Werrett, Herbert Stanley

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

Herbert Werrett enlisted and survived the First War, but enlisted again in 1940 and 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.



Plaque in memory of Herbert Werrett; when seen om 18/10/2022 it had been tended recently

Rail employment information

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

Rail employment notes: Born 2/8/1900. Joined WAGR 3/10/1926 aged 26 as Porter, Traffic Branch, Perth.

("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. Perth, a very busy station, probably had at least 10 porters)

Enlisted in AIF 2/8/1940. Killed in action 14/2/1942.

Military service information

Conflict:	Second World War 1939-1945
Service:	Australian Army
Military unit:	2/4th Machine Gun Battalion
Service number:	WX7166
Date of death:	14 February 1942
Place of death:	Singapore
Age:	41
Rank at time of death:	Private

Buried/commemorated: Singapore Memorial, Singapore

Herbert Werrett previously enlisted in First World War in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) on 5/8/1917 when he was given service number No.7386 and allocated to 22nd Reinforcements to the 28th Australian Infantry Battalion. He embarked for Europe on 13 March 1918 and survived the remainder of the war to return to Australia 12/7/1919.

When the Second War began, Herbert enlisted in the Australian Army on 2 August 1940 in Claremont, and gave his wife Annie Werrett as his next of kin.

Later in 1940 Australia formed as 2/4th Machine Gun battalion, to be part of a proposed 8th Division and Herbert 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

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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.

Private Herbert Werrett is officially presumed killed in action on 14 February 1942 in the last ditch fighting before the surrender. His remains were never identified and he is remembered on memorials in Singapore.

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 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.

Additional/personal information:

Herbert was a son of Thomas and Margaret Madge (nee Ogilvie) Werrett. His parents had married in Victoria in 1895 and it seems they almost immediately moved to WA, which many others were doing in that decade of the WA gold finds. (Vic BDM 4552/1895). Herbert is shown in DVA and WAGR records as born in Perth on 2 August 1900, although the birth was not registered at the time. His mother died in 1905 and it appears Herbert was an only child.

In 1925 Herbert married Annie Rouse. Annie (nee Singleton) had previously married Ernest Rouse but he died in 1922. In 1927 Herbert and Annie had three children, and named their first son like his father – Herbert Stanley Werrett.

As with many soldiers, the family waited in suspense before they had any certainty:

> WERRETT, Herbert Stanley (2/4th M.G. Batt., 2nd A.I.F.).—Previously reported missing Singapore. 1942. Now presumed dead, loved step-brother of Jack and Mona Marriott; fond uncle of Keith. We will always remember you. Stan. *The West Australian* 16/3/1946p1
>
> WERRETT, Stan (24th M.G. Batt.).— In loving memory of our dear husband and Dad, presumed killed at Singapore, February 14, 1942. Inserted by his wife Annie and children Shirley, Stanley and Norman. The West Australian 14/2/1947p1

Herbert's widow Annie remained in WA and died in 1966 aged 76.

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----------