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Hall, William Harrison

A West Australian railway employee killed after volunteering for military service for his country



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

Rail employment information

Employer:	Western Australian Government Railways
Branch:	Chief Civil Engineers
Designation:	Ganger

Rail employment notes: Born 23/5/1899. Joined WAGR 18/9/1926 aged 27 as Repairer (role in a trackwork gang), CCE Branch, Mooterdine. ("Repairer" was a track maintenance worker in a gang responsible for upkeep of an allocated section of railway line. A typical gang might include between 3 and 6 Repairers with one Leading Hand Repairer and a Ganger in charge, with many at very small settlements or tent camps.)

Transferred to Congelin 29/3/1927, Brookton 28/5/1930, Wooroloo 22/2/1932 and Perth 13/5/1935. Promoted to Ganger 3rd Class, Norpa 2/12/1935, Ganger 2nd Class, Brookhampton 25/5/1936 and transferred to Coolgardie 7/3/1940.

Enlisted in AIF 21/10/1940. Died 7/7/1943.

Military service information

Conflict:	Second World War 1939-1945
Service:	Second Australian Imperial Force
Military unit:	2/4th Machine Gun Battalion
Service number:	WX8747
Date of death:	17 July 1943
Place of death:	Japanese POW camp, Thailand
Rank at time of death:	Private
Age:	44 (see text)

Buried/commemorated: Kanchanaburi War Cemetery, Kanchanaburi Province, Thailand

William Hall enlisted in the Australian Army on 21 October 1940, giving his age as 39 and his next of kin as his wife Agnes Hall. He was given the service number WX8748.

Late in 1940 Australia had formed as 2/4th Machine Gun battalion, to be part of a proposed 8th Division and William was allocated to this new unit. It would turn out to be a tragic decision. 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 series of very slow trains and dusty road tracks.

The next move was by ship, the *Aquitania,* but not direct – it sailed via Sydney to collect more men then to Fremantle where it moored offshore to restock 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, with some of the men who had gone ashore – others were put on a later ship. The Battalion landed in Singapore on 25 January 1942. But the Japanese forces were rapidly

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moving south capturing Malaya then attacking Singapore island with heavy fighting and on 15 February 1942 the Allied forces, now surrounded and with water supplies cut off, surrendered.

William Hall was among the men taken prisoner of war, held initially in the Changi area of Singapore. The Japanese forces soon began dispersing the captives to work on various projects.

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 were “missing”. The newspapers of 10 July 1942 carried a list from the military of 760 WA men “missing”, mostly from the fall of Singapore.

Private Hall was sent to work on the infamous Burma-Thailand railway. Conditions there were harsh indeed, and he died on 17 July 1943 of Malaria and complications.

His remains were recovered and buried in the Kanchanaburi War Cemetery in Thailand.

Kanchanaburi War Cemetery, Thailand.

Prisoners of war who died working on the Thai-Burma railway are generally buried or remembered here.

Photo A.Tilley



Additional/personal information:

Born in Abergavenny, Wales UK. WAGR records give his birth date as 23/5/1899, but 2nd/4th Battalion website shows 23/5/1901. When he enlisted in 1940, the age limit was 40 years so he may have given the army a later date in order to enlist. It is not known when he came to Australia.

The 2/4th Machine Gun Battalion website (below) shows that William Hall was earlier married to a Kate Thomas whom he married in WA. However by the time he enlisted, his wife was Agnes Carmel Hall (nee Murray). Neither marriage is recorded in WA so it is not known when the change happened, nor who was the mother of the four children mentioned in a family notice:

> HALL (William Harrison), now confirmed died of Malaria whilst POW in Japanese hands, July 19, 1943; loved husband of Agnes; loving father of Ken. Pat. Gwen and Barbara. *The West Australian* 13/9/1945p1

His widow Agnes Hall remained in WA, dying in 1980 aged 72 years and being buried at Karrakatta cemetery.

Further information

More detailed information on this battalion and the 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----------