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# Argyle, David Alexander

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## 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: | Chief mechanical Engineer |
| Designation: | Fireman |

Rail employment notes: Born 8/1/1909. Joined WAGR 12/12/1924 aged 15 as Junior Worker, Locomotive Branch, East Perth. Appointed Cleaner, East Perth 22/11/1926 ("Cleaner" in this case was a position in the Locomotive branch, cleaning and otherwise working around locomotives whilst training to be a Fireman, the next step up the ladder).

Promoted to Fireman 6/1/1929. Transferred to Merredin 8/1/1929 and reduced to Cleaner 5/7/1931. Transferred to East Perth 12/9/1931 and re-appointed Fireman 26/3/1933. Transferred to Northam 1/6/1936.

Enlisted in AIF 13/8/1940. Died in Malaya 17/2/1942.

### Military service information

| | |
|---|---|
| Conflict: | Second World War 1939-1946 |
| Service: | Australian Army |
| Military unit: | 2/6 Field Park Company |
| Service number: | WX7969 |
| Date of death: | 17 February 1942 |
| Place of death: | Singapore |
| Age: | 33 |
| Rank at time of death: | Sapper |

Buried/commemorated: Singapore Memorial, Singapore

David Argyle enlisted in the Australian Army on 13 August 1940 at Claremont. He was posted to the 2/6 Field Park Company, an engineers unit, with the rank of Sapper which is the traditional term for a Private in an Engineers unit. This unit was sent to Malaya in June 1941 and in late January 1942 moved onto Singapore. Their primary function was to manufacture and organise stores and to run the power and water supplies.

As the Japanese invaded the island and moved towards Singapore city, the company made their technical equipment and transport unserviceable.

With no chance of resupply, and water supply cut off, the British commander of allied forces in Singapore surrendered on 15 February 1942. More than 130,000 Allied troops were taken prisoner. More than 15,000 Australian soldiers were captured. Of these, more than 7,000 would die as prisoners of war.

Sapper Argyle thus became a Prisoner of War and is believed to have died there on or about 17 February 1942. His body was not recovered and he is remembered on a memorial on the island.


© Rail Heritage WA

A small chapel has been built at Changi to host those remembering the many prisoners who died while concentrated in this area of Singapore.

The chapel is modelled on a St George's Chapel built by the prisoners during their captivity.

Photo A.Tilley



**Additional/personal information:**

David Argyle was born 8/1/1909, his birth registered in Boulder on the Goldfields, a son of David and Catherine Argyle. He married Violet J Wheatley in 1930, registered in the Perth district, and the couple bore two children

The 2/6th company's move onto Singapore appears to have been unknown to his family until after the war. It would be a long time before the names of those who died in captivity were known. Three years after David's presumed death, his family could still only mention him as "missing Malaya" when they reported the death of his mother:

> ARGYLE (David and Catherine). - Fondest memories of our beloved Dad and Mum, who left us June 18, 1943, and July 16, 1940, respectively. Inserted by their loving family, Elizabeth, Bill, Vi, Dave (missing Malaya), Bill, Bonnie (RAN), Kitty, Stan, Hannah, Will and grandchildren.
>
> *The West Australian* 18/6/1945p1

It was only after the war when Japan had surrendered and Singapore could be re-entered that any details of the dead there emerged:

> Mrs. V. ARGYLE wishes to THANK all kind friends and relatives for expressions of sympathy upon official notification of the death of her beloved husband and Daddy of Patricia and Brian, at the fall of Singapore. *The West Australian* 26/7/1946p1

David has been remembered in Kings Park with plaque M576 (in May Drive) which was dedicated by his widow and family in 2003.

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----------