417

Mussman, Alfred Charles

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



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

Rail employment information

Employer: Western Australian Government Tramways

Branch: Tramways

Designation: Fitters Assistant

Rail employment notes: Born 25/4/1911. Joined Tramways 20/1/1936 aged 24 as Fuelman, Power Station. Appointed Fitters Assistant 17/10/1938.

Enlisted in AIF 9/12/1940. Killed in action 12/2/1942.

Military service information

Conflict: Second World War 1939-1945

Service: Australian Army

Military unit: 2/4th Machine Gun Battalion

Service number: WX9887

Date of death: 12 February 1942

Place of death: Malaya

Rank at time of death: Private

Age: 30

Buried/commemorated: Singapore Memorial, Singapore

Alfred Mussman enlisted in the Army on 9 December 1940. He gave his address as Highgate WA and his next of kin as his mother Maude (or Maud) Mussman who lived in South Australia.

At this time Australia had just formed a 2/4th Machine Gun battalion, to be part of a proposed 8th Division and Alfred Mussman joined this new unit. It would turn out to be a tragic placement. 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 with heavy fighting and on 15 February 1942 the Allied forces, now surrounded and with water supplies cut off, surrendered.

In the very last days of fighting to defend Singapore, Alfred Mussman was killed in action on 12 February 1942 on the island. After the surrender, it was some months before his body could be located and buried where he fell, and years before his family could know his fate.

A general memorial to all who fell in the fighting on Singapore has been erected at Kranji, near the causeway which links he island to Malaysia.

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Additional/personal information:

Alfred Mussman's brother wrote after the war that Alfred was born on 25/4/1911 in South Australia, a son of Laurance and Maud Mussman, however no government record has been found.. By the time he enlisted he was living in Highgate WA, and is believed to have been single.

The difficulties caused by the lack of information allowed out of Singapore after eh surrender are well illustrated by this family. Alfred's father Laurance died in 1941, and on the anniversary of his death, Alfred's brother Fred placed a notice in Adelaide:

> MUSSMAN.-In memory of our dear father who passed away on May 9 1941. Always remembered by his loving sons Fred and Alf.

Fred could not know then that Alf had been dead for 3 months. And final confirmation of Alf's death was not received until near the end of the war:

> MUSSMAN.-In loving memory of Alf, killed in action. Singapore, February 12, 1942. Inserted by Joan. To know him was to love him. So long, Mussy.
>
> MUSSMAN.-In fond memory of Alf, previously reported missing, now killed in action. Singapore. Always remembered by Mrs Curtin and Joan.
>
> MUSSMAN.-In fond remembrance of Alf. killed in action. Singapore. February 12, 1942. Inserted by Mrs Coward, Sonny. Kath. Au revoir. Mussy.
>
> All *The West Australian* 1/6/1945p1

Family and newspaper records reproduced on the 2nd/4th website (below) show Alfred Mussman was a keen footballer, playing many game sfor Sturt (SA) and East Perth (WA). In the state leagues.

Further information

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. Family information and collation by G.Higham.

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