

Breaking Gerald's Silence

Bombardier Gerald Ernest Burt 908631 of 118th Field Regiment Royal Artillery never spoke of his wartime experiences except on two occasions. The first was to write a short piece for his grandson's school project newspaper (attached). You will notice he says how he got to be a Far East POW and how he got home, but not a lot about his captivity. The second was to show his son Jeremy a photo taken in secret of soldiers in the square at Penang. He didn't take the photo, but had been the custodian tasked with bringing it home. The photo has not been seen since. Hopefully, as Gerald was a historian it has been passed to a suitable repository.

The Order of the Deep (photo attached) was issued on the USS Westpoint as the ship travelled from Halifax, Nova Scotia to Trinidad and Tobago and crossed the Equator. It is a sailor's tradition to pay homage to King Neptune the first time you cross the equator by means of an initiation or event. No doubt the American sailors set up an event for all the English Army passengers. What is incredible is that this paper survived capture at Singapore on 15/02/1942, internment in Changi and work on the "Death Railway" to return to England with Gerald in October 1945. It was then stuck in a scrapbook with other family photos until it fell out when the sticky tape wore off, to reveal 5 names and addresses on the reverse.

Four of the five names have been traced to other members of the 118th, two of whom returned and two of whom didn't. When they returned, the British Government asked each soldier to complete a questionnaire about their time in captivity. By examining the questionnaires of the two who returned it is clear that they were not in the same camps as Gerald so it is likely he wrote these names and addresses on the back when they were on board the USS Westpoint.

Gerald's questionnaire shows he was in Changi from February 1942 to May 1942 under G.O.C 18 Div, Haverlock Road- May 1942 to October 1942 under Lt Col Thomas, Kanu (Tarsoa Group) -November 1942 to March 1943, Chungkai -April 1943 to May 1844 under Lt Col Outram, Tamuang -May 1944 to June 1945 under RSM Christopher and Pratchai- June 1945 to August 1945 also under RSM Christopher. By reading accounts written by other people who broke their silence about these various camps, it is possible to get an idea of what Gerald went through.