

GUYATT James Hugh Sydney

Name: James Hugh Sydney Guyatt

Born: 22 October 1920

Rank: Private

Service Number: 7599314

Regiment: Corps of Royal Electrical
and Mechanical Engineers (REME),
British Army



Died: 27 July 1998

Pre-War:

James, known as Jim, started his working life in 1936, at the Railway works in Eastleigh, when he was 16. His grandparents moved to Eastleigh to find work on the railway. So, he carried on the family tradition and started a 5 year apprenticeship in the Machine Shop. He completed his apprenticeship in 1941.

Wartime experience:

Jim joined the TA and was 'called up'. He left the UK on the Empress of Asia, arriving in Bombay in January 1942. In February 1942 the ship was set on fire whilst approaching Singapore and was subsequently abandoned. The men reached Malaya and he was captured at the fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942.

Jim remained a FEPOW until the end of the war and was in various camps, including Changi, Ban Pong, Non Pladuk, and finally Ubon. He worked on the Thai/Burma Railway known as the Death Railway. Towards the end of the war the camp medical officer told Jim that he had no more than 3 months to live because of the ravages on his body caused by malnutrition, beri beri, dysentery and malaria and no medical supplies for treatment. At one point the Padre was sent to him as they thought the end was nigh, but Jim fought through, determined to live for his loved ones back home. Thankfully, the Japanese surrendered, and the medical supplies started to come through. Jim survived but, he was in a very bad state of health and the doctors told him he would only have a 40% chance of living to 65 due to all the illnesses he had suffered.

Civilian life after return:

On his return home Jim was over the moon to find his sweetheart, Emily had waited for him and they married on 12 January 1946. They had a daughter Joyce, born in 1949. He took some time before he was well enough to go back to work at the Railway, as a Charge Hand and later was promoted to an Instructor in the British Rail Training School.



COFEPOW is a registered charity, number 1074474. Reproduction of the COFEPOW Album Pages without the express consent of COFEPOW, or reproduction of all or any of the information contained herein without the express consent of the family of the FEPOW concerned, is prohibited. For further information, contact www.cofepow.org.uk

All through his working life, Jim suffered from depression, occasionally having to take time off work, although he always tried to battle through. He also suffered dreadful headaches and from time to time had malaria type symptoms. He managed to work until 1976 when he had to take early retirement due to ill health, at age 56. Jim found being retired and not working really hard, especially when he had to give up driving, due to fits. Sadly, he went to pieces for a while feeling useless. His health suffered and then he suffered a heart attack, which in its own way was a blessing in disguise. He was put on an experimental drug for his heart, which worked wonders, and was prescribed Prozac for his depression. During his last few years, Jim was in a far better place and his spirit shone through again.

Jim talked very little about the war but, in later life, he did open up a bit, about the dreadful and cruel treatment the POWs had received. What he never told anyone was that the prognosis of him not living past his 65th birthday affected him greatly. When he reached his 65th, he revealed for the first time, in letters to his wife and daughter, how he had kept the information to himself so as not to worry them but, he was determined he would have the will-power to fight through and make it. It was at this time he apologised to his family for the times when he was unwell, depressed and short tempered but stubborn. After all he had suffered no apology was needed, Emily and Joyce were so proud of him.

On the 50th anniversary of VJ Day, Jim paraded with the veterans and was chosen to lay the wreath at the Cenotaph in Eastleigh.

Sadly, Jim died on 27 July 1998, at the age of 77.

VJ Memorial

written by Joyce for her Dad on 50th VJ Day Anniversary

Marching under clear blue skies,
The veterans came with heads held high.
They came to remember the darkness of war.
The sacrifice paid for freedom for all.

Each had their memories vivid and clear
Of the traumas of war seen year after year.
They remembered the many who gave up their lives
And the families at home who mourned them and cried.

They thought of the wounded and suffering borne,
And the Prisoners of War who were tortured and torn.
They each had their memories of their own wartime life,
Of their comrades, their hardships and of common strife.

My father was one of the proud men that day,
Who marched and remembered what they had to pay.
He has suffered more than I'll ever know,
But his proudness and spirit is still there on show.

You can see the courage that helped them all through,
And the grit that made them heroic and true.
Their war years are something they will never forget,
And neither should we – we are in their debt.

The above information and wording has been provided and approved
by Joyce Collinge (daughter)



COFEPOW is a registered charity, number 1074474. Reproduction of the COFEPOW Album Pages without the express consent of COFEPOW, or reproduction of all or any of the information contained herein without the express consent of the family of the FEPOW concerned, is prohibited. For further information, contact www.cofepow.org.uk