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O'Leary, Daniel Martin

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:	Locomotive
Designation:	Fireman

Rail employment notes: Born 3/3/1910. Joined WAGR 31/5/1926 aged 16 as Junior Worker, Loco Branch, Northam. Transferred to Perth 7/12/1926, Albany 14/3/1927 and Narrogin 9/7/1928. Appointed Cleaner ("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) 14/1/1929 and transferred to Lake Grace 1/1/1930. Retrenched 3/9/1930.

Re-employed as Labourer, Narrogin 2/12/1931 and appointed Cleaner 30/7/1934. Transferred to Geraldton 12/9/1935 and promoted to Fireman 27/12/1936. Transferred to East Perth 16/5/1938, Narrogin 20/6/1938 and Cue 17/12/1938.

Enlisted in AIF 16/8/1940. Died 14/11/1943.

Military service information

Conflict:	Second World War 1939-1945
Service:	Australian Army
Military unit:	2/4th Machine Gun Battalion
Service number:	WX8174
Date of death:	14 November 1943
Place of death:	Thailand
Rank at time of death:	Acting Lance Sergeant
Age:	33

Buried/commemorated: Thanbyuzayat War Cemetery, Thailand

Daniel O'Leary enlisted in in the Australian Army on16 August 1940 and was registered with service number WX8174.

Late in 1940 Australia had formed as 2/4th Machine Gun battalion, to be part of a proposed 8th Division and Daniel O'Leary was transferred to 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 series 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, 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 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.

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Private O'Leary 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.

Daniel O'Leary was sent to work on the infamous Burma-Thailand railway. Conditions there were harsh indeed, and he died on 14 November 1943 of cholera.

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

Additional/personal information:

Daniel O'leary was born in Kalgoorlie on 3 March 1910, a son of Jeremiah and Honorah Ethel O'Leary. He had at least two siblings.

Nes of his death did not reach family until 1945:

> O'LEARY, Daniel Martin (A L/Sgt, AIF) . previously reported POW. Thailand now reported believed died of illness, Thailand. 1943; loved son of Mr and Mrs J. O'Leary (Furnival-street, Narrogin); loved brother of Aileen (Perth) and Kevin (RAAF). *The West Australian* 20/4/1945p1
>
> O'LEARY, Danid Martin (WX1174). died of illness, Slam, November 14, 1943. In loving memory of our dear Son and Brother. Mr and Mrs J. O'Leary, Aileen and Kevin (Narrogin). *The West Australian* 14/11/1945p1
>
> O'LEARY, D. M. (S-t. 2/4th M.G. Be.). --A sincere tribute to the memory of Dan, who died while P.O.W. in Japanese hands, Thailand. November 14, 1943. Inserted by Set T. MacLennan. A soldier and a man. *The West Australian* 14/11/1945p1

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/* including photos of Daniel O'Leary.

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. Family information and collation by G.Higham.

----------Lest we forget----------