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McGlinn, Donald Spencer

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:	CCE
Designation:	Platelayer
Rail employment notes:	Platelayer at Lake Biddy.

Military service information

Conflict:	Second World War 1939-1945
Service:	Australian Army
Military unit:	2/4th Machine Gun Battalion
Service number:	WX11580
Date of death:	16 July 1943
Place of death:	Thailand
Rank at time of death:	Corporal
Age:	29

Buried/commemorated: Kanchanaburi War Cemetery, Thailand, grave 1.J. 44.

Donald McGlinn enlisted on 9 April 1941 at the Claremont recruiting centre..

Late in 1940 Australia had formed as 2/4th Machine Gun battalion, to be part of a proposed 8th Division and Don McGlinn was transferred to this new unit. 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 the 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.

Private McGlinn 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.

McGlinn was sent to work on the infamous Burma-Thailand railway. Conditions there were harsh indeed, and he died on 16 July 1943 of dysentery.

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

 © Rail Heritage WA

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 22/3/1915 at York, WA, one of 8 children of James Edmund (or Edward) McGlinn and Victoria (nee Bond) McGlinn. He was not married.

> McGLINN On July 16th, 1943, while P.O.W. in Japanese hands, died of illness: Cpl. Don McGlinn (late of Lake Grace, Dumbleyung and Wagin). Loved son of Mr. and Mrs. J. McGlinn, of Lake Biddy.
>
> McGLINN (Donald Spencer). - Don, reported missing, now presumed died of illness, Thailand, July 16, 1943; dearly loved son of Victoria and James McGlinn; loving brother of Sophia, Eric, Phil, Ern, Gordon, Maurice, Ray. *The West Australian* 18/6/1945p1

And a reminder of how different things were:

> MR. & MRS. McGLINN, of LAKE BIDDY, wish to publicly thank Mr.H. S. Goldsmith, of Wagin, for the letters he so willingly typed to our dear Son, Cpl. Don McGlinn, without cost to us for more than two years. *The Wagin Argus* 14/6/1945p4 both

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. Family information and collation by G.Higham.

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