

# ELSAM Sydney Douglas

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**Name:** Sydney Douglas Elsam

**Born:** 20 May 1917

**Rank:** Corporal

**Service Number:** 4977436

**Unit/Regiment:** 1/5<sup>th</sup>  
(Derbyshire) Battalion,  
Sherwood Foresters

**Died:** 6 April 1989



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## Pre-War:

Sydney left school at the age of 14, in June 1931, to start working in the clay industry with Ensors & Co., located near Swadlincote in South Derbyshire. He joined the local 1/5<sup>th</sup> (Derbyshire) Battalion Sherwood Foresters, a Territorial Infantry Battalion, in 1937, at the time there were strong rumours of a possible war in Europe, Sydney was mobilized in September 1939.

## Wartime experience:

Immediately on the outbreak of WWII, the 1/5<sup>th</sup> was deployed to France until June 1940. On return they were stationed in Sheffield and York; he married in 1941 and was moved to Scotland and then back to Penkridge in Staffordshire. On 20 October 1941, as part of 18 Division, the 1/5<sup>th</sup> boarded HMS Orcades (part of Convoy CT5), setting sail from Gourock, Scotland bound for Canada. The convoy arrived in Halifax, Nova Scotia on 7 November, there the regiment boarded the USS West Point, which sailed on 10 November as part of Convoy WS 12X. The 1/5<sup>th</sup> arrived in Bombay on 27 December and sent to Ahmednagar Cantonment for 3 weeks training and then re-joined the West Point, which departed Bombay on 19 January, as part of Convoy BM11. The West Point arrived in Singapore on 29 January 1942, when the 1/5<sup>th</sup> were immediately deployed to the front line. After experiencing two weeks fighting the Japanese, on 14 February, Sydney was wounded in the chest and hospitalised in Raffles Hotel (a make shift hospital). Singapore surrendered to the Japanese the next day. Sydney, now a POW, was taken to Roberts Barracks Changi, which was the hospital for Changi POW Camp, where he remained for two months.



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On 24 June 1942, Sydney was moved, as part of the fourth Mainland Party (18 Div) Train 4, bound for Ban Pong. There he became part of Work group 2 on the Thai/Burma Railway (which became known as the Death Railway). From Ban Pong he went on to work at Chungkai, Tha Khanun and from there, they were transported to Japan on the Toyofuku Maru. Having suffered many hardships during his captivity, Sydney was released by the Americans in August 1945. He arrived back in the UK in October 1945, after recovering from tinea (also known as ringworm), malnutrition, a bad abscess and suffering from yellow jaundice – physically, he was in a very poor state.

### **Civilian life after return:**

Sydney's recovery to full fitness took a long while, returning to work with Ensors & Co in June 1946, a full 8 months after returning home. He stayed with them until 1968, during that time he became the Chairman of the Sports and Social Club and Secretary of the Sick and Dividend Club.

Sydney held several Church appointments, as well as being a Chorister and Sexton at Hartshorne Church. He was the founder member and Chairman of the Hartshorne Tenants Association and Allotments and Gardeners Association. Sydney was a gentleman, a kind man and loved everything in life that was natural and free, he was respected by everyone he encountered.

Sadly, Sydney passed away on 6 April 1989 (Badajoz Day<sup>1</sup>)

*The above information and wording has been provided by David Elsam (Son)  
Further information provided by Keith Andrews, COFEPOW Head of Research*

<sup>1</sup> *Badajoz Day is an historic day in the Sherwood Foresters, when, in 1812, they successfully stormed the castle and city of Badajoz*

