

## Pte. P.W.Randall – The Queen’s Royal Regiment (West Surrey)

Peter Randall was born in 1919, the son of Francis and Mabel Randall (nee Wallis) who came to Westcott from Claygate in 1931. The School Registration Book shows that Peter attended Westcott School from 1931 to 1934 and lived at ‘The Cottage, Woodlands’. He married Enid Norton, in the Registration District of Sturminster, Dorset in early 1940.

Peter served in the 2<sup>nd</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Queen’s, which had been created when the Territorial Army was expanded in 1939. The battalion was part of the 12<sup>th</sup> (Eastern) Infantry Division which landed in France on 12<sup>th</sup> April 1940 to join the British Expeditionary Force (the BEF). They were followed by 23<sup>rd</sup> (Northumbrian) Infantry Division which landed on 22<sup>nd</sup> April, and 46<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division which arrived two days afterwards, on 24<sup>th</sup> April. None of these Divisions were properly trained or equipped; they were designated as Line of Communication troops engaged in training or deployed on labour duties maintaining the routes between the supply bases and the front-line Divisions.

The first few months of the war in France and Belgium were relatively quiet, but this so-called ‘phoney war’ ended on 10<sup>th</sup> May 1940 when the German armies began their invasion of France. To the north, Army Group B advanced through the Netherlands and northern Belgium while Army Group A, in the south, advanced through the Ardennes to capture Sedan and then turned north towards the Channel coast. The route of Army Group A’s advance took them behind the allied front line with the aim of cutting off the BEF and their neighbouring allies from the remaining French armies to the south, and trapping them to force a capitulation.

These advances took the Allies by surprise and the Germans made rapid progress using their air force to attack allied troops and destroy their positions ahead of the *Panzer* Divisions moving forward on the ground. The inexperienced Line of Communication troops found themselves in the path of the advancing *Panzer* Divisions and were overwhelmed. On 20 May 1940 the 12<sup>th</sup> (Eastern) Infantry Division was overrun by German troops and only a few small groups were able to escape and eventually return to UK. The Division’s casualties were so high that in July 1940 it was disbanded; those elements that remained were absorbed into the 1<sup>st</sup> London Division.

**We do not know the circumstances of Peter Randall's death. He is buried in Saleux Communal Cemetery which is 6 miles south-west of Amiens. The cemetery holds the graves of ten Commonwealth soldiers, three of whom are unidentified. The remaining seven are all men of the 2<sup>nd</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> Queen's; six of them, including Peter Randall, died on 20<sup>th</sup> May when the Germans attacked, and the seventh died on 21<sup>st</sup> May 1940. That they all died on the same day suggests they may have lost their lives in the same incident. Peter Randall was 21 and died just a few weeks after his wedding.**

**The German advance continued and the BEF were soon surrounded on three sides and cut off from their supply depots. By 26<sup>th</sup> May the ports of Boulogne and Calais had fallen and only Dunkirk remained in allied hands. A defensive perimeter was established round the port and defended by the French First Army and elements of the BEF while the Royal Navy organised 'Operation Dynamo' to rescue the beleaguered force. Eventually 198,000 British and 140,000 French and Belgian troops were brought back to England to continue the war.**