

BRIGGS Philip Edward

Name: Philip Edward Briggs

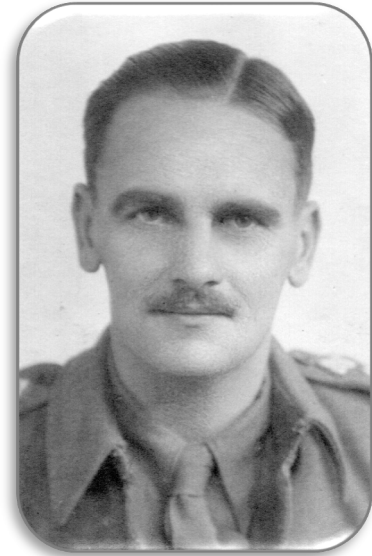
Born: 27 June 1916

Rank: Captain

Service Number: 165538

Unit/Regiment: Royal Army
Service Corps. 18th Division

Died: 19 June 1991



Pre-War:

Philip Briggs was born in Stockport, where his parents owned and ran the "Manchester Arms" Public House, and was educated at The Leys School, Cambridge. He left school in 1934 and joined the Transport Department of Joseph Rank Ltd, the Flour Millers. Also, in 1935 Philip met Gladys Crome (nee Parnell) who he was to marry on her divorce in June 1941. She changed her Christian name at the same time and became Patricia Briggs.

Wartime experience:

Philip volunteered in 1939 and received a Commission in the Royal Army Service Corps (54 Infantry Brigade Group) in 1940. His RASC Unit, under the command of Major R S Sykes, sailed for an unknown destination in late 1941 and, eventually, via India, became part of the final detachment of 18 Division to reach Singapore on 5 February 1942. He saw some action before Singapore fell on 15 February. The Company, comprising 8 Officers and 257 other ranks, was transferred to Changi on 18 February. On 18 June 1942 the Company was the first to travel overland to the Gulf of Siam, where they de-trained at Ban Pong on 23 June and had to develop workshops and stores. Among Philip's fellow officers was Captain Ewart Escritt who later documented his time as a FEPOW on the Railway. The start of the construction of the Thai/Burma railway was at Nong Pladuk which became the location for vehicle maintenance. Whilst here, Philip was one of the Officers under Sykes' command running the clandestine 'V' scheme under which intelligence on Japanese troop movements and on the prison camps was passed to Allied command via an intermediary in Bangkok, in return for funds to buy extra supplies and medicines on the 'black market'.



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As well as his involvement in the 'V' scheme, Philip was one of a small number of officers operating a concealed radio set and was the guardian of the set's single headphone which he kept in his shoe. It was probably due to his vehicle maintenance expertise, that Philip spent most of his time at Nong Pladuk, though the records neither confirm nor counter this. We know that he was there in September 1942, May 1943, and May 1944 when the hospital files show that he was being treated for various ailments. Compared with camps further up the railway Nong Pladuk was an improvement and that, combined with his comparative youth (aged 25 on capture), no doubt contributed to his survival. Philip was close to his commanding officer Major Sykes and was distraught when the latter was killed in a major RAF air raid on New Year's Eve 1944. In January 1945, Officer POWs were moved from Nong Pladuk to Kanchanaburi, 75 kilometres to the north. The clandestine radio was keeping POWs informed about Allied progress in the War and Philip heard about the end of the War in Europe in May and about American progress in the Far East theatre. There were rumours that the prisoners would be massacred if Japan faced defeat though when the Atomic Bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August and Japan surrendered these worst fears were not realised.

When Philip had set off for what turned out to be Singapore in late 1941, he knew that Patricia was pregnant but when she gave birth to a daughter in April 1942 he was in captivity. The fact that the baby (christened Patricia) died of Spina Bifida after only twelve days did not reach Philip until much later. He was able to send a pre-printed card (one of four during his captivity) which said, "Please see that Patricia's grave and all is taken care of".

Philip, like so many FEPOWs, did not talk much about his experience. But late in life he did jot down some brief notes to help him in case he decided to write about his time as a POW. The notes survive. Here are a few extracts:

- **Medical Supplies and Food.** Probably a reference to the clandestine work that he, Sykes and others did which is mentioned above.
 - **Howard and Pomeroy.** Captain Pomeroy and Lieutenant Howard escaped from the camp in Kanchanaburi in February 1943, were recaptured by the Thai police and handed over to the Japanese. They were tortured and bayoneted to death. Philip may have witnessed some of this.
 - **Major Smith and Radio.** The radio story is referenced above. The "Smith" referred to is unclear.
 - **Singapore escapee shootings** – Sikh firing squad. Self-explanatory – must have taken place before Philip's June 1942 transfer to Thailand
 - **Railway** – one death for every sleeper laid. 16000 allied POWs and 75,000 Asian labourers died in the Railway's construction. Here Philip is referring to Hugh Simpson's article 'A life for every sleeper'
 - **Beatings – Non Pladuk incident.** Which incident this refers to is not known.
 - **Kempei** – Tai methods. Philip no doubt witnessed the actions of the notorious Japanese military police
 - **Concentration Camp conditions.** Transportation conditions.
 - **Officers and men made to grovel** – bowing to guards.
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BRIGGS Philip Edward (cont. . .)

- **Plans to kill all prisoners in the event of invasion** – saved by atom bombs.
- **Dog Incident.** Not known.
- **Murder of Prisoners in field.**
- **No clothes issued in three and a half years.**
- **Interpreter in hole in ground for three months** – saved by end of war
- **Sergeant Watanabe.** Philip here makes reference to a Japanese soldier who was commended in a report by Captain Escritt: "One Japanese preferred human duty to self-protection Sgt WATANABE carried to the Hospital one of the first casualties (of a bombing raid) and assisted generally in directing POWs"

Civilian life after return:

Philip was 29 when he was repatriated to England in 1945 – he re-joined Joseph Rank Ltd and rose with the firm to a senior management position. He took early retirement in 1970. He and Patricia had two children – Patrick (b. 1946) and Carole (b. 1949). In the early years after the war Philip suffered from the memory of his imprisonment and would wake in the night screaming. He would not eat rice and intensely hated anything Japanese, although this moderated somewhat in later life. He rarely talked about his experiences. He kept in touch with Captain Escritt, who he liked and respected, though he avoided reunions. He died of Lung cancer just before his 75th birthday in 1991. Patricia had pre-deceased him in 1978.

The above wording and information has been provided by Patrick S Briggs (son)



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