

Charlie Year 6 – Why VE day is important for me and my family.

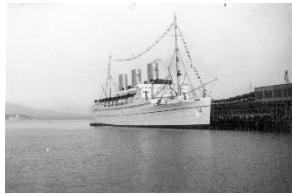


Photo 1 is my Nana meeting Sir Winston Churchill whilst making ammunition in a Bradford factory. Photo 2 is 'The Empress of Scotland'. Photo 3 is the 122nd Royal Naval Armv Field regiment and Photo 4. a Howitzer 155mm.

My Great Grandad (Charles Henry) was born on 23rd April 1920 and he sadly passed away on September 1st 1998. My Great Grandad served during the war and I am very proud of him.

My Great Grandad first joined the territorial army in 1939. He was a gunner and trained to use a Howitzer 155mm. He was moved to North Cave in 1940, one night he left his gun in the pub where he had been drinking but luckily got back for it in time otherwise he would have been charged with a martial offence. From there he was moved to South Cave on the East Coast. He was then moved to Glasgow where he boarded an ocean liner turned troop ship, it was originally called 'The Empress of Japan' but it was later renamed by Churchill in 1942, the 'Empress of Scotland'.

It was New Year of 1941 when Charlie set sail. Ship sailed to Sierra Leone, North Africa. Here they were shelled by Nazi forces when in the harbour. The ship made several stops but finally reached it's final destination of Singapore in March 1941. After training the troops were sent to Malaya for further shooting practice.

War began when the Japanese bombed the American Naval base at Pearl Harbour, Hawaii. 7th December 1941. Charlie was back in Singapore when the Japanese bombed on the 8th of December. Singapore was over taken by 30,000 Japanese troops and soon Charlie was captured and put in Changi jail. He was held there for 6 months before being moved and taken to the Fukkai Maru (ship). He went on a journey to North Korea. The conditions on the ship were appalling. Great Grandad never spoke of his experiences on the ship. He was then held in Korea in terrible conditions where he was forced to do hard labour with little food and poor accommodation. He slept on a wooden platform with a straw filled mattress.

By 1944 the war was going badly for Japan. As the commander of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour had said, 'they had only awakened a sleeping giant'. The Japanese mainland were running short of general labour to support war production. My Great Grandad arrived at the camp on October 11th 1944, he would not leave until 19th September, 1945. The camp was described as brutal and the troops were only fed very basic rations including maggots as a source of protein. Many were beaten. Work was an 8 hour shift but often extended to 12 hours. The prisoners were made to work in the mines.

My Great Grandad was only a small man with a boyish face and in the camp, he was known as Buntai Baby – meaning squad baby.

One morning the huts and the ground shook and they rushed outside fearing an earthquake. They saw a huge mushroom shaped cloud rising high into the sky (at that moment they did not know it was an atomic bomb). Some time later, they were told no more work, and the guards were all gone. They realised the war was over. They did receive orders to stay in the camp and eventually American troops arrived.

He was taken by ship to Manila in the Phillipines where him and many others were nursed back to health as far as was possible. After a brief stop, in Okinawa, Japan, they eventually arrived in San Francisco USA. He was made to feel incredibly welcome and was well looked after in San Francisco. After a few weeks they were taken by train to Vancouver in Canada and then to Nova Scotia and aboard the Queen Elizabeth liner to sail home to Southampton UK.

When my Great Grandad arrived back in Bradford, he was met by his family and they had a welcome home party. He arrived back in Bradford on November 2nd 1945.

My Dad and my Grandad are very proud of my Great Grandad, as am I and the resilience he showed under the most shocking conditions. My Grandad has written a book of his life and he quotes 'we are here because of what he and millions of others endured.'