374

Burn, Alan George

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



Memorial at Midland Railway Workshops

Rail employment information

Employer:	Western Australian Government Railways
Branch:	Chief Mechanical Engineer
Designation:	Apprentice Blacksmith

Rail employment notes: Born 20/3/1922. Joined WAGR 26/9/1938 aged 16 as Apprentice Blacksmith, CME Branch, Midland Workshops.

In this era, the Chief Mechanical Engineer's branch included the major workshops at Midland (then Midland Junction) employing a wide range of tradesmen to work on locomotives, carriages and freight wagons as they were built or passed through for repairs, and also trained apprentices in many trades.

Enlisted in AIF 6/5/1941. Killed 5/10/1943.

Military service information:

Conflict:	Second World War 1939-1945
Service:	Australian Army
Military unit:	1 Company Australian Army Service Corps
Service number:	WX12376
Date of death:	5 October 1943
Place of death:	Thailand
Rank at time of loss:	Private
Age:	21
Memorialised:	Kanchanaburi War Cemetery, Kanchanaburi Province, Thailand

Alan Burn enlisted in the Army Claremont on 3 May 1941. He quoted his father George Burn as his next of kin and said he resided in Subiaco.

He was given service number WX12376 (the 'W' indicated a West Australian enlistment) and allocated to the No.1 Company Australian Army Service Corps. Soon afterwards he was transferred to the 2/4th Motor Transport Company.

The 2nd/4th Reserve Motor Transport Company was one of three reserve motor transport companies sent to Singapore and Malaya in 1941 to act a s transport unit for materials and personnel for the 8th Division. (ref. AWM website) This unit was captured when Singapore surrendered to the Japanese Army on 15 February 1942. Alan Burn was among the men taken Prisoner of War (POW) , held initially in the Changi area of Singapore. The Japanese forces soon began dispersing the captives to work on various projects.

It appears Private Burn was sent to work on the infamous Burma-Thailand railway. Conditions there were harsh indeed, and he died on 5 October 1943 of illness.

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Kanchanaburi War Cemetery, Thailand.

Prisoners of war who died working on the Thai-Burma railway are generally buried or remembered here.

Photo A.Tilley



Additional/personal information:

Alan George Burn was born in the Perth district on 20 March 1921, a son of George H Burn and Isobel Burn (nee Reid). A bother John H Burn was born in 1924. (BDM and Trove)

After the capture of Singapore. the family would only be told that he was "missing", and it was not until the end of the war that allied forces would obtain and pass on details of those deceased after the fall of Singapore. Thus it was almost two years after Alan died of illness that his family could mourn with certainty.

> BURN, Private Alan George (5/4th MT), who died of illness while POW, Siam, October 5, 1943; beloved son of Mr and Mrs Burn and brother of John. *The West Australian* 13/9/1945p1

Notices were often placed by family or friends of those serving, including of those who had died in the war. In the first case below, the family of Leonard King Thistlethwaite (WX11375) probably did not yet know that 'King' had actually died before Alan Burn:

> BURN, Private Allen George (4th Motor Transport), who died of illness while POW, Siam, October 5, 1943; sincere friend of King Thistlethwaite (POW, Siam). *The West Australian* 19/9/1945p1
>
> BURN. Pte Allan George (2/4th MT), died while POW in Siam; Pal of Bernard Cody (F/Sgt. RAAF, deceased): friend of Mrs. M. Cody and family (Shenton Park). *The West Australian* 18/9/1945p1

('Siam' was the name generally used by Europeans to refer to Thailand before the 1940s)

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----------