

Bethersden

Second World War

1939 – 1945

DAVIES, SYDNEY JOHN. Staff Sergeant, 7623092.

Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers.

Died 4 October 1943. Aged 28.

Born and resided Kent.

Son of Sydney Robert Barlow Davies and Edith Jane Davies.

Buried Kanchanaburi War Cemetery, Thailand.

Grave 2. K. 12.

Attended Ashford Grammar School 1926-1931, where Sydney is commemorated in the Second World War Book of Remembrance.

Originally enlisted in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps, and was probably transferred to the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers on its formation on 1 October 1942.

Sydney was one of the allied prisoners of war and natives who died whilst working on the infamous Burma-Siam Railway, 'The Railway of Death.' During its construction, approximately 13,000 prisoners of war died and were buried along the railway. An estimated 80,000 to 100,000 civilians also died in the course of the project, chiefly forced labour brought from Malaya and the Dutch East Indies, or conscripted in Siam (Thailand) and Burma (Myanmar). Two labour forces, one based in Siam and the other in Burma worked from opposite ends of the line towards the centre. Kanchanaburi War Cemetery is only a short distance from the site of the former Kanburi, the prisoner of war base camp through which most of the prisoners passed on their way to other camps. It was created by the Army Graves Service who transferred to it all graves along the southern section of railway, from Bangkok to Nieke.

MURRELL, FREDERICK GEORGE. Able Seaman, C/JX336225.

Royal Navy, HMS President III,

Died 18 May 1943. Aged 27.

Son of Frederick George Randall Murrell and Julia Murrell of Bethersden, Ashford, Kent.

Husband of Joyce Murrell of Bethersden.

Buried Alexandria (Hadra) War Cemetery, Egypt. Grave Ref: 4. K. 17.

At the time of his demise Frederick was probably a Royal Navy trained gunner aboard one of the Defensively Equipped Merchant Ships, as in the event of their deaths the Royal Navy personnel are recorded by their respective Royal Navy Establishments. In the case of the R.N.T.G.'s, H.M.S. President III would normally be recorded, it being their administration and pay office.

NEALE, RICHARD (Dick) HENRY. Petty Officer, C/JX 145790.

Royal Navy, H.M. Submarine Stonehenge

Died 20 March 1944. Aged 24.

Son of Arthur and Clara Beatrice Neale.

Husband of Jean Ann Neale of Bethersden, Ashford, Kent.

Also commemorated on the Second World War memorial plaque located in Tenterden, Kent, (St. Mildred's) parish church, and the Chatham Naval Memorial. Panel 74. Column 3.

Built by Cammell Lairds Ltd. of Liverpool, Lancashire, H.M. Submarine Stonehenge commissioned on 11 June 1943, under the command of Lieutenant David S.M. Verschoyle-Campbell, D.S.C. R.N., at which time he became the youngest officer in the Royal Navy to be given command of a submarine. Following one patrol in the North Sea in September 1943, Dick's submarine left the United Kingdom for service in the Far East and was stationed at Trincomalee, Ceylon with the Fourth Submarine Flotilla, arriving at Colombo, Ceylon on 16 January 1944. H.M. Submarine Stonehenge sailed from Trincomalee engaged on her first war patrol in the Far East theatre of war on 1 February 1944. On 5 February 1944, she sank a small Japanese transport by gunfire with about 80 Japanese troops on board, and after various other operations off the northern coast of the island of Sumatra, during which time she was unsuccessfully attacked by a number of Japanese Navy anti-submarine vessels, she torpedoed, and sank, the Japanese auxiliary warship 'Chocko Maru' of approximately 7,000 tons off the coast of Penang on 12 February 1944. Dick's submarine then returned to Trincomalee on 18 February and, after a week's rest, she sailed again on 25 February undertake more patrols in the area of the Malacca Straits. H.M. S/M Stonehenge failed to return from that patrol and in so doing, became the first Royal Navy submarine lost in the war against Japan. It is thought that the submarine was lost after she had struck a mine between Northern Sumatra and the Nicobar Islands. The commander of H.M. S/M Stonehenge, 23 year old Lieutenant, David S.M. Verschoyle-Campbell, D.S.O., D.S.C., and Bar, R.N. the son of Major-General William Henry McNeile Verschoyle-Campbell, C.I.E., O.B.E., and Ethel Mary Verschoyle-Campbell (née Pilkington), of Baily, Co. Dublin, Republic of Ireland, and the husband of Merle Davos Verschoyle-Campbell (née Bain), and the entire submarines compliment were all presumed lost in the sinking.

PENFOLD, Ernest F. Lance Corporal, 6283707.

2nd Battalion, The Buffs (Royal East Kent Regiment).

Died France & Belgium Campaign, between 15 May 1940 and 4 June 1940.

Aged 30.

Born and resided Kent.

Son of Ellen Elizabeth Penfold of Ashford, Kent.

Husband of Hetty Irene Penfold of Ashford, Kent.

Buried Esquelmes War Cemetery, Peco, Hainaut, Belgium. Grave Ref: V. B. 60.

Pre war member of The Buffs (Royal East Kent Regiment).

PLEYDELL, JOHN MANSELL. No trace.

ROOTS, WILLIAM CHARLES. Lance Corporal, 79179646.

44th Royal Tank Regiment, Royal Armoured Corps.

Died of wounds at El Duda, Egypt 27 November 1941. Aged 22.

Born and resided Kent.

Son of William George and Gertrude Lilian Roots of Bethersden, Ashford, Kent.

Buried Halfaya Sollum War Cemetery, Egypt. Grave Ref: 20. D. 3.

Attended Ashford Grammar School between 1931 and 1936, where William is commemorated in the Second World War Book of Remembrance.

In view of William's date and place of death, it would appear that he was wounded during a particularly hard fought action by both sides. It seems likely that William had possibly been amongst the tank crews of 'A' Squadron, as the 44th Royal Tank Regiment had rallied between Zaafran and Belhamed, and was in action again the 26 November 1941, at which time 'A' Squadron had four of its tanks destroyed. A Night attack on Ed Duda supported by infantry, resulted in joining up with the 1st and 4th Tank Battalions. The 44th Royal Tank Regiment, Royal Armoured Corps went to the Middle East in April 1941, and by the time of 'Operation Crusader,' November 1941, in the 1st Army Tank Brigade, had been equipped with Valentine Tanks, along with 8th and 42nd Royal Tank Regiments, supporting 2nd New Zealand Division. Part of the Official New Zealand history of the Second World War, when partially describing the action where William died, reads:- "The Bersaglieri Regiment fought with much greater determination than is usually found among the Italian troops, and the numbers of their dead, and the positions in which they lay showed that they had kept their guns in action to the last." Needless to say their allies of the Afrika Corps had also fought stoically and tenaciously.

VINE, JAMES HENRY. Guardsman, 2617530.

Grenadier Guards. Attached to HQ 6th Guards Tank Brigade.

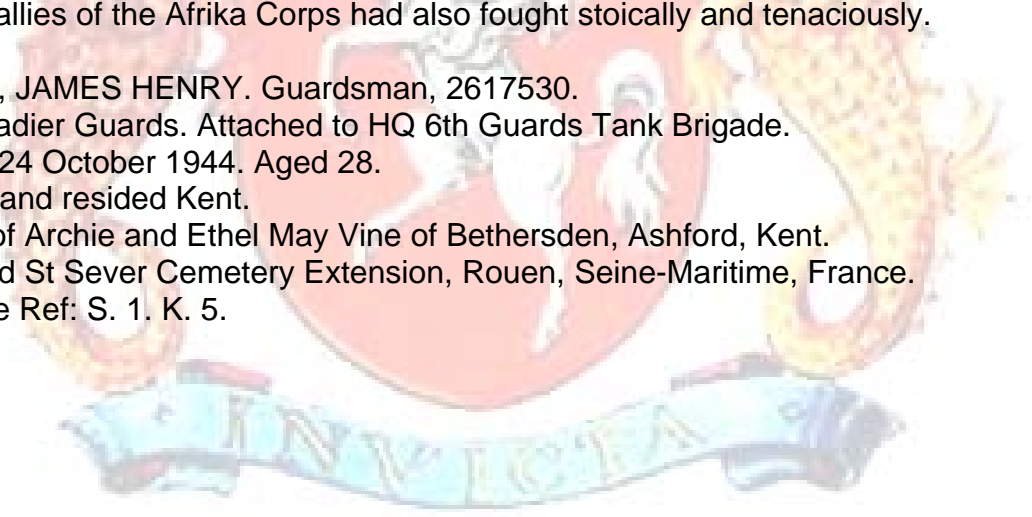
Died 24 October 1944. Aged 28.

Born and resided Kent.

Son of Archie and Ethel May Vine of Bethersden, Ashford, Kent.

Buried St Sever Cemetery Extension, Rouen, Seine-Maritime, France.

Grave Ref: S. 1. K. 5.



LOST MEN

MILLEN, BERESFORD BRUCE. Flight Sergeant (Pilot), 1289479.

Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve.

156 (Pathfinder Force) Squadron, Royal Air Force.

Died 25 February 1944. Aged 23.

Son of Basil Wickham Millen and Hephzibah Millen of Bethersden, Ashford, Kent.

Buried Durnbach War Cemetery, Bad Tolz, Bayern, Germany. Grave 8. H. 5. Beresford was the pilot of Lancaster bomber JA941 GT-A which took off at 1903 hours from R.A.F. Warboys, Huntingdonshire on 25 February 1944, on a bombing mission to Augsburg, Germany. The aircraft was amongst 594 aircraft taking part in the first large scale attack on Augsburg, Bavaria, Germany, the mixed bomber force was comprised of 461 Lancasters, 123 Halifaxes, and 10 Mosquitos. The various diversions employed on the raid, and the splitting of the main bomber force into two separate waves reduced casualties, despite which 21 aircraft were lost on the mission, they being 16 Lancasters and 5 Halifaxes, at least four of the lost aircraft were due to collisions. The bombing at Augsburg was outstandingly successful in clear weather conditions and against this fresh target with only weak flak defences. The Pathfinder ground-marking was accurate, and the raid became controversial because of the effects of its outstanding accuracy. The beautiful old centre of Augsburg was completely destroyed by high explosive and fire, with much less than the usual spread of bombing to the more modern outer areas, where some industry was located. There were 246 large or medium fires and 820 small ones; the temperature was so cold at minus 18 degrees Celsius that the River Lech was frozen over, and many of the water hoses also froze. German propaganda capitalised on the raid and publicized it as an extreme example of Bomber Command 'terror bombing.' When flying at 19,000 feet Beresford's aircraft was located by a German night-fighter which attacked and destroyed the bomber, which is believed to have crashed in the vicinity of the garrison town of Lahr in the Black Forest, near the French border. Five of the bombers seven crew were killed and are at rest in the same cemetery, and the two survivors of the crash were captured, they being Pilot Officer W.H. Liddiard who was injured and was confined in hospital due to same, and Flight Sergeant J.A. Yeomans who was interned in Camp L6/357, with the prisoner of war Number 2124.

PEPPER, PERCIVAL JOHN. Trooper, 7889203.

7th Royal Tank Regiment, Royal Armoured Corps.

Died 17 May 1943. Aged 24.

Born and resided Kent.

Son of Ethel May Pepper.

Husband of Hilda Agnes Pepper of Bethersden, Ashford, Kent.

Buried Ashford (Bybrook) Cemetery. Grave Ref: Section 68. Grave 91.

Commemorated on the Ashford, Kent civic war memorial.

Pre war member of the Royal Armoured Corps.

BURIED BETHERSDEN
ST MARGARET CHURCHYARD

WEBSTER, WILLIAM BASIL LANDON. Captain, 129913.

Royal Army Service Corps.

Died 22 December 1941. Aged 27.

Born East London. Resided Essex.

Son of William Percy and Florence Mabel Webster of Bell Common, Epping,
Essex.

Grave Ref: grave C/16.

