

RANGELEY Dennis

Name: Dennis Rangeley

Born: 10 June 1914

Rank: LAC and later Corporal

Service Number: 805452

Unit/Regiment: 605 County of
Warwick, Birmingham Squadron,
RAF (Fighter)

Died: 14 March 1977



Pre-War:

Dennis was born in Burnley, Lancashire to Dennis and Martha Ann Rangeley nee Bennett. He qualified as an Auto Electrician in his hometown but shortage of work there saw him move to Coventry where he worked in car factories until finally becoming an Aircraft Inspector with GEC.

Wartime experience:

In Coventry, Dennis joined the RAF Auxillary Corps and was a volunteer reserve when he was called up two weeks before the start of the War (24 August 1939). He was sent to the South Coast where he was part of the ground maintenance crew working on Hurricanes during The Battle of Britain. He was posted to Wick for a short while before being sent to Java. Captured by the Japanese in March 1942 he was transported to Japan by the cargo boat, Dainichi Maru, which was carrying iron ore. The conditions on board were terrible. The prisoners were packed tightly in the battened down hold, which was overrun with rats. Dressed only for the tropics, they slept on the iron ore which was freezing at night and sweaty through the day. They were only allowed on deck for one hour daily for latrines, so the stench of so many bodies with no air or sanitation became overwhelming at times. To compound their misery, this "Hell Ship" was dive bombed by the Americans unaware of the allied POWs on board.

Dennis was incarcerated in a prisoner of war camp at Zentsuji on the island of Shikoku and on Innoshima. They were told every day at assembly that if any hostile forces landed on Japanese soil, all POWs would be beheaded. He worked on the Docks, marching there and back each day. Normally, prisoners were fed half rations but if a prisoner was ill, he was given no rations, dramatically curtailing their life. Dennis resolved to work on and never to say that he was ill, even when he was



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Sometimes, he stole small amounts of food whilst unloading on the docks, concealing them around his body, in spite of the terrible consequences if caught. He felt the aftershock of the Atomic Bomb but did not see the cloud. He was liberated from the Camp in 1945, stretchered off, because of a septic leg, onto the hospital ship Tjitjalengka, bound for Hamilton, North Island, New Zealand. The care he received, both on the journey and afterwards, at the Waikato hospital saved his life and he remembers being fed oysters as part of his convalescing diet. Eventually, he was repatriated in January 1946 and came home to Burnley in the middle of the night, having to rouse his father from sleep.

Civilian life after return:

Dennis worked as an Auto Electrician at W H Harrison, Motor Dealers in Burnley before joining Lucas as an Inspection Engineer. As a former choir boy, he was welcomed back into the choir at St Matthew's Church where he met his wife, Edna. They married on 5 June 1948 and Edna helped Dennis when he became a founder member of The Burnley Branch of the Far East POW Association. Two colleagues and ex POWs were Harry Haworth, Welfare Officer and Joe Stanworth, Treasurer. On repatriation, the POWs were given very little help and just had to get on with their lives. Understandably, many were bitter about the treatment they received. So, the Association became a lifeline. Twelve members met once a month and over time Dennis acted as both Secretary and Welfare Officer. After his death, Edna carried on this work until in the 1990's the Association, with only one living member, was handed over to the Burnley Branch of the British Legion.

In 1974 Dennis and Edna, on a holiday to the Far East, visited Japan. They sailed past the island of Shikoku where he had been held prisoner all those years before.

Sadly, Dennis passed away on 14 March 1977 at the age of 62.

Edna said "Dennis did not hold any ill-will towards the Japanese people. He understood it was their culture to do as they were told, to follow orders".

"He never complained and Edna felt fortunate to be his wife, as he was such a loving man".

*The above wording and text has been provided by Edna Magnall
(formerly Rangeley, Dennis' widow)*



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