



Gunner Harry Dobson - 956452

148th Field Regiment (Bedfordshire Yeomanry), Royal Artillery

Born 1919

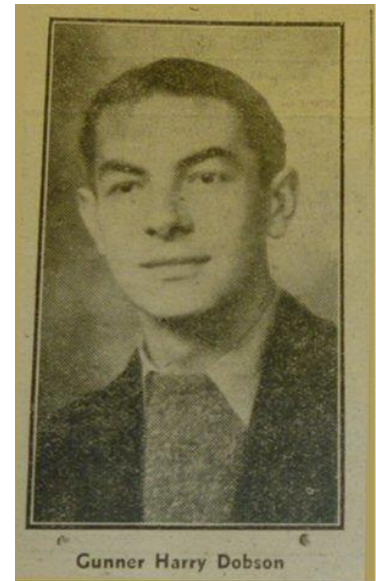
Died 11th December 1943, Age 24

Congregational Memorial

Burbage War Memorial

Kanchanaburi War Cemetery, Thailand

Plot 2, Row C, Grave 63



Harry Dobson was the son of John and Eleanor Dobson of 18 Flamville Road, Burbage. Harry was employed by Bennett Brothers Hosiery Manufacturers and Dyers of Southfield Road, Hinckley.

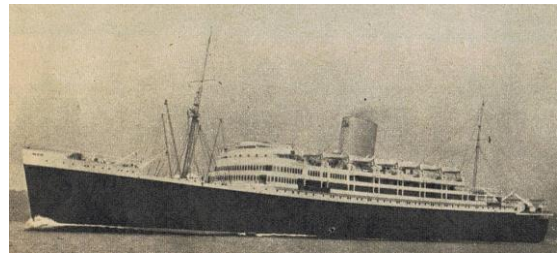
Harry Dobson, along with another Burbage casualty Jeffrey Tite, joined the 148th (The Bedfordshire Yeomanry) Field Regiment, Royal Artillery towards the end of 1939, after war broke out following the German invasion of Poland on 1st September 1939 and the declaration of war by Neville Chamberlain two days later.

In September 1939, the 148th Field Regiment were based in Luton, Bedfordshire and based on an account by Kenneth S Burns¹ who was posted to the 148th Field Regiment in 1940, their service career would have taken the following path up to their arrival in Singapore.

In 1940 they trained in Norfolk and they also received field gun training at Larkhill on Salisbury Plain. Later they continued their training in Hawick in the Scottish Borders, then three months in Rochdale, followed by a training camp at Trawsfynydd in what is now Snowdonia National Park and finally, before embarking overseas, to Monmouth.

¹ www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/stories/52/a3847052.shtml

On October 30th 1941 they embarked on S.S. Andes, a commandeered passenger liner and by account the whole of the 148th Field Regiment were on this ship including Harry Dobson and Jeffrey Tite. The Andes set sail on 1st November with an escort of three destroyers.



SS Andes

They were escorted by both British and American destroyers, although America was not yet at war, during the crossing of the Atlantic to Halifax, Nova Scotia. Then onward travelled on the USS Wakefield, with a stop at Trinidad, to Cape Town, arriving on 8th December 1941 the day after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour.



USS Wakefield (formerly SS Manhattan)

After a four day stay in Cape Town, they were rerouted to the Far East setting sail and arriving in Bombay 14 days later. Following arrival in Bombay, (now Mumbai), they travelled to Poonah, (now Pune, a former garrison town of the British Army), staying for two weeks, upon which they were redirected back to the USS Wakefield for onward travel to reinforce Singapore.

The USS Wakefield set sail for Singapore on 19th January 1942 arriving on 29th to find the island under bombardment by the Japanese.

The Japanese had taken most of Malaya by this time and where only 30 miles away, and following the water supply being cut to the garrison and Singapore residents, Lieutenant General Arthur Percival, the Singapore commander, surrenders to the Japanese on 14th February 1942.

Harry Dobson and Jeffrey Tite had become Prisoners of War and were probably detained in Selarang Barracks in Singapore.

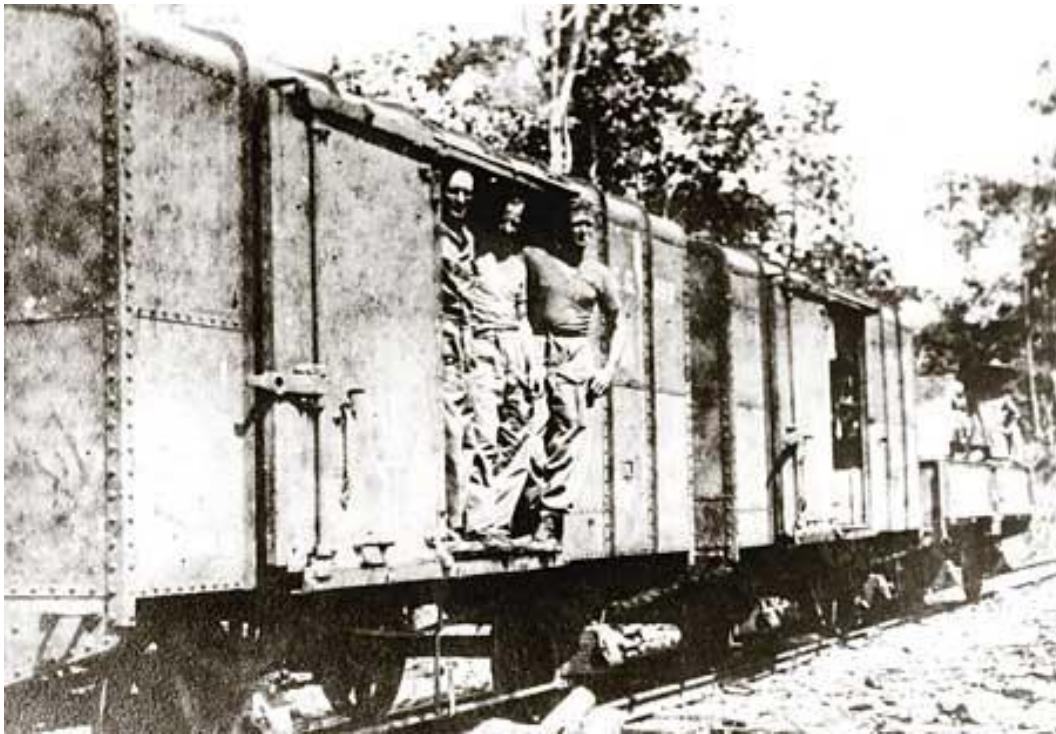


The British surrender to the Japanese on 15th February 1942

Harry Dobson and Jeffrey Tite were then transported to Thailand. Eventually Harry and Jeffrey arrived at a station called Bam Pong and the realization that they are to build a railway to provide a means for the Japanese to expand through Thailand across Burma and into India.



Bam Pong Station



Account by Sidney John Stebbeds of 5 Battalion, The Suffolk Regiment

We are taken to Singapore railway station where we are crowded into steel cattle wagons. On average about 35 men to each of these wagons; about 30 of these made up a train. So, around 1000 men, plus guards with machine guns at the ready were on the move to Thailand. What we are taken there for was anyone's guess. It took about four days to get to our destination. A journey I will never forget. Most of us now were suffering from dysentery, and with no toiletry facilities being available, most of us were experiencing a very hectic time. A lot of stoppages occurred as regular trains took priority over our train. So, when we stopped in a siding, nine times out of ten it would be in full sun, and being steel trucks we are accommodated in, you can imagine what the temperature is like.

A railway from Thailand to Burma had previously been surveyed pre-war and it had proved too costly in both time and labour, it was estimated that 60,000 labourers would be needed for 5 years. The Japanese did not have 5 years to dominate the region but they did have 250,000 prisoners of war for free labour.

At this time the line ended a Ban Pong and from here you would march to the section of the railway you had been allocated to often marching at night because it was cooler.

Kanchanaburi 25 miles

Nam Tok 67 miles

Finally, after the march we were housed in bamboo Huts.



Harry would have been employed on the Railway until the time of his death on 11th December 1943 from Chronic Colitis.

Reported in the Hinckley Times 29th June 1945:

“Mrs E Dobson of 18 Flamville Road has received news that her only son, Gunner Harry Dobson, has died while a prisoner of war in Japanese hands. This information has just reached her. His death, from chronic colitis took place on December 11th, 1943.

Gunner Dobson, who was 24, was taken prisoner when Singapore fell. He joined the Forces with the militia in December 1939. Before the war he was employed at Bennett Bros, Southfield Road. His father has died since he was sent abroad.”





Kanchanaburi War Cemetery

The graves of those who died during the construction and maintenance of the Burma-Siam railway (except for the Americans, whose remains were repatriated) were transferred from camp burial grounds and isolated sites along the railway into three cemeteries at Chungkai and Kanchanaburi in Thailand and Thanbyuzayat in Myanmar.

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.



Kanchanaburi War Cemetery