircraft accident in England, Robert Walter W. (Dick) the dearly beloved eldest son of Bob and Nora, beloved brother of Jim,

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A.I.F. (returned M E), Tom, R.A.A.F. Darwin (returned overseas), Noel, A.I.F., Mervyn (deceased), Keith (deceased) and Irene. Loving brother-in-law of Gladys, grandson of the late Mr and Mrs T. Frankish, and grand nephew of Mr W. Wetherall. of Mandurah. Loving memories. Someday we'll understand.
The Northam Advertiser 25/9/1943p2

It seems the willingness to serve extended through cousins and friends also – unfortunately the "cousin Ken" mentioned below was Flight Sergeant Kenneth Frankish, who also joined the RAAF, was also attached to the RAF in England, and also died there in 1944, aged only 20 :

FRANKISH, Flight-Sgt. R. W. (RAAF), result of aircraft accident, England; dearly loved nephew of Dick and Silvia, fond cousin of Ken (RAAF), Ron (RAN) and Beryl. One of the best.

FRANKISH. On September 18, as result of aircraft accident in England. Dick (Flt-Sgt, RAAF.), beloved nephew of Jesse and Zelma Frankish and loved cousin of Rena; aged 27 years. He laid his sacrifice upon the altar of duty--his life.
FRANKISH, Bob (Flight-Sgt, RAAF). -September 18. as result of aircraft accident in England, loved friend of Phoebe and Mar Taylor (RAAF, abroad). We will always remember.
All *The West Australian* 24/9/1943p1

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. Family information and collation by G.Higham.

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