

DEWISON Fred Okell

Name: Fred Okell Dewison

Born: 5 January 1908

Rank: Driver

Service Number: 2356208

Unit/Regiment: Royal Corps of
Signals, 18th Division

Died: 7 March 1986



Pre-War:

Fred was born in Durham to John and Minnie Dewison. When he left school he became a Storekeeper. He married Hilda Evans at Stockton, Durham in 1929 and went on to have two boys, Keith and Graeme. Fred enlisted in the army at Catterick on 21 November 1940 and became part of the 18th Division.

Wartime experience:

On 9 September 1941, Fred was issued with Tropical kit and was ordered to proceed to Liverpool Docks. The 18th Division sailed on the Reno Del Pacifico, arriving at Halifax on 8 November 1941. The men from the 54th Infantry Brigade, which included Fred, were moved across to the USS Wakefield, a transport ship tied up alongside. The Wakefield was part of a convoy, William Sail 12X, consisting of six American troopships, two cruisers, eight destroyers and the aircraft carrier Ranger, which set sail on 10 November 1941 – destination unknown. The convoy arrived in Trinidad on 17 November 1941, stopping for only two days to take on supplies, before continuing on its journey arriving in Cape Town, South Africa early in December 1941. On 13 December 1941, the convoy left Cape Town and sailed along the coast of East Africa past Madagascar and into the Indian Ocean heading for Bombay arriving on 27 December 1941. On 17 January they embarked back onto the USS Wakefield and sailed the next day in a convoy escorted by the HMS Exeter and HMS Glasgow with British and Australian destroyers destined for the Far-East. Having escaped being bombed the Wakefield arrived in Keppel Harbour, Singapore on 29 January 1942. Ships were ablaze in the harbour, clouds of smoke drifted across the sky and the smell of fumes was overpowering. The Japanese had taken most of Malaya in three weeks and were only thirty miles away from Singapore.



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

The 18th Division were moved to the north-eastern part of the island near the Changi Peninsula with orders to hold the area. On 5 February 1942 the Empress of Asia bringing supplies, including ammunition for the 18th Division, was hit by bombs and went aground on the Sultan Shoal, this did not help the desperate situation the battalion was in. The following days saw heavy bombing and bombardment from the Japanese. On Sunday 8 February 1942, using makeshift rafts, the Japanese 18th and 5th Division began to move across the Straits, separating Malaya and the north-western end of Singapore. The Australian troops who faced them didn't get the artillery support they needed and, shielded by the dense smoke, the Japanese soon got a foothold, the fighting was soon hand to hand. On the night of 7 and 8 February the Japanese attacked the island of Ubin, off the straits, to the right of the 54th Infantry Brigades sector. The enemy consisted of about 1,000 men and the small platoon guarding the beach had to make a quick withdrawal, four men failed to return. The Japanese were making ground quickly by infiltrating the Allied lines and by the 9 February were about two miles behind the defences. On 10 February parts of the 54th Infantry Brigade and the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers formed 'Tomforce' under Lt-Col L C Thomas. Their orders were to support 12 Indian Brigade and stop the enemy advancing on Bukit Timah. The force travelled in buses to the north side of Bukit Timah, then advanced towards the village, the 1/5 Sherwood Foresters advanced from the south, but that night the village was taken by the Japanese. It was considered an impossible task to advance further, as the Japanese were heading north of 'Tomforce' towards the reservoir near Thompson Village. The force withdrew to the Singapore Racecourse to try to stem the Japanese advance, joining with the 4th Suffolks on the right to form a perimeter defence of the MacRitchie Reservoir. The 4th Suffolks received an order to advance towards the Swiss Rifle Club Range, letting the Japanese infiltrate with cover fire from the high ground, they already held. This caused the right flank of the battalion to be exposed. The enemy quickly took the advantage and completely surrounded 'Tomforce' leaving only a small area free to the east. 'Tomforce' was dissolved and the defences of the position in Adam Road were quickly put into place, these include a barbed wire fence and that night some sleep was gained. The next day started with a heavy shell and mortar attack allied artillery returned fire but there were many casualties during the day. That evening the battalion were relieved by 1/5 Sherwood Foresters, withdrawing to the east side of the road, however, with the shelling very little rest was gained. The same pattern of shelling and bombing carried on into 14 February causing heavy casualties, this later was followed by a prolonged attack to the north of the positions and with a second attack the Sherwood Foresters were forced back. B and C companies then counter attacked and regained their positions with heavy losses. The situation on the island was now very critical with many troops overrun and the enemy threatening to take control of the water supply. The end came very quickly. At noon on 15 February 1942, a car travelled down the Bukit Timah Road with a white flag above a Union Jack - Singapore had surrendered. Following his capture, Fred was incarcerated in Changi Camp. On 3 November 1942 he was transported overland by railway to Thailand with 'O' Letter Party, train 10. This was the 28th train to Thailand with 650 PoWs on board.



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

DEWISON Fred Okell (cont. . .)

On 26 November 1943 he was in Tha Sao Hospital with Malaria and infected scabies and released on 10 January 1944. On 16 January 1944 Fred was re-admitted to Tha Sau Hospital with chronic Malaria and in about April was transferred to Nakhon Pathom Hospital. 1 November 1944 he was transferred from Nakhom Pathom to Tha Muang, 38 km from Nong Pladuk. On 5 January 1945, Fred was once again in Tha Muang Hospital with S.T. Malaria and released on 25 February 1945. On 7 March 1945, again re-admitted to Tha Muang Hospital with Malaria and released on 18 March 1945. On 3 April 1945 re-admitted to Tha Muang Hospital again, this time with Scabies and released on 14 April 1945. On 1 September 1945, Thailand was liberated and Fred was transferred to the Royal Australian Army under Lt-Col C A McEachern. He was flown from Thailand to Rangoon, where, on 16 September 1945, Fred embarked on the RMS Corfu, stopping at Colombo on 19 September, where shore leave was granted, before continuing its journey to the UK.

Civilian life after return:

On his return home, Fred resumed his life in Teesside with his wife Hilda, raising his two sons Graeme and Keith and working for ICI. Fred continued to suffer with Malaria for many years and was moderately disabled, as a direct result of his time in Thailand, but still managed to live a relatively active life. In 1979 Fred and Hilda celebrated their Golden Wedding anniversary.

Sadly, Fred passed away on 7 March 1986 at the age of 78.

*The above information has been provided by Stephen Dewison (Grandson)
with added information and wording taken from Ron Taylor's site FEPOW Family. Roll of Honour.
Ron.Taylor@roll-of-honour.org.uk*



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