386

Rodda, Arthur William

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:	Storeman

Rail employment notes: Born 28/4/1900. Joined WAGR 4/11/1920 aged 20 as Junior Worker, Stores Branch, Midland Workshops. Appointed Labourer 28/4/1921 and promoted to Storeman's Assistant 19/7/1922 and Storeman 22/10/1928.
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 Army 5/8/1940. Died as a POW 20/2/1945.

Military service information:

Conflict:	Second World War 1939-1945
Service:	Australian Army
Military unit:	2/4th Machine Gun Battalion
Service number:	WX7509
Date of death:	20 February 1945
Place of death:	Thailand
Rank at time of loss:	Private
Age:	44
Buried/Memorialised:	Kanchanaburi War Cemetery, Thailand

Arthur Rodda enlisted in the Australian Army on 6 August 1940 at Claremont.

Late in 1940 Australia had formed as 2/4th Machine Gun battalion, to be part of a proposed 8th Division and Arthur Rodda transferred to this new unit. It would turn out to be a tragic choice. This Battalion, of nearly 1000 men, was mostly formed of West Australians and trained initially at Northam then shipped to Woodside in South Australia. The Battalion was then taken to Darwin by a series of very slow trains and dusty road tracks. The next move was by ship, the *Aquitania*, but not direct – it sailed vis Sydney to collect more men then to Fremantle where it moored offshore and soldiers were denied shore leave, This caused a riot and numerous defections via barges and launches which came out with supplies. Eventually the ship sailed, with some of the men who had gone ashore – others were put on a later ship. The Battalion landed in Singapore on 25 January 1942. But the Japanese forces were rapidly moving south capturing Malaya then attacking Singapore island with heavy fighting and on 15 February 1942 the Allied forces, now surrounded and with water supplies cut off, surrendered.

Private Rodda was among the men taken prisoner of war, held initially in the Changi area of Singapore. The Japanese forces soon began dispersing the captives to work on various projects.

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The 2/4th suffered very badly: according to the AWM website: “Between 8 and 15 February the 2/4th had 137 men killed or missing… by the war's end, another 263 men from the battalion had died as prisoners.” There was also great uncertainty, as families could be told only that their relatives were “missing”. The newspapers of 10 July 1942 carried a list from the military of 760 WA men “missing”, mostly from the fall of Singapore.

Rodda was sent to work on the infamous Burma-Thailand railway. Conditions there were harsh indeed, and he died on 20 February 1945 of Malaria.

His remains were recovered and buried in the Kanchanaburi War Cemetery in Thailand.

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:

Arthur Rodda was born in 1900, a son of Henry & Jane (nee Robertson) Rodda. In 1924 he married Eileen B Humphreys and the couple appear to have had at least 3 children, of whom the son was also enlisted:(BDM 4888/1900 et al.)

> RODDA, Pte. A. W. (2/4th M.G.Battalion).— Died of illness, February, 1945, whilst prisoner of war, dearly loved father of Bill (A.I.F.) and Shirley.
>
> RODDA.— Died on February 20, 1945, while prisoner of war in Japanese hands, Bill, of 2/4th Machine-gunners, friend of Stephen and Molly Bye. Both *Kalgoorlie Miner* 10/10/1945p4
>
> RODDA.--In loving memory of Bill, beloved husband of Eileen and darling Daddy of Wendy. died. February 20, 1945, whilst P.O.W. Japanese hands. We must never forget the debt we owe him.
>
> RODDA. A. W. (2/4th M.G. Bin.). In loving memory of Dad, who died while prisoner in Japanese hands. Feb,uary 20. 1945. Inserted by Bill (Wewak) and Shirley.
>
> RODDA, A. W. (2/4th M.G. Btn., A.I.F.).-In loving memory of Bill, who Paid the supreme sacrifice whilst P.O.W.. Japan, February 20. 1945; loved son and step-son of Mr. and Mrs. Fleming, brother of Ray and Herbert. Sleeping where no shadows fall.
>
> RODDA (Pte. A. W.).-In loving memory of Bill, died whilst P.O.W. In Japanese hands. February 20. 1945. Inserted by his brother Ray, sister-in-law Win: niece and nephew. Anne and Prank. Until the day break. All *The West Australian* 20/2/1946p1

Confusion: The CWGC website says that Arthur was born in 1906 and that he married Maisie. Although such as marriage is recorded by BDM in 1936, this appears to be a mistake but confirmation would be welcome.

More detailed information on this battalion and the railwaymen among its soldiers may also be found on the website http://2nd4thmgb.com.au/ A readable account of the 2/4th and its formation, training,

transport and captivity, by a survivor. can be found in the book “A yarn or two” by Don Lee, published by Hesperian press as ISBN 0859052788.

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----------