

MERVYN ROBERT DONOVAN

WX 12948 Pte. Mervyn Robert Donovan

Mervyn Donovan was born on the 6th of October 1905 at Canning Mills (near Karragullen) to parents Edward and Catherine Ellen Donovan (nee Dornan). It is unknown when Mervyn arrived in Nannup, his enlistment papers show that he was a mill labourer, he married Olive Mervyna Rodda at Nannup in 1939 and at the time of his enlistment they had one child.

Mervyn enlisted in the AIF 14th of May 1941 and was assigned to the 1st Training Battalion at Northam on the 16th of May 1941, he was appointed acting Lance Corporal on the 19th of May 1941. On the 10th of June 1941, Mervyn was transferred to M1 reinforcement's 2/16th Battalion. Granted 7 days pre-embarkation leave (27.8.1941 to 2.9.1941).

Embarked Fremantle 26th of September 1941, aboard the "SIBAJAK" as part of the convoy US-12B, the ship was codenamed "JJ" bound for the Middle East for the Middle East. During the voyage Mervyn was admitted and spent 3 days in the Ships Hospital (reason unknown).

Disembarked Middle East 20th of October 1941. (Port Tewfik, the Port of Suez) 24th of October 1941, Mervyn was evacuated to 7 Australian General Hospital with a case of the mumps and on the 25th of October 1941, Mervyn reverted to the rank of Private. Discharged from 7 Australian General Hospital, 27th of October to Camp M/1 (training camp).

On the 20th of January 1942, Mervyn marched out to join the 2/2 Pioneer Battalion and on the 21st of January 1942, embarked on board the SS "Orcaades" On the 18th of February disembarked Batavia NEI (Netherlands East Indies) During April 1942, Mervyn was reported Missing in Action and transferred to the "X" list. In October of 1942, the service record of Pte. Donovan states "previously reported Missing, now believed to be a Prisoner of War. In October 1945, it was reported in his service record that Mervyn Donovan died as a result of illness, he had contracted Typhus, which resulted in his demise.

It was further reported that his place of burial was at or near the 12 Kilometre mark (presumably on the Burma – Siam railway. Mervyn's remains were later exhumed and reburied at the Kanchanaburi war cemetery in Thailand.

Notes:

In early 1942 the 6th and 7th Divisions were ordered to return to Australia as the threat of a Japanese invasion was a very real possibility. Included in this contingent were the 2/2nd Pioneer Battalion, the 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion and 2/6th Field Company as well as other allied units. The troops embarked aboard the SS ORCADES for the voyage to Australia. However, the ORCADES was about to be caught up in the Japanese thrust. Despite being told by the British Government, not to reinforce Java and being specifically instructed by the Australian Prime Minister John Curtin, not to break up the Australian Divisions, General Wavell (a British Army Officer) ordered Brigadier Arthur Blackburn VC (in command of the troops aboard ORCADES) to land 2,000 troops at Batavia. Wavell believed Australia had no jurisdiction over its own troops. On the afternoon of the 24th of February 1942, Brigadier

Blackburn was given further orders, "Give every assistance possible to the Dutch Forces in resisting the invasion – impressing every hour gained by resistance would be of value to the allied cause to the South Pacific in general and to Australia in particular. Blackburn was to use his troops in offensive operations against the Japanese wherever possible. His force was to be named "BLACKFORCE".

An Australian Army Officer, seconded to Wavell's staff told Blackburn that Wavell had already given Java up as lost. With no substantial force on Java to command, his Java command would be dissolved, and Wavell would fly to India to take up a new role as Commander in Chief India.

Blackburn and all the Australians were left to fend for themselves, Wavell knew they would have little chance of survival without surrendering to the Japanese.

Although Blackburn was in command of all Australian troops, he was under the control of the Dutch Commander in Chief, Hein ter Pooten. With little resources with which to fight the Japanese, no tanks, no aircraft and very few, poorly trained troops, Hein ter Pooten was left with very little choice, and on the 8th of March 1942, he surrendered to the Japanese. The Australians were furious, they felt the Dutch were not committed. Considering the Dutch surrender, Blackburn had no alternative but to follow suit. This resulted in all Australian and the allied forces under his command, to become prisoners of the Japanese, the majority of which would go on to suffer severe privation and hardship on the building of the infamous Burma Siam railway. Many would die or suffer such injuries as to never fully recover.