

Personal Stories

from World War II



Cyril Collins

239 Battery Light Ack- Ack Regiment



The Lion's Head Public House was located on the Common, Winterslow, opposite Weston Lane and flanked by the Shripping (Cow Lane) serving the community until demolished; to be replaced by four homes in 2017. In the first decade of the 1900s the Collins family moved from London to Winterslow with the head of the family Thomas Collins taking over as licensee of the Lion's Head and with the family "living on the job". The family consisted of Thomas' wife Sara, daughters Elsie & Gladys and two sons David Thomas (known as Thomas) & William. Sara died in 1910 when the son Thomas was 18.

In 1914 The Great War young Thomas enlisted in 1st Battalion of the Wiltshire Regiment, going on to serve in the 4th and 5th Battalions, the latter operating in the Middle East in Gallipoli and Egypt before moving to Mesopotamia (modern day Iraq). He was killed in action near Basra, in what is known today as Iraq, on January 25th 1915.

Thomas Collins senior died in 1933 at the age of 82 to be replaced by Leonard Thorn (father of Norman Thorne - Parish Historian) as the licensee, who married one of Thomas senior's daughters Elsie. Elsie's surviving brother Bill, who worked as a painter was married, living initially in Witt Road (formally Lower Road) and then moving into a new council house in Red Lane in 1939 with their son Cyril aged 18.

With the outbreak of the Second world War in September 1939 Cyril enlisted with the Royal Artillery and went on to become a member of the 14th Army, often referred to as the "Forgotten Army", which fought the Japanese in Burma. So called because the fighting continued in Burma after Germany was defeated in 1945 and the people back home in England were celebrating the end of the European campaign, forgetting the conflict in the East continued. The campaign in Burma was designed to prevent the Japanese gaining access to India.

The conditions in the Jungles of Burma, the longest running campaign of World War Two, were demanding due to the ferocity of the enemy, the climate and risk of disease. The following is a quote from a Winterslow Parishioner, who like Cyril served in Burma.

"The weather is getting hot, the land getting parched, streams running dry. Ticks were a problem: they will bury their heads in your skin, choosing a delicate part such as your belly button or between your fingers. Our clothes were soaked in sweat every day and started to rot"

The campaign in Burma (Now Myanmar) can be broken down into three phases:

First the Japanese invaded from the south in January 1942, as in many other countries forcing the British forces back; on this occasion to the Indian border.

Then came the successful response of phase two in 1944 when the Japanese were defeated at Kohima and Imphal, with fighting between 17th March and 18th July.

This was followed by severe fighting across Burma as the British forces pushed the enemy back south and out of the country between August and November, with the Royal Artillery carrying out a vital role, which included Cyril seeing action with the 239th Battery, Light Ack-Ack Regiment.

Many casualties survived operational action only to be taken ill with malaria, dysentery or cholera. In Cyril's case it was clinical typhus that caused his death in December 1944, resulting in him being buried in the War Cemetery at Imphal in India.



Imphal Cemetery

So Cyril became the second Collins from Winterslow, following the death of his uncle Thomas in the First World War, to make the ultimate sacrifice.

Mick Brown

*Acknowledgements:
Norman Thorne
Wikipedia*

