

WW2 REMEMBERED

PRIVATE PERCY CHARLES GARWOOD

Percy Charles Garwood (the Great Chesterford war memorial incorrectly shows Percy George Garwood) was born in the second quarter of 1922 in Great Chesterford. His father, also called Percy, had served in WWI with the Suffolk Regiment, and was wounded. He worked as a farm labourer and married Beatrice Alice Lake on the 1st May 1919 in Great Chesterford, after which they lived in Manor Lane. They first had a daughter Mary born in 1920 followed by Percy Charles. By 1926 the family had moved to Carmen Street and that remained the family home, though Percy's mother died in 1932.

In August 1938 Percy joined The Queen's Royal Regiment (West Surrey) as Private 6088428. As the minimum enlistment age was 18 and Percy was barely 16, it must be assumed he lied about overseas around his age. As both regular battalions were that time, it is likely he joined one of the Territorial Battalions. In 1939 when war with Germany seemed inevitable, the Territorial battalions were rapidly expanded to form 131 (Queen's) Brigade in which Percy probably served and the 169 (Queen's) Brigade.



Both brigades were sent to France in 1940 and were overwhelmed by the German Blitzkrieg in May and evacuated at Dunkirk. We do not have records of where Percy served after Dunkirk, but analysis by Surrey Infantry Museum suggests he would have served in either the 1/6th or 1/7th Battalions which fought in North Africa, Italy, D Day and North Western Europe.



On December 8th 1944, the Queen's Regiment records show Percy's transfer to the 1/5th Welch Regiment (the archaic spelling of Welch was a tradition held firmly by several regiments), part of the 53rd Welsh Division. This timing coincides with 1/6th and 1/7th Queen's Battalions being broken up to fill the extensive casualties amongst those British units which had fought from Normandy to the German border. 53rd Welsh Division had incurred significant casualties in the fighting in Normandy and Holland.

In February 1945 the Allies had entered Germany, though still west of the River Rhine and in preparation for the forthcoming Rhine crossing were clearing-up the German forces blocking their way. As part of Operation Veritable the 53rd Welsh Division, including 1/5th Welch was tasked to clear the Reichswald Forest south of Kleve, a task made difficult by the limited number of paved roads needed for armoured operations. Following early Allied successes on 11th February the Germans committed the last of their reserves including 47th Panzer Korps with heavy tanks and the fighting intensified. Percy was killed on 12th February 1945 aged 22, but over the next week Kleve was taken and German forces west of the Rhine destroyed.



Percy was initially buried near to where he died at Asperden, but in 1946 he was reburied in the Rheinberg Cemetery near Duisberg, when the Commonwealth War Graves Commission consolidated all smaller graveyards in the area.



His father Percy died aged 66 and was buried in the village churchyard on the 21st July 1959, having died in the St. James Hospital, Saffron Walden (now the Community Hospital).

If you know in which specific houses the Garwoods lived or any other information about Percy, please contact us on chesterford.history@outlook.com or call 01799 530364