

LOUDWELL Leonard John

Name: Leonard John Loudwell

Born: 26 November 1918

Rank: Private

Service Number: 6915345

Unit/Regiment: 18th Division, 18th
Battalion, Reconnaissance Group
(5th Battalion, The Loyals)

Died: 14 September 2001



Pre-War:

Leonard was born on 26th November 1918 in West Norwood, South-East London. As a young man he was employed by the then Home and Colonial Stores. An unfortunate cycling accident left him with a scarred face and, because of this, his employers thought it would be off-putting to customers, so they sacked him.

Wartime experience:

Leonard joined the King's Own Rifles at Winchester Barracks on 15 December 1939. He went on to join the Loyal Regiment, which later became part of the 18th Division, 18th Battalion Reconnaissance Corps. He was on the troop ship, the Empress of Asia, which was attacked on 5 February 1942, as it entered the western approaches to Singapore. Nine Japanese dive bombers focussed their attention on the Empress of Asia, which was gravely damaged. The crew and troops gathered at the stern, as fire was raging amidship, which allowed the HMAS Yarra to carefully manoeuvre its bow alongside and lift 1,804 survivors to safety. All but 16 were rescued before the ship went down. He was involved in the conflict in Malaya before being captured on 15 February 1942, when Singapore fell to the Japanese, and he became a prisoner of war. Leonard was incarcerated in Changi before being transported to Thailand to work on the Thai/Burma railway and the Kwai Bridge. Following the Japanese surrender, Leonard returned home in October 1945.

Civilian life after return:

On his return to civilian life Leonard joined the Civil Service and, having started as "The lowest form of animal life" as he put it, he rose to the rank of Senior Executive Officer.



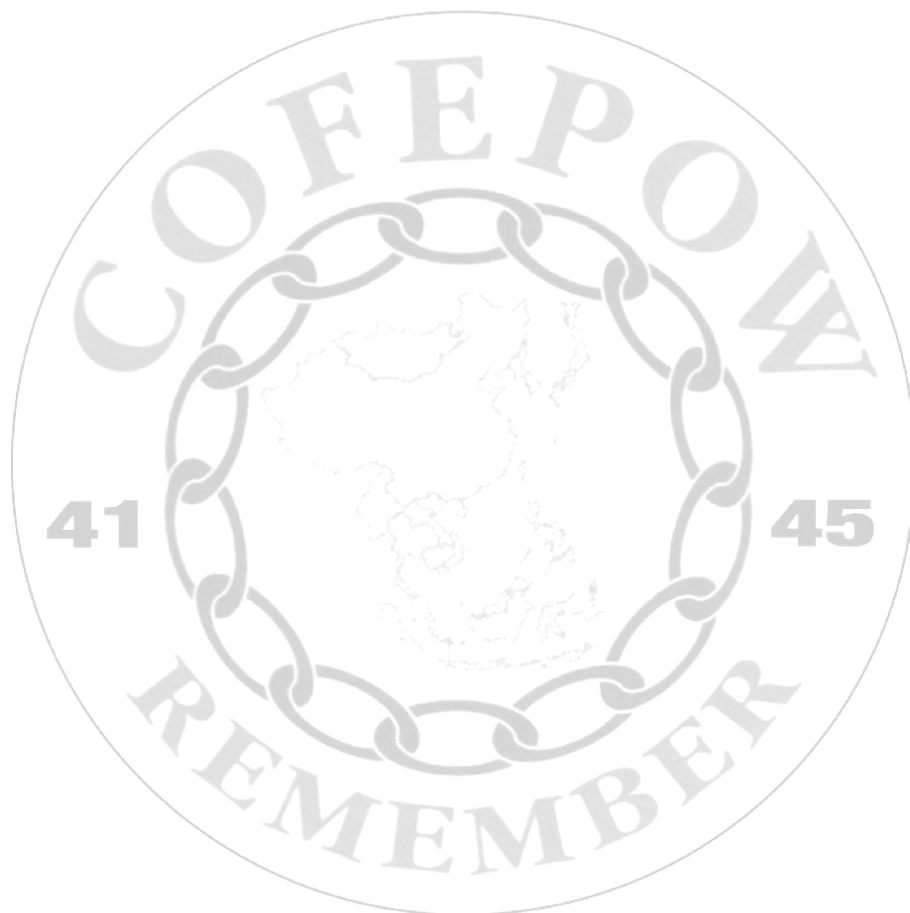
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He remained in the Civil Service until he retired in 1980. Sadly, he was bedridden for eight years before he died on 14 September 2001 at the age of 82.

Leonard's son, Terry paid this tribute to his father:

"He was an outstanding Dad and husband and, given his terrible suffering at the hands of the Japanese, one would have expected him to have become a bitter, angry man, yet nothing could be further from the truth. He was an exceptionally kind, generous and above all, compassionate man".

The above information and wording has been provided by Terry Loudwell (son)



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