

PARK David

Name: David Park

Born: 22 October 1909

Rank: Private

Service Number: 13698

Unit/Regiment: Federated Malay
States Volunteer Force, 2nd Battn,
Selangor



Died: November 1982

Pre-War:

David was born in Belfast, the youngest son of Jacob and Catherine Park, who originally came from Dumbarton, Scotland. After school he was an apprentice engineer in Harland & Wolff shipyards where his father worked as Foreman Master Plater. However, he left and went to Australia, probably with the Big Brother Movement, where he worked on a farm in Western Australia for a couple of years. Disenchanted, with what was quite a lonely existence, he moved to Perth where, in his spare time, he joined a School of Dance. He became part of an adagio and tap dance double act (Anita & Boris) who toured with a small company all over Australia and the Far East.

Wartime experience:

Apparently, he left the 'Act' in Malaya, and although it is not clear what he was doing, on 5 September 1940 he enlisted in the 2nd Battalion Selangor, Federated Malay States Volunteer Force. The fall of Singapore found him incarcerated in Changi from 16 February to October 1942. From there, he was transported to work on the Thailand/Burma Railway at Kinsayok, Chungkai and Nong Pladoc between 23 October 1942 and 3 June 1943. Having survived the Death Railway, he was sent on a Hell Ship (believed to be the Hioki Maru) from Singapore to Japan and ended up in prison camp Fukuoka 17 (Omuta) where he was a slave labourer in the Mitsui coal mine from 28 June 1944 until he was liberated. Working in the mines was incredibly dangerous with some POW's breaking their own limbs to avoid having to go down the mines. David noticed that the Japanese were very wary and suspicious of the mentally ill and deranged, so he faked madness.



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He was then confined to a cell with someone who really had lost his mind and had to fight for survival there as well.

David was liberated on the 2 September 1945 and began the long journey home via Nagasaki and Manila and then on HMS Glory to Esquimaux Naval Base in Canada. (Ironically HMS Glory was built by Harland & Wolff in Belfast.) David crossed Canada by train, probably to Halifax, where another ship brought him back to England late in 1945.

Post War:

David turned up at his eldest sister's house in Lancaster on Christmas Eve, 1945, not having been heard of for years*. David spent several months convalescing and in 1946 married Eve Hughes, a girl he had met while she was working for the Red Cross. Subsequently, he developed a music hall, vaudeville type of act "Davendo, Versatile Acrobatic Dancer". After that he applied for a position which involved ice skating, although he could not skate, which led to him becoming a comic turn as a clown. Always very athletic, he soon became proficient on ice and from there his career took off. Amongst other things he appeared in Puss in Boots on Ice at Earls Court, London, entertained American troops in occupied Germany and, in 1955, travelled to the United States to fulfil an engagement at the Hilton Hotel in Chicago. He took his family with him to the States planning to see a bit of the country, however an offer to join the Ice-Capades Company, meant they settled permanently in Ellenville, Ulster, New York. He left Ice-Capades in 1964 at the age of 55 but having developed a stage act as Dave-O-The-Clown, carried on as an independent entertainer in hotels, resorts and summer camps. He spent his latter years as a children's entertainer until he was at least 70. He passed away in 1982. (The US Social Security Index states he died in 1981 but his son said he died in 1982.)

*David was only 7 years older than my father,** his nephew. This is an extract from my father's memoirs relating to David's return home.

I had reached home in time for Christmas, 1945. My brother, Leslie, also came back from Takoradi in West Africa, and my Uncle David turned up unexpectedly at our house in Lancaster on Christmas Eve, having been a POW in Malaya and Japan. He had been released by US forces, handed over to the Canadians and repatriated to the U.K., kitted out in Canadian uniform. David was in poor physical condition and was convalescent for some months afterwards. It was a happy Christmas for all, especially for my parents.

My father said they all sat in the front parlour and as he related the story of what had happened to him, David cried. One of Dad's most vivid memories was his mother insisting that he, Leslie and David all go to Morecambe to visit the Gorstige (Gracie's) family. (Gracie was another sister whose address David gave as his contact on his Japanese POW card.) They went down in uniform on the tram and he says there was great excitement over the visit and when they left Ann and Heather (their cousins & David's nieces) travelled part of the way back on the tram with them.

** Flt/Lt RKD Cooper MBE (1916-1998)

The above wording and information has been provided by Susie Vince (Great Niece)



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