

YOUNG Walter Ernest

Name: Walter Ernest Young

Born: 7 June 1908

Rank: Lance Sergeant

Service Number: 1483240

Unit/Regiment: 35 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment RA

Died: 5 March 1943 (official date)



Above: Walter and Doris Young
This picture remained on Doris' bedroom wall until 2020

Pre-War:

Walter was born in 1908 in Blackwood, Monmouthshire, Wales, to Walter Ernest and Mary Ann Young. He was the third eldest of twelve children. He trained as a hairdresser as his father had before him. Before 1932, Walter got on his bike and cycled to Oxford to find work. It was there that he met and married his wife, Doris Wilkins, in July 1932, at the Oxford Registry Office. Walter was working as a sheet metal worker. They had three sons: Morris, Trevor and Kenneth. In 1934, the family moved to Rose Hill, Oxford, where they lived among family and a close-knit community. In 1939, Walter signed up for National Service. His son, Trevor remembers: "My Dad volunteered in 1939, as soon as war was declared. My Mum always said he was too patriotic". He had turned down the offer of the landlord at the Jolly Post Boys Pub in Florence Park, an area of mainly Welsh people who had come to work at the factory. Morris and I were at Donnington school at the time. One day a lorry passed us on the way home, with three soldiers on the back. Dad called out my name I waved to him, and hurried home." Sadly, that was the last time they ever saw each other. Kenneth was just 3 years old when war broke out and so had no memory of his father.

Wartime experience:

Walter joined the 35 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment RA becoming Lance Sergeant. (His last letter to Doris, in 1941, was [published](#) as part of IWM VJ80 Letters to Loved Ones.)

On 15 February 1942, Walter was taken prisoner of war in Singapore and imprisoned at the Changi Prison. In October, 600 British prisoners of war – since named 'The 600 Gunners Party' were loaded on to a ship said bound for a prison camp in Japan POWs headed instead south of the equator to Rabaul, New Britain in Papua New Guinea.



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In November, the 517 fittest men were shipped to Ballalae Island to build a secret airstrip. Many prisoners died from overwork and disease or were killed by allied air raids. A raid on 12 March 1943 may have killed 300 when their encampment was bombed. In June 1945, another heavy US raid convinced the Japanese the island was about to be invaded and they executed all surviving prisoners. A full record of Walter's official documents can be [downloaded here](#).

After the war ended, a mass grave was discovered by Australia and the remains of over 400 men were removed and laid to rest at The Bomana Commonwealth War [Cemetery](#), 12 miles north of Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. Walter is [commemorated](#) at The Singapore Memorial Commonwealth War Grave and has a stone near The Children of Far East Prisoners of War (COFEPOW) building at The National Arboretum.

Family Grief:

Morris, Trevor and Kenneth were 6, 8 and 10 years old in 1943, the year of Walter's official death. Trevor remembers the moment his Mum received the news. His grandmother Lily came to their house with two uniformed army officials. Lily was told first as Walter had given her address to his captors to make sure his wife was supported with any bad news. Morris ran up the garden and could not speak. Trevor tried to comfort his Mum. The family are pictured later with their Grandmother: from left to right: Morris, Kenneth, Mary Ann, Doris & Trevor Young. As records remained officially secret for 50 years, Doris died knowing little of Walter's fate. She brought up her 3 boys with the help of her Mum. She never remarried.



Pilgrimage:

In June 2003, Kenneth joined a COFEPOW pilgrimage to Ballalae Island. A COFEPOW article 'Pilgrimage to Ballalae (Solomon Islands)' describes how they first visited Singapore, The Kranji Memorial and the Changi Chapel.

Kenneth laying a posy for his father, at The Kranji Memorial, Singapore.



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YOUNG Walter Ernest (cont . . .)

The party travelled on to other islands in The Solomon Islands. They took a small plane to the uninhabited Island of Ballalae, landing on the airstrip built by their forebears.



The party laid wreaths and remembrance crosses at the refurbished memorial plaque. The picture shows crosses laid by Walter's sons, Morris, Ken and Trevor.

The plaque was refurbished and [rededicated](#) again in 2023 by HMS Tamar.

The above information and wording has been compiled by Sarah Young (Walter's granddaughter). Dedicated by Walter's son, Trevor, and grandchildren: Martin, Tim and Kevin Young.



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