

HARWOOD William Thompson

Name: William Thompson Harwood

Born: 22 July 1917

Rank: Gunner

Service Number: 909966

Unit/Regiment: 239 Battery, 60th
Field Regiment, Royal Artillery

Died: July 1968



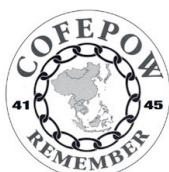
Pre-War:

William, known as Bill, was born in Cleethorpes, Lincolnshire on 22 July 1917. At the age of 19 he joined the local Territorial Army in Grimsby.

Wartime experience:

When war broke out, he was drafted into the regular army and was part of the British Expeditionary Forces (BEF) that was sent to France. Operation Dynamo, which was the evacuation of troops from the beaches of Dunkirk started on 28 May until 31 May 1940. This involved not only British Naval ships but also a fleet of small boats from England, sailing over and picking up soldiers, often out of the shallow waters off the beaches. Bill was one of the 338,000 British and French soldiers that were evacuated from the beaches of Dunkirk on the last day - 31 May 1940.

Bill was transferred to the 6th HAA Regiment on 10 June 1941 and on 11 November 1941 he sailed to the Middle East on the Monarch of Bermuda, leaving behind his wife Kathleen. On 9 December, during the voyage to the Middle East, Japan bombed Pearl Harbour, thereby joining the war – so the Monarch of Bermuda was diverted to Durban, South Africa and Bill, with all the other troops, boarded the MV Aorangi and left on 13 December 1941 bound for Singapore as part of Convoy DM1, arriving on 13 January 1942. On 13 February, 2 days before the fall of Singapore, Bill evacuated with 239 Battery to Sumatra, whilst there he was transferred to 241 Battery, 77th HAA. He avoided capture there and in late February, managed to escape with his Battery to Java, where he was finally captured on 8 March 1942, in Java and incarcerated in Unicamptong camp, Tandjong Priok for 7 months. On 22 October 1942, bound for Singapore, he embarked on the Yoshida Maru, a dirty, battered converted cargo ship, where they were put into one of two cramped, airless holds, each split into two by a wooden shelf which was about three feet up. Arriving on 26 October 1942.



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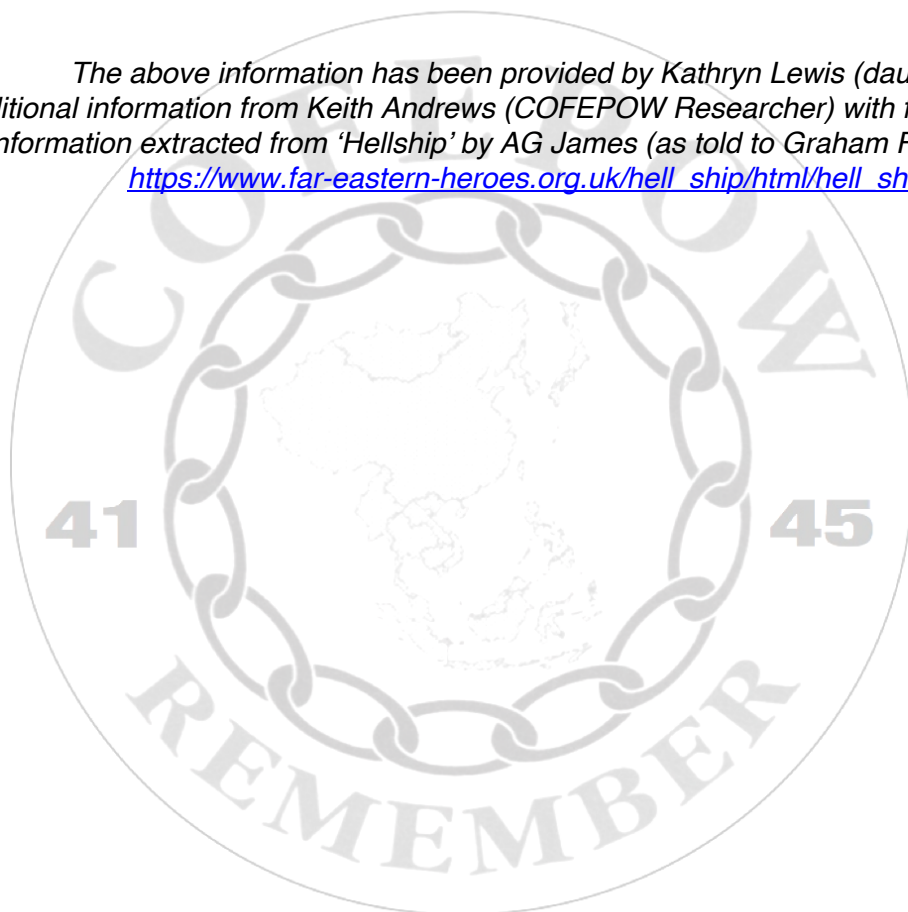
At Singapore, on 29 October, they were transferred to the Singapore Maru where the conditions were even worse, on a voyage lasting 23 days. Of the 1,081 prisoners who went aboard, 677 disembarked in Japan. 63 were buried at sea, 290 left aboard too sick to disembark and left to die. They finally arrived in Moji, Japan in November 1942. It was Japanese winter and the men were poorly clothed and weak. He arrived at Hiroshima Camp 9B, Onoda Ohama Camp, then called Yahata Provisional POW Camp, Ube on 27 November 1942. Here he was used as forced labour to work in the coal mines for the Ohama Coal Mining Company, under the Inland Sea.

Post War:

Bill survived and eventually, returned home to Cleethorpes. There he worked on the fish docks and, in the evenings, he played clarinet and saxophone with local bands.

Sadly, Bill died in July 1968, at the age of 50.

*The above information has been provided by Kathryn Lewis (daughter)
Additional information from Keith Andrews (COFEPOW Researcher) with further
information extracted from 'Hellship' by AG James (as told to Graham Fisher)
https://www.far-eastern-heroes.org.uk/hell_ship/html/hell_ship.htm*



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