

WW2 REMEMBERED

CORPORAL ERIC DOUGLAS FREDERICK SMITH

Today we begin our commemoration of men who died in service during or shortly after the end of WW2. Today seventy four years ago Eric Smith died, the last of eight men of the Chesterfords who died in this conflict. In May 1945 there were widespread celebrations in Britain at the defeat of Germany, but this global conflict continued in the Far East until the dropping of two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki persuaded Emperor Hirohito to override his Military Government, who were set on fighting to the last man, woman and child, and announce their surrender.

Eric was born 10 April 1918 in Blandford, Dorset, one of five sons of Arthur George Smith and Blanche Edith, nee Edwards. His parents married in Lambeth, London in 1908. His father was a police constable with Metropolitan Police and the family appears to have moved several times with the job. His mother is recorded on the 1939 Register at 1 Council Houses, Great Chesterford (on the Walden Road) and his father living at the address of another son Harry in Chigwell, though both were living in Great Chesterford at the end of WW2. Eric lived in Great Chesterford at various times and it was recorded as his home address in Army and probate records at his time of death.

Before the war Eric worked as a motor mechanic, probably with his brother Harry, a garage proprietor, in Chigwell, Essex. When war was declared in September 1939 he joined the Royal Army Ordnance Corps as Private 7604194. After his basic training Eric was assigned to the 11th Army Field Workshop in France, where according to a Casualty Report dated 23 March 1940 he became seriously ill and would have been repatriated to Britain, several weeks before the German Blitzkrieg and the evacuation from Dunkirk.



After recovery Eric was reassigned to the 18th Division Ordnance Workshops which had been hastily re-routed to Singapore after Japan's entry to WW2 arriving there in January 1942. By this time he had been promoted to Corporal and was part of the 53rd Brigade fighting on the Malaysian Peninsula, attached to the 118th Field Regiment, Royal Artillery.

Eric was captured by the Japanese at the surrender of Singapore on 15 February and initially detained at the notorious Changi jail.

