Adams, John Allan

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
Branch:	Workshops
Designation:	Fitter

Rail employment notes: Born 15/2/1907. Joined WAGR 10/9/1923 aged 16 as Apprentice Fitter, CME Branch, Midland Workshops. Appointed Fitter, Midland Workshops 2/10/1928. Retrenched 18/11/1930 (in the Depression) and re-employed as Fitter, Midland Workshops 16/11/1933.

Enlisted in RAN 17/9/1940. Killed in action 4/3/1942.

Military service information:

Conflict:	Second World War 1939-1945
Service:	Royal Australian Naval Reserve
Military unit:	HMAS Yarra
Service number:	F3050
Date of death:	4 March 1942
Place of death:	Indian Ocean
Age:	35
Rank:	Engine Room Artificer 4th Class
Burial/memorialisation:	Plymouth Naval Memorial, Plymouth, Devon, England, United Kingdom
	Also listed on Monument at former Railway Workshops, Midland, Western Australia.

John Adams enlisted with the Royal Australian Navy on 6 June 1940 (according to DVA record). He nominated his wife Minnie Adams as next of kin and gave his address as Claremont WA.

By 1942, John Adams was a crew member of HMAS *Yarra* (II), the second of four Royal Australian Navy ships which have born this name. *Yarra* was a 'sloop', a warship smaller than a destroyer or corvette and often used for mine-sweeping and convoy escort duties. Her main armaments were three 4-inch guns capable of high-angle aim for anti-aircraft firing. Her design followed the Royal Navy's Grimsby class minesweeping sloops. She was built in Cockatoo Island dockyard in NSW, launched in 1935 and commissioned in 1936, with a standard displacement of 1060 tons. Initial duties were around the Australian coast then in the Red Sea, Middle East and Mediterranean in 1940/41. In December 1941 she was reordered to Batavia (Indonesia as the Japanese Navy and Army were rapidly moving south.

Following the fall of Singapore, and then Japanese attacks on Java, on 27 February 1942 *Yarra* left Batavia escorting a small convoy aiming for Australia but on the morning of 4th March she encountered a Japanese Navy group including three cruisers, all faster and more heavily armed. In attempt to give he convoy ships a chance to scatter, Yarra turned back to lay a smoke screen and engaged the enemy. This was a hopeless fight and the crew soon had to abandon the sinking ship. A

few survivors were saved from life rafts over coming days but 138 of the 151 complement perished, including John Adams.

Additional/personal information:

John Allan Adams was a West Australian, born on 15/2/1907 and his birth registered in the Fremantle district, the son of Henry and Edith Adams. He married Minnie May Thompson in 1934 (BDM).

After the sinking of HMAS Yarra, with the possibility of survivors still unknown, a few notices appeared in the press, including group notices:

> OFFICERS AND MEN H.M.A.S. PERTH AND YARRA. The President, Officers and Members of the Ex-Naval Men's Association (W.A.Section) in conjunction with Chairman and Committee of the Naval Welfare and Comforts Fund, desire to express their deepest sympathy to parents, wives, relatives and friends of officers and men of H.M.A.S. Perth and Yarra, now posted as missing.
>
> *The West Australian* 17/3/1942p1

Being posted "missing" left many in limbo as it was some time before the few survivors were accounted for. John's widow was one of many who only placed family notices one year later, by which time the navy regarded the lost men as officially "presumed dead":

> On Service. ADAMS, John Allan, reported missing March 4, 1942 (HMAS Yarra), as result of enemy action, dearly loved husband of Min. *The West Australian* 4/3/1943p1

It is not known if John and Minnie had any children, although it was usual for children to be mentioned in the family notice if there were any.

The sinking of HMAS Yarra continued a very bad year for Britain and the other countries supplying forces under British control at that time, including Australia. On 15 February the army on Singapore had surrendered to Japan – 85 000 soldiers. In the same month, the Royal Navy lost a battleship and battlecruiser off Malaya, and then on 28 February the HMAS *Perth* was sunk in Sunda Strait.

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----------