Ramage, George Robert Adam

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

George Ramage enlisted in 1940 and joined the 2/4th Machine Gun Battalion, an ill-fated unit whose members would land in Asia to fight only briefly before surrender to Japan and great suffering as prisoners.



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

Rail employment information

Employer:	Western Australian Government Railways
Branch:	Traffic
Designation:	Guard

Rail employment notes: Born 24/6/1905. Joined WAGR 9/11/1926 aged 21 as Goods Porter, Traffic Branch, Geraldton.

("Porter" was a very general category in the WAGR – some had specific roles such as a receiving goods porter, some were general hands while some learnt safe-working and could assist with signals, etc. Geraldton, a junction station and with a separate goods shed, had multiple porters. At some stage Mr Ramage sturdied and passed safe working exams, necessary for a Guard)

Appointed Shunter 7/11/1927 and promoted to Head Shunter 25/10/1929. Regressed to Shunter 16/10/1930 and transferred to Kalgoorlie 2/7/1931 and Midland Junction 23/6/1932. Promoted to Head Shunter, Kalgoorlie 23/12/1933 and transferred to Guard, Malcolm 14/1/1935, Kalgoorlie 7/5/1935 and Perth 17/3/1938.

Enlisted in AIF 25/10/1940. Died as a POW 24/9/1943.

Military service information

Conflict:	Second World War 1939-1945
Service:	Australian Army
Military unit:	2/4th Machine Gun Battalion
Service number:	WX9059
Date of death:	24 September 1943
Place of death:	Burma
Rank at time of death:	Acting Sergeant
Age:	38

Buried/commemorated: Thanbyuzayat War Cemetery

George Ramage enlisted in the Australian Army on 25 October 1940. He nominated his wife Edna Ramage as his next of kin and was allocated service number WAX9059.

At this time Australia formed as 2/4th Machine Gun battalion, to be part of a proposed 8th Division and Robert Ramage Werrett 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

 © Rail Heritage WA

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.

By this time he had been promoted to Sergeant.

According to the 2/4th website (below), Robert Ramage was among those who defected from the *Aquitania* to have a home break in Fremantle. He returned to the Army but had missed that ship. He and others were shipped north but following the surrender in Singapore they were landed in Java. They then became prisoners when the Dutch surrendered to Japan.

There was great uncertainty, as families could be told only that their relative was "missing". The newspapers of 10 July 1942 carried a list from the military of 760 WA men "missing", mostly from the fall of Singapore.

The men in captivity were dispersed in various direction to work on Japanese projects, and Sergeant Ramage was sent to work on the infamous Thai-Burma railway. He died there of dysentery on 24 September 1943.

Additional/personal information:

George Robert Adam Ramage was born on 24/6/1905 in Cape Leeuwin, WA, a son of George and Ellen Ramage. He married to Edna Florence Smith in 1929 in the Perth district and it appears from family notices that the couple had several children.

> RAMAGE, Robert George. — On September 18, 1943, while P.O.W. in Japanese hands, Thailand, dearly loved husband of Edna, darling dad of Ken and Laurel, of 117 Zebina street, Mt. Lawley, loving brother-in-law of Vera and Jack Nials, 229 Piccadilly street, Kalgoorlie. Deeply mourned. *Kalgoorlie Miner* 5/3/1945p2
>
> RAMAGE (George Robert, Sergeant, A.I.F.) — In loving memory of my brother (Bob), who died of illness whilst a prisoner-of-war In Japanese hands in September, 1943. —Inserted by his loving sister (D. Ramage). *Geraldton Guardian and Express* 3/3/1945p2

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----------