

Thomas Couch Richards



Trooper 4132824, 18th (5th Bn. The Loyal Regt.) Regt., Reconnaissance Corps

Died August 31st 1943, aged 33

Commemorated Thanbyuzayat War Cemetery, Myanmar (Burma)

Also memorial at St Endellion Churchyard (Grave E 105)

Son of George Jestenyen and Clara Richards, of Delabole, Cornwall
(formerly Port Isaac)

Thomas Couch Richards was born in Port Isaac during the second quarter of 1911, just after the 1911 census. In that census, his father George (35) and mother Clara (34 – *nee Couch*) Richards were living in Port Isaac with their two sons, George Jestenyen (8) and John (3) and their daughter Annie Kate (5). George gives his occupation as Labourer, to which the enumerator has added 'General Farm or Farm Servant'.

Thomas was in 5th Battalion The Loyal Regiment. This was a Territorial Army Battalion, which was originally trained as a motorcycle battalion in the 55th (West Lancashire) Division, later transferred and converted to a Reconnaissance Corps and redesignated 18th Battalion, Reconnaissance Corps within 18th (East Anglian) Division. It was transferred with the rest of 18th Division as reinforcements for the Battle of Singapore. When Singapore surrendered on February 15th 1942, 18th Division, along with other allied troops, became prisoners of the Imperial Japanese Army.

The Japanese had signed but never ratified the 1929 Geneva Convention on Prisoners of War, so did not treat POWs in accordance with international agreements. The Japanese military viewed surrender as dishonourable, and POWs were subject to the most brutal treatment, including forced labour on starvation rations with poor medical treatment. The death rate of Western POWs was 27.1%, some seven times greater than that under the Germans and Italians. The death rate for Chinese prisoners was near 100%, as only 56 Chinese POWs were released at the end of the war. The most notorious use of POWs as forced labour was in the building of the infamous Burma (*Death*) Railway, and Thomas Couch Richards was one.

There were 61,811 allied POWs who worked on the Burma Railway, almost half of which were British. In total, 12,621 men died, of whom 6,904 were British.

Trooper Thomas Couch Richards is buried at Thanbyuzayat War Cemetery in Burma. Thanbyuzayat had become a POW administration headquarters and base camp, built by the prisoners themselves, in September 1942. In January 1943 a base hospital was organised by the prisoners to give what little care they were able to provide for the very sick (*the less sick were required to work*). In June 1943 it was evacuated and the prisoners, including the sick, were marched to camps further up the line, although it continued to be a reception centre for groups of prisoners arriving to reinforce the parties working on the line.

Thanbyuzayat War Cemetery was created by the Army Graves Service. It contains the graves of 3,149 Commonwealth and 621 Dutch POWs, transferred from all the graves along the northern section of the railway between Moulmein and Nieke (*Nikki*).

Thomas Couch Richards' mother Clara died in 1939. His father George had moved to Delabole by the end of the war and he died in 1955. George and Clara are buried in St Endellion Churchyard, where the simple memorial also commemorates their son Tom.





The Death Railway



The simple gravestone of Clara and George Richards and the memorial to their son Tom

In Memory of
Trooper
Thomas Couch Richards
4132824, 18th (5th Bn. The Loyal Regt.) Regt., Reconnaissance Corps who died on 31 August 1943 Age 33
Son of Jesteyn and Clara Richards, of Delabole, Cornwall.

Remembered with Honour
Thanbyuzayat War Cemetery



Commemorated in perpetuity by
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Sources:

The Loyal Regiment: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loyal_Regiment_%28North_Lancashire%29#Second_World_War.2C_1939.E2.80.931945
Treatment of POWs by Japan: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prisoner_of_war#Empire_of_Japan
Burma Railway: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burma_Railway
Thanbyuzayat War Cemetery: <http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/2007400/THANBYUZAYAT%20WAR%20CEMETERY>