

VJ DAY 75

Sergeant Philip Edward Marston Royal Army Medical Corps

Where does one begin when talking about your family and how it relates to VJ Day? My father, Philip Edward Marston, was born on 7 February 1906 in Rhayader in the Counties of Radnor and Brecknock. He was the third of seven children. His father, (James Marston, born 11 Feb 1879), was at the time serving in the Army as shown in the Certificate of Service below.



When James left the army in 1908 he became classified as a General Labourer and at some time around 1912 he moved to the Rhondda Valley. He became a carpenter in the coal industry and, with seven children, life was hard. The First World War did no-one any favours but my grandfather (James) was shielded because he worked in the coal industry.

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My father's age at the start of the First World War was eight and by the end he had reached the age of twelve. At the age of fourteen, in order to keep the family going, we believe that he felt compelled to start work in the coal industry.

My grandfather (James) died in 1933 which meant that all of the children were required to work. My father, for whatever reason, was not married until 1937 (31 years of age), which in those days was quite old.

The outbreak of the Second World War saw mass conscription into the Army. My father escaped this at first because, like his father, he was in the coal industry. However, he was classed as a 'surface worker' as opposed to a coal miner and eventually was called up to serve in the Army. There are virtually no photographs of this period except this one showing him with his younger sister Olwen.



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Philip's Record of Service is below:

7518125 War Substantive Sergeant

Philip Edward Marston, Royal Army Medical Corps

Enlisted in Aldershot into the Royal Army Medical Corps embodied

Territorial Army as a Private and posted to 1\0.1 Company 14.09.39

Mustered in trade of Nursing Orderly - Group C Class III 14.09.39

Appointed rank of Lance Corporal 18.06.40

Appointed rank of acting Corporal 25.09.40

Posted to No 1 Depot and appointed rank of acting Sergeant 19.09.41

Posted to 32nd Company (Date not recorded)

Reported missing and confirmed as a Prisoner of War – Malaya 15.02.42

Granted rank of War Substantive Sergeant whilst a Prisoner of War 18.03.42

Released by Allied Forces 09.09.45

Arrived back in the U.K. 19.10.45

Release to Reserve 01.04.46

Discharged 10.02.54

Service with the colours 14.09.39 – 31.03.46

Overseas Service, Malaya 29.09.41 – 14.02.42

Prisoner of War (in Japanese Hands) 15.02.42 -18.10.45

Military Conduct: Exemplary

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The testimonial on Philip's service reads:

'Sergeant Marston is leaving the Army after over 6 years service. He joined as a volunteer in September 1939, qualified as a nursing orderly and rendered such valuable service that he was promoted to the rank of Sergeant. He has had the misfortune to spend over 3 years as a Prisoner of War in Japanese Hands. His conduct in the Army has been excellent.'

From this record you can see that immediately on joining up on 14 September 1939 he was 'Mustered to the Trade of Nursing Orderly.' After one year he had arrived in Malaya as an Acting Sergeant in the Medical Corps and on 15 February 1942 was a Prisoner of War in Japanese hands. The fact that he was a medic meant that he was tasked with helping in the hospital which allowed him to obtain some extra rations which eventually helped him to survive.

He was a prisoner of the Japanese for three years and eight months. In the meantime, my mother was told that he was missing, presumed dead.

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I have an older sister, who was born in October 1937, who my father would have known for the first few years of her life. However, I was born one month and three days after he was captured and it was unlikely that he knew much about me. This set the scene for my early life. My mother had taken over the duties of running the household and paying all the bills. We do not know, but assume, that she was receiving Army Pay but still life was difficult.

VJ Day is designated as 15 August 1945 and my father was liberated on 9 September 1945. He did not arrive back in the UK until 19 October 1945 and was then 'quarantined for debrief' until 1 April 1946, just after my 4th birthday. He was immediately re-employed in the coal mines.

From then on I have to say that my mother and father, for whatever the reason, never 'got on' and I remember most of my childhood trying to hide under the bedclothes to avoid the noise, arguments and smashing of plates. However, they never parted, never physically abused my sister and I and ensured we were brought up in the best possible manner on very poor wages.

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My father rarely spoke of his experiences but lived until 1976. Latterly, he told me two stories that stick in my mind:

Firstly, in a lot of cases the average Japanese soldiers were treated as badly as the prisoners by their own Officers and NCO's.

Secondly, on VJ Day the soldiers and prisoners, working together, caught a snake and ate it raw.

Philip was awarded the following medals:



1939-45 Star



Pacific Star



War Medal 1939-45

These commemorative medals were purchased separately:



Restoration
of Peace 1945



Allied Ex Prisoners
of War