

BRADLEY William

Name: William Bradley

Born: February 1909

Rank: Gunner

Service Number: 1713293

Regiment: 6HAA Royal Artillery

Died: 29 October 1974



Wartime experience:

In November 1940 at the age of 31 years 7 months, William, known as Billy, (from Manchester) enlisted in the Army for the second time, to fight in WW2. He left behind his widowed mother, his wife Lilian May, his daughters, Lilian May (eleven years) and Barbara (11weeks), his third daughter Susan would be born in 1947 after his return from the Far East.

Memories of the family's hardship in the 1930's depression were still raw so in order to maximise provision for his family Billy told his wife, " I'll leave my suit; you'll be able to sell it if things get tough; I'll go to the army camp in my work overalls because they'll give me a suit when I get there." By that, he meant an army uniform. Another useful instruction was that she could sell anything she needed to in order to survive and Billy promised that when he came home they would "start again". He had sawn a penny in two and each spouse kept their half as tokens to be put together again on his return. Billy's wife and daughters, Lilian, and Barbara, "a babe in arms", waved him off to war at London Road Station, Piccadilly. Billy did army service in the Belfast area of Ireland but when the time came to travel further afield, he was sent by sea to Durban and then to Singapore. He fought in battles there but with no air support it became obvious that Singapore was going to fall. He became part of the group that was ordered to collect and burn all bank notes before the Japanese arrived.

At Singapore, on 15 September 1942 Billy became a Japanese Prisoner of War. He referred to having spent his time there as a POW in Changi Gaol.

On 4 April 1942 Billy became part of the Saigon Battalion, a group of approximately a thousand men, led by Lt. Col. F.E. Hugonin and they were the first to leave Singapore as slaves. They were transported in the Hell Ship Nisshu Maru and Billy, having spent his 33rd birthday on board, landed at Saigon docks on 10 April 1942. He worked in harsh conditions there. Fourteen months later at the end of June 1943 he left Saigon for Thailand to work on the Thai-Burma Death Railway.



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The time he spent in captivity is as follows:

1 July 1943 - arrived at Kin-Saio (Kinsayok) in a party of 700 men led by Lt. Col. Hugonin.....(Jungle Camp). This was the period known as "Speedo" and in a matter of one month a fifth of these men would be dead.

10 August 1943 - Tarsao led by Lt. Col. McKellar.....(Jungle Camp)

26 July 1944 - Concreta (Konkoita) led by Lt. Col. McKellar.....(Jungle Camp)

23 December 1944 - Tamarkan (Kwai)

11 March 1945 - Patshburi (Petchaburi) led by Lt. Davidson of the Australian Army.

Billy was liberated from Patshburi at the very end of August 1945; he weighed just 6 stones (84 pounds). Then he was flown to Rangoon where he was reunited with his friend "Jim" Connolly and met Lady Mountbatten. After spending some time in Rangoon he boarded "The Corfu" and sailed for the UK, arriving at Southampton on 8th October 1945; it was the first of the ships carrying Japanese POW's to reach England.

Civilian life after return:

Somehow in all of his travels, trials and tribulations Billy had managed to keep his half of the penny he had split in 1940 and he brought it home to his little two up two down terraced home in Manchester on 19 October 1945.

He learnt that his mother had died the previous February; she did not know he had survived. His wife Lily and his daughters, Lilian now aged 16 and Barbara aged 5, were safe and still living in the home he had left five years before. During Billy's captivity his wife had not managed to access his army pay because, as a Japanese POW, he had been untraceable; he may have been dead for all anyone knew.

Ironically, Lily had not been able to claim a widow's allowance either as there was no proof that he had died. Apparently, during the war, provision for such families was available but no government agency or otherwise had thought to inform Lily. Some practical help had been provided by her parents and she remained forever grateful to them. In 1946 Billy was demobbed from the Army and in 1947 his third daughter, Susan, was born. He lived to walk all three daughters "down the aisle" and he knew all of his ten grandchildren.

Sadly, Billy died on 20 October 1974, at the age of 65 - twenty nine years and one day after his post war reunion with his family.



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