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Wearn, Thomas Clifford

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

Herbert Werrett joined the 2/4th Machine Gun Battalion, an ill-fated unit whose members would land in Singapore to fight only briefly before the island's surrender and great suffering as prisoners.



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

Rail employment information

Employer:	Western Australian Government Railways
Branch:	Chief mechanical Engineer
Designation:	Moulders Assistant

Rail employment notes: Born 27/4/1909. Joined WAGR 5/3/1937 aged 27 as Temporary Dresser, CME Branch, Midland Workshops. Appointed Moulders Assistant 7/11/1938.

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 29/4/1941. Died 1/12/1942.

Military service information:

Conflict:	Second World War 1939-1945
Service:	Australian Army
Military unit:	2/4th Machine Gun Battalion
Service number:	WX12008
Date of death:	20 November 1942
Place of death:	Burma
Rank at time of loss:	Lance Corporal
Age:	33
Memorialised:	Thanbyuzayat War Cemetery, Thanbyuzayat, Mon State, Myanmar

When the Second War began, Thomas Wearn enlisted in the Australian Army on 29 April 1941 in Midland Junction, and gave his wife Edith Wearn as his next of kin.

Late in 1940 Australia had formed as 2/4th Machine Gun battalion, to be part of a proposed 8th Division and Thomas Wearn joined 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 mixture 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 - the Battalion landed in Singapore on 25 January 1942. But the Japanese forces were moving south capturing Malaya rapidly then attacking Singapore island with heavy fighting and on 15 February 1942 the Allied forces, now surrounded and with water supplies cut off, surrendered.

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Lance Corporal Wearn was among the men taken prisoner of war, held initially in the Chang area of Singapore. The Japanese forces soon began dispersing the captives to work on various project, and Tom Wearn was sent to work on the infamous Burma-Thailand railway. Conditions there were harsh indeed, and he developed dysentery. He died on 20 November 1942 in Burma.

His remains were later recovered and buried in the Thanbyuzayat War Cemetery in Myanmar (then called Burma).

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.

Additional/personal information:

Thomas Clifford Wearn was born in Boulder near Kalgoorlie on 27/4/1909, a son of Joseph Henry Wearn and Margaret Ann Wearn. He married Edith Edwards in 1934 (BDM). Family notices after Tom's death indicate Tom and Edithy had two daughters.

As with many soldiers, his condition was unknown for many months and the war was almost over before the family received confirmation:

> WEARN (A/L Cpl Thomas Clifford Wearn).--In sad and loving memory of our dear Husband. Father and Brother, Tom. who died of illness while POW, Thailand. December. 1942. Inserted by his Wife Edith, daughters May and Shirley, sister May. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
>
> WEARN.-In proud and loving memory of our dear Brother-in-law (L/Cpl Thomas Clifford), who died of illness on or about December 1. 1942. whilst POW in Japanese hands. Inserted by his loving brother-ln-law and sister4n-law. Tom and Dot, and niece, Thelma Edwards. His duty nobly done.
>
> Both *The West Australian* 17/3/1945p1

More detailed information on this battalion and the 7 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. Military information researched by Dr G.M.Galvin. Family information and collation by G.Higham.

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