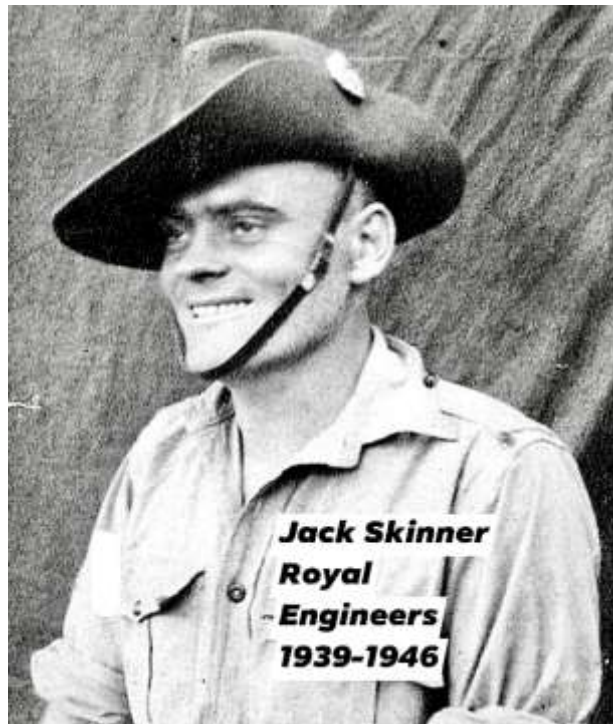


Jack William Skinner d.o.b. 28th August 1919.
Royal Engineers Army no. 1898020

ID - BOG 076



At the outbreak of WW2, he followed his father and enlisted in the Royal Engineers at Kingston on 15th November 1939 aged 20. He was working in a job on the railway at Twickenham classified as a reserve occupation and didn't need to enlist, but joined the Army in any case, probably to see the world and experience life. He enlisted as a "Fireman" in the Royal Engineers and at Kingston Surrey in October 1939 aged 20, passed the medical Grade 1 (see Att !)

As a Sapper in the Royal Engineers army no. 1898020, he did his basic training at Bordon Hampshire and then in April 1940 retrained at Longcross as a Railway Engine Driver (see Att 2). After basic training he took part in exercises with the Home Guard, being 'captured' at an early stage in the exercise so that they could relax at the local pub and enjoy a pint!

He was mobilised to the Southern front in the Central Mediterranean Force, setting up supply lines to the Russian front. He embarked on a ship to the port of Durban, South Africa in February 1942 where he lived in a bell tent on the Durban race course for a short time. In a letter home to his parents he described how modern Durban was with a great selection of fresh produce including black grapes and bananas (see Att 3). He was then taken by ship to the port of Banda Shahpor, Iraq, where he worked setting up a supply route to Bagdad, through to Kirkuk and establishing a supply railway through to Tehran and on to Tabriz in Persia.

He said that rolling stock and engines were shipped from Britain to Iraq, Baldwin oil fired steam locomotives from the United States and British built Stanier coal fire locomotives, his preference being the Baldwin locomotive.

Due to the terrain which had some steep inclines, trains were powered by more than one steam engine, "double headers" were utilised (see att 4) and sometimes a third engine connected to the rear of the train to provide sufficient locomotive power (see att 5).

He mentioned that they had to be aware of ambush by some of the tribesmen who worked for the enemy forces. On an incline the track surface could be covered with grease causing the engine's driving wheels to slip and lose traction. With the train stalled armed tribesmen would fire on the train. They needed to try and maintain forward motion by operating the throttle and using weapons carried on the footplate fired back keeping the enemies' heads down. They devised a system of sand buckets attached to the engine above the driving wheels which could be emptied by pulling ropes to pour sand on to the greased track areas to improve traction.

The steam engines needed topping up with water at certain points along their routes, some where villages already existed. When water supplies needed to be improved the Engineers also helped the local population by improving water supplies to the village wells which was apparently much appreciated (see att 6).

With the job done in Persia, in August 1943 he was redeployed in the Central Mediterranean Force via Alexandria in Egypt. Time was given for a little relaxation before being shipped to Italy via landing at Anzio shortly after the main invasion forces were landed from Sicily.

Following the arrival, he said they had to recommission engines and rolling stock left behind by retreating enemy forces. Dad said that booby traps had been placed in the engine boilers which if fired up would have exploded. They had to crawl into the engine fire boxes to ensure that all wrecking devices had been neutralised and that the engine brake systems were suitably repaired.

His job was to keep allied forces transported and supplied as they moved north, through Italy. In doing so they passed through many villages whose Mayor would ask if they had spare room on the train, would they transport the local produce to other villages along the line for market. This was agreed and meant that grateful villagers showed their gratitude with kindness and well-being towards the allied troops.

On one occasion he suffered brake failure during a descent to drop off 1000 troops on board his train, the train overshot the station at speed and he subsequently brought the train to a halt on the incline up the other side of the valley. An officer on board the train with this troops threatened to have him arrested to face a possible Court Marshall until his own RE officer pointed out that the actions he had taken had saved the train from probable derailment and he had brought the train to a safe halt.

When he arrived in Rome a visit to the Vatican was arranged (see att 7) as well as enjoying a little sightseeing in other areas which was a welcomed alternative.

Jack Skinner was released from the Royal Engineers in March 1946, he subsequently married Margaret in 1949 and together they had 4 children.

Compiled by Michael Skinner, son, assisted by sisters June and Diane with brother Andrew



Att 3 Sight-seeing in Durban



Att 7 Visit to the Vatican



Att 6 With villagers at newly repaired water well



Att 5 "Double header" with third engine at the rear



Att 4 Double header train



Memento from time in Egypt



Military currency issued to Allied Forces



Local currency issued to Allied forces in Persia

N.S. (ARMED FORCES) ACT
MILITARY TRAINING ACT, 1939

GRADE CARD

Registration No. RMB 1149

Mr. SKINNER Jack William.

whose address on his registration card is 28 Andover Rd. Letchworth Hdx

was medically examined at DRILL HALL, 3015 A.A. BATTN.
PORTSMOUTH ROAD
KINGSTON-ON-THAMES

on 21-10-39

and placed in

GRADE* I (one) **KINGSTON MEDICAL BOARD**

E.D. Until* _____ (Medical Board stamp.)

Chairman of Board D. W. Skinner

Man's Signature J. W. Skinner

*The roman numeral denoting the man's Grade (with number also spelt out) will be entered in RED ink by the Chairman himself, e.g., Grade I (one), Grade II (two) (a) (Vision). If the examination is deferred the Chairman will enter a date after the words "E.D. Until", and cross out "Grade"; alternatively, the words "E.D. Until" will be struck out.

M.R. 55 [P.T.O.]

Att 1 Enrolment at Kingston Surrey

This Pass must be presented in conjunction with A. B. 64 or Identification Tag.
(Questo permesso deve venire esibito unitamente alla carta di Identificazione personale)

No. 008606

Pass 1898020. SPR. SKINNER, J.W.
(lasciapassare al)

Account RAILWAY ENGINE DRIVER.
(Grado o qualifica)

Unit (reparto) 192 RAILWAY OPERATING COY. R.E.

Valid when countersigned by
(Valido solo se controfirmato da)

[Signature] MAJOR R.E. A. Longdon
UNIT COMMANDING OFFICER
BRIGADIER
D. M. R. S.

SIGNATURE OF HOLDER (FIRMA DEL TITOLARE)

Att 2 Engine Driver certificate