

DURDEN Richard Joseph

Name: Richard Joseph Durden

Born: 19 February 1917

Rank: Lieutenant

Service Number: 170662

Unit/Regiment: Royal Corps of
Signals

Died: 25 May 2002



Pre-War:

Dick, as he was known, was born in East Sheen, Surrey. The family name comes from the old French meaning 'strong tooth' so it is likely that he was descended from the Huguenots. His mother died in childbirth when he was only three years old, so his father, Percy, was left to bring him up single-handedly, with the help of a live-in housekeeper, Margaret Francis (we knew her as 'Auntie Peggy' or 'Miss Francis'). He spent his early years growing up in East Sheen and was educated at St Paul's School in Hammersmith. He subsequently moved to Edgware, Middlesex, with his father. Here he met his future wife, Alison Upsdell, at St Margaret's Church, Edgware, where they both attended and were involved with the Crusader group there. They were married on 15 February 1941.

Wartime experience:

Dick joined the Royal Corps of Signals and was assigned to the 18th Infantry Division sometime after the start of the war. He spent much of 1941 in Britain, undergoing training and being moved around the country. This included an anti-invasion role in East Anglia, and training in Scotland. He was in the convoy of ships that set out from Liverpool on 28 October 1941 to carry the 18th Infantry Division to the Middle East. The convoy had reached South Africa in December and was preparing for the final stretch of its journey when news of the Japanese entry into the war was received. As a result, he, with most of the 18th Infantry Division, was diverted to Bombay, India, to reinforce British forces facing the Japanese. He arrived in Bombay on 27 December 1941 and, by February 1942, the Signals Corps had moved to Malaya for some cable work, while the majority of the 18th Division were now in Singapore.



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Shortly afterwards the entire division was engaged in the Battle of Singapore, culminating in the surrender to the Japanese on 15 February 1942 – that day was his first wedding anniversary.

Dick spent the next 13 months as a POW in Changi POW camp. In March 1943 he was sent, along with hundreds of other prisoners, to Thailand to work on the Thailand-Burma railway.

He was assigned to 'D' Force, Work Groups 1 & 4. The table below lists the POW camps he was in between 1942 and 1945. This information is from the liberation questionnaire he completed at the end of the war; he also annotated a map in the front of John Coast's book, *Railroad of Death*, (published just after the war) with the dates he was in the various camps.

Camp	Dates	Camp Leader
Changi	15 Feb 1942 – 20 Mar 1943	Gen. Percival Lt. Col. E E Holmes
Kanchanaburi (Kamburi)	24 Mar 1943 – 4 Apr 1943	Lt. Col. Carpenter
Wan Po	4 Apr 1943 – 20 Apr 1943	Lt. Col. Carpenter
Chungkai	20 Apr 1943 – 18 Sep 1943	Lt. Col. Outram
Konkoyta	3 Oct 1943 – 10 Dec 1943	Lt. Col. Baker
Hindato	10 Dec 1943 – 10 Mar 1944	Lt. Col. Baker
Nom Pradok	10 Mar 1944 – 10 Sep 1944	Lt. Col. Baker
Tamuang	10 Sep 1944 – 21 Jan 1945	Lt. Col. Knights
Kanchanaburi	21 Jan 1945 – 28 Jun 1945	Lt. Col. Toosey
Nakom Nyok	13 Jul 1945 – 15 Aug 1945	Lt. Col. Toosey

Following the unconditional surrender of the Japanese on 15 August 1945, Dick was air-lifted to Rangoon on 4 September, spending a week and a half at the military hospital there. He set sail for home on the *Worcestershire* on 17 September, going via Colombo (Sri Lanka), the Suez Canal and Gibraltar, and arriving back at Liverpool on 16 October 1945.

Although he had nothing good to say about his Japanese captors (calling them 'barbaric apes'), he made light of the hardships he must have endured. He extolled the camaraderie he had found among the prisoners, the plays and concerts they mounted, the sports they had played, and the life-long friends he had made. Indeed he met up with a small group of ex-POWs for many years after the war for an annual reunion. (They were Henry Salisbury, 'Willie' Williams, Bill Phorson, and Wesley 'John' Worth.) He never talked about his experiences – all that we, his children, knew about his war-time service was that he had spent time as a POW, and that he taught us to count from 1 to 10 in Japanese!



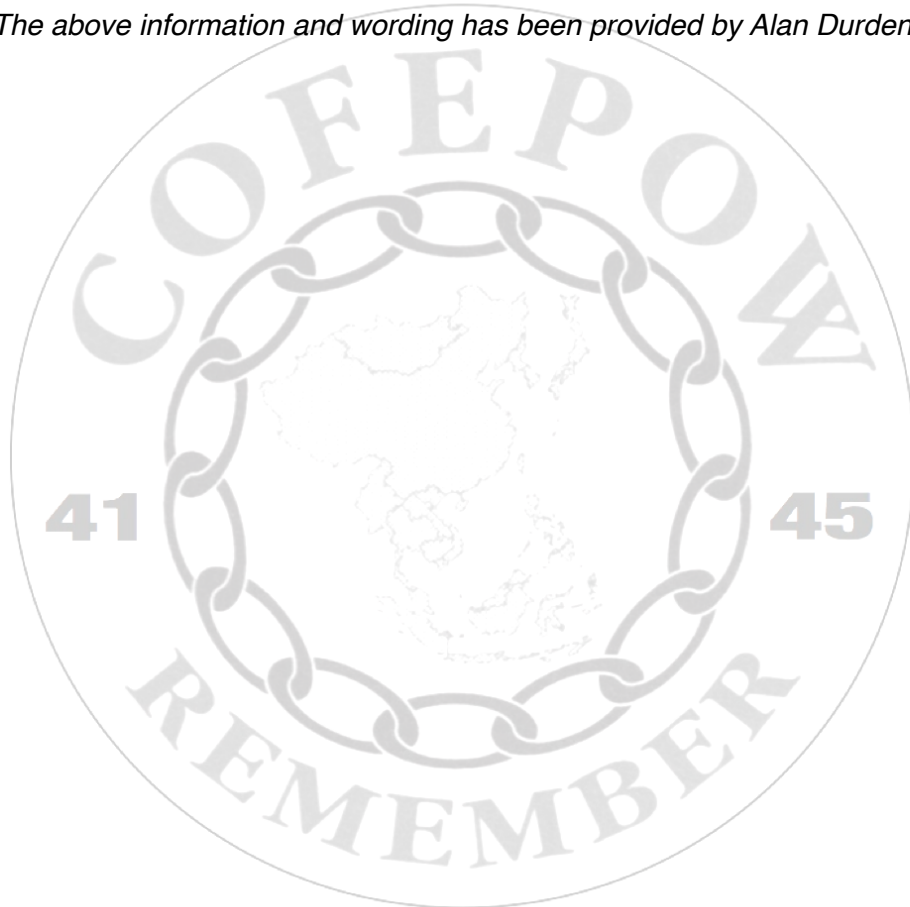
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Civilian Life After Return:

Dick and Alison started married life 'proper' once they were reunited by buying a bungalow in Northwood Hills, Middlesex, where they had three children: Alison Helena (born 29 October 1946), and twins Alastair Charles Joseph and Alan Richard (born 23 February 1948). In 1950 the family of five moved to a larger house in Pinner, Middlesex. Dick worked as an actuary, eventually becoming manager of the London office of the Australian life assurance company Colonial Mutual.

Dick spent his retirement with Alison in Haslemere, Surrey. He died at the age of 85 in 2002.

The above information and wording has been provided by Alan Durden (son)



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