

BANTON James

Name: James Banton

Born: 1920

Rank: Leading Aircraftman

Service Number: 956528

Regiment: Royal Air Force

Died: February 2003



Pre-War:

Jim, as he was known, was born and lived in Burton-on-Trent and worked as a Train Driver for Worthington's Brewery. On 3 March 1940, at the age of 19, he enlisted, at a local airfield called Burnaston – which is now the Toyota Car Factory, Near Derby.

Wartime experience:

Jim trained at Blackpool with his 'passing-out' parade on the Beach. He was stationed at RAF West Raynham in Norfolk before embarking on the Stirling Castle (formerly a Royal Mail ship) from Gladstone Docks, Liverpool, bound for Singapore. Jim, together with two young airmen, were shipped out to Java, where they were given the task of defending the Dutch Airfield at Kalidjati. Not long after, they were informed that the Japanese were invading and duly ordered to evacuate. They managed to avoid being captured for a while but were eventually caught in the hills of Java on 8 March 1942. They were then put to work on the Sumatra Railway.

Civilian life after return:

Jim returned home to his wife, Dorothy, and 3 year old son, David, who was born while he was away. Jim soon found the way to his son's heart by producing a large bar of chocolate from his kit bag.

Jim and Dorothy had 3 more children and were married for 62 years. Jim, Dorothy and all their family, including their grandchildren, attended the opening ceremony of the Sumatra Railway Memorial, at the National Memorial Arboretum in 2001. Jim managed to write his life story but sadly, died in February 2003 aged 82.

Following a phone call from Jack Plant, Keith (Jim's son) and Russell (one of his grandchildren) went to the National Memorial Arboretum and mixed the cement for the footings so the Sumatra Memorial could be built.

The above information and wording has been provided by Keith Banton



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