Walker, John

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



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

The Walker family suffered a double tragedy – John and his brother Phillip both enlisted but both died from illnesses contracted in the war zone.

Rail employment information

Employer:	Bunning Brothers
Branch:	Lyall's Mill
Designation:	Locomotive driver

WAGR employment notes: Born 4/9/1884. Entered WAGR service 4/6/1904 as Cleaner, Kalgoorlie. Retrenched 26/7/1907 after warning for neglect of duty.
("Cleaner" in this case was a position in the Locomotive branch, cleaning locomotives and otherwise employed at a locomotive depot whilst training to be a Fireman, the next step up the ladder.)

According to an obituary for John Walker published in the *Kalgoorlie Miner* (2/10/1915p6), he then transferred to work for private railways, first in the goldfields then in the south-west. His last job was with Bunning Brothers at Lyall's Mill, which was approximately 11 km south of Collie.

Rail historian Jeff Austin comments that at Lyalls' Mill at that time, he would have driven two historic old locomotives: '23' was built in 1875 for the WAGR for the opening of the Geraldton-Northampton line, and 'Nevada' which was built in 1880 for the WAGR for the opening of the Fremantle-Guildford railway and was a sister of C1 'Katie' now at the Railway Museum in Bassendean.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	16th Australian Infantry Battalion
Service number:	2537
Date of death:	24 September 1915
Place of death:	Malta
Rank at time of loss:	Private
Age:	31

Burial/memorialisation: Pieta Military Cemetery, Tal-Pieta, Malta (island), Malta

Jack Walker enlisted in the AIF on 17 May 1915 in Perth. He gave his occupation as a locomotive driver and stated that he had 2 years of militia service in the Goldfields Regiment. On enlistment he nominated his mother as his Next of kin (despite the fact that his father was living). His basic military training was conducted at Blackboy Hill Camp and after one month he was assigned to 7th Reinforcements to 16 Battalion with the regimental number 2537. Pte Walker departed Australia on 18 Jun 1915 aboard A51 HMAT *Chilka* and disembarked at Alexandria. He crossed to the Gallipoli Peninsula and was taken-on-strength of 16 Bn on 2 August 1915, in the field. His records show that he was wounded on 10 August 1915 but he remained on duty and was not admitted to any medical facility. On 26 August 1915 he reported sick and was evacuated aboard HMHS *Manheno* to Lemnos where he transferred to HMHS *Nero* for transport to St Andrews Hospital, Malta. Pte Walker failed

to respond to treatment and died of Dysentery on 24 September 1915. He was buried the same day in Pieta Military Cemetery with Chaplain Wills officiating. His mother, 17 May 1927 and father 02 Aug 1936 are also buried in that compartment.

Additional/personal information:

John Walker was born in Lancelot, South Australia, the son of John Andrew and Mary Jane Walker.

He was brought to WA when young and attended school in Fremantle, then went to sea for three years before joining the WAGR as above. He provided references when joining the WAGR, which showed he had been employed on the British ship 'SCOTTISH HILLS'.

> In Memoriam: WALKER.—In loving memory of our dear son and brother, Private John Walker, who died at Malta, September 23, I915. We miss him most who loved him best. —Inserted by his loving mother, father, sister, and brother-in-law, W. and E. Bottemley. *The West Australian* 26/9/1917p1

His family paid for an inscription on his headstone which reads 'In Memory of the Dearly Loved Son of J & M Walker of West Australia'. For his service he was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. He wrote a Will on 2 August 1915 in his paybook in which he left his entire estate to his mother. An initial application for a War Pension for his mother was rejected on the grounds that she was not dependent on him. Subsequently she was granted 14/- per fortnight with effect from 18 July 1917 and this was increased to the full rate of 40/- per fortnight after 26 May 1919.

Private Walker's brother Pte Thomas Philip Walker served as 6602 as a member of 11 Battalion. He was returned to Australia with advanced bilateral Tuberculosis form which he died in Perth in 1919.

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*

For information on WA timber mills and their railways see
Gunzburg, Adrian and Jeff Austin: "Rails through the bush", Perth, 2008, Rail Heritage WA, ISBN 978-0-9803922-2-7

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. Family notes and collation G.Higham.

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

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