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Curnow, Francis Lyle

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 Railways

Branch: Traffic

Designation: Clerk

Rail employment notes: Born 7/8/1917. Joined WAGR 14/5/1934 aged 16 as Junior Clerk, Traffic Branch, Kalgoorlie. Appointed Clerk 7/8/1938 and transferred to Fremantle Goods 20/2/1939.

Enlisted in Staff Instructional Corps. 30/7/1940 and transferred to AIF 19/11/1940. 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: WX3446

Date of death: 12 February 1942

Place of death: Singapore

Rank at time of death: Lieutenant

Age: 24

Buried/commemorated: Kranji War Cemetery, Kranji, Singapore

Enlisted in Staff Instructional Corps. 30/7/1940 -apparently had previous experience - and transferred to Army 19/11/1940. Commissioned as Lieutenant.

At this time Australia had just formed a 2/4th Machine Gun battalion, to be part of a proposed 8th Division and Frank Curnow 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, Francis Curnow was killed in action on 12 February 1942 on the island. He was leading a small group to try and recapture a feature called Hill 200 but was killed by enemy fire. After the surrender, it was some months before his body could be located and buried where he fell. Details of this last action may be read on the 2nd/4th website referred to below.

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Additional/personal information:

Francis Curnow was born in Kalgoorlie WA on 7 August 1917, a son of Carlyle and Naomi Curnow. He later married Gladys Jean Rogers who had been born in Boulder on the WA goldfields in 1919 and family notices indicate they had a son Lyle Curnow, whom Frank never saw. (BDM).

Frank Curnow was one of the few soldiers killed in the invasion of Singapore whose death was notified almost immediately. Many families had to wait until after the war:

> CURNOW. — Killed in action, at Singapore, on February 12, Lieutenant F.L. Curnow, very dearly loved second son of Coll. and Naomi Curnow, brother of Stan (R.A.A.F.), Don (R.A.A.F.), Barbara and Gwenyth. *Kalgoorlie Miner* 17/2/1942p2

> CURNOW.—Killed in action at Singapore on February 12, Lieutenant F. L. Curnow, dearly beloved husband of Jean, and fond Daddy of little Lyle, beloved son-in-law of George and Edie Rogers, brother-in-law of Keith. *The West Australian* 20/2/1942p1

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/* This includes photos of Lieutenant Curnow, letters, additional family notices, etc.

A readable account of the 2/4th and its formation, training, transport and captivity, by a survivor. can also 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----------