FREEMAN Philip Roy Clifford

Sergeant, 565537
Royal Air Force
Place of Birth: Fareham, Hampshire
Died of Illness in Captivity: Tuesday 3rd April 1945
Cemetery: Labuan War Cemetery
Aged: 29 years



Phil Freeman was born in Fareham, Hampshire on 7 May 1915, the eldest son of Cliff Freeman and his wife Florence "Floss" (nee Darking). The Freemans and the Darkings were both long established Haverhill families but, with her husband away at the front, Floss had gone there to stay with relatives.

In 1911 Phil's father, Cliff was aged 16, was living with his parents, grandfather and siblings at 39 Mount Road and working as a finisher of hair cloth. At this time, Floss was a milliner's apprentice aged 14, living with her parents, a brother and two sisters at 27 Clement's Lane.

Cliff was badly wounded at Passchendaele in 1917 and spent the next three years convalescing. When he finally returned home, the family moved briefly to Little Yeldham and soon afterwards to Sible Hedingham. Phil attended the village school in neighbouring Castle Hedingham.

At the age of 12 Phil won a scholarship to the Grammar School in Earls Colne, becoming the first "Grammar School" boy in the family. But when his Father lost his job in 1931, Phil left school and sat the RAF Apprentices Exam. He passed with flying colours and began his training at RAF Halton in Sept 1931.

In 1933 the family moved back to Haverhill, where for many years Phil's Aunt ran a Tobacconists and Confectioners Shop in the High Street (M & L. Freeman - Nos. 75-77).

After three years at Halton Phil was posted to RAF Felixstowe, where alongside his work, he indulged in his twin passions of photography and cricket.

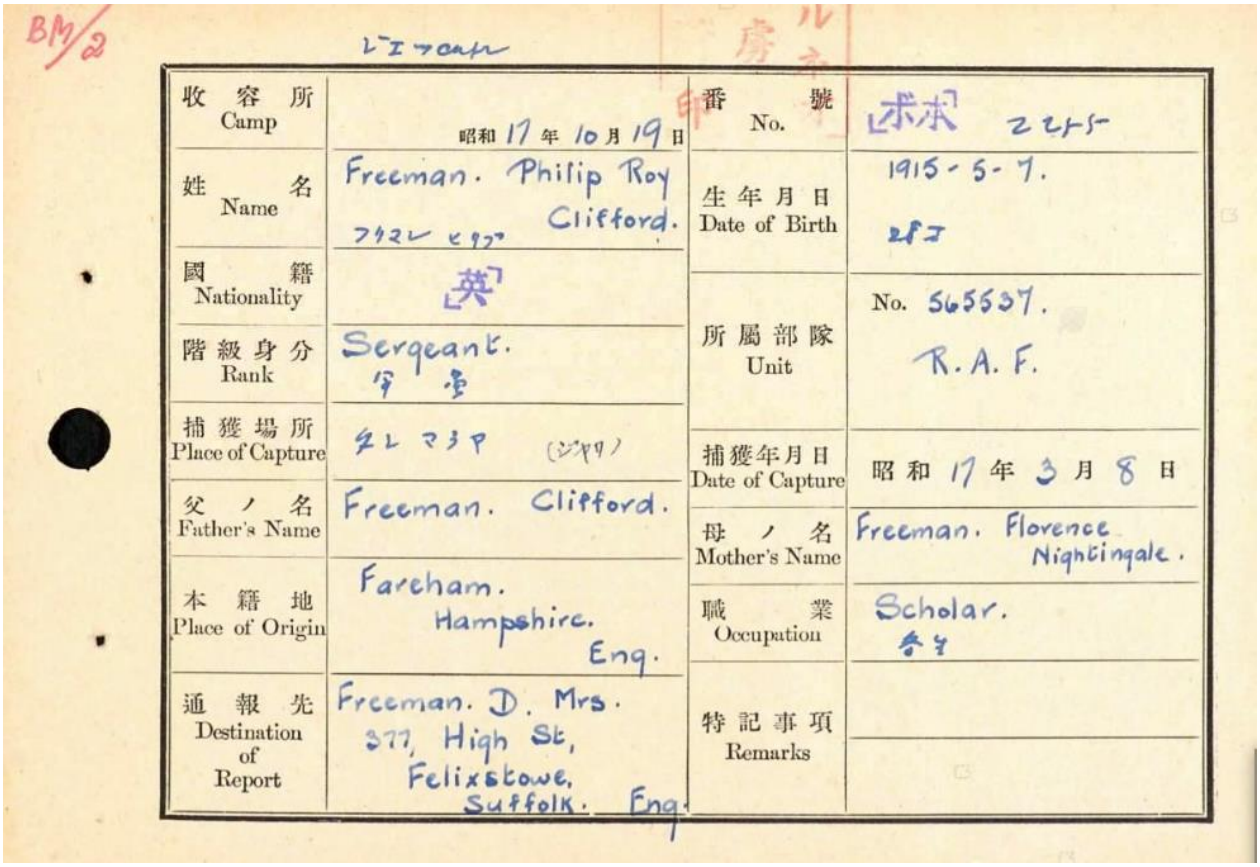
A fine off spin bowler (he once took 4 wickets in 4 balls), he was nicknamed "Tich" – after his namesake A.P " Tich" Freeman - who was a legendary leg spin bowler at that time for Kent and England. Ironically Phil was rather tall!

In 1938 Phil married Doreen Dawson in Felixstowe. And soon afterwards, in May 1939, he was posted with 62 Squadron to the Far East.

He saw service first in Singapore, then Alor Star in Northern Malaya, before being sent on detachment to Kuantan, where he worked alongside 205 Squadron.

Following the fall of Singapore and the chaos that followed, Phil was taken prisoner by the Japanese in Java in March 1942. The Echo reported his capture noting that the family were living at 8 The Pightle.

After a spell at Changi Jail in Singapore, Phil was moved to Northern Borneo and from April 1943 was a prisoner at the infamous Sandakan POW Camp.



收容所 Camp	昭和 17 年 10 月 19 日	番號 No.	缺本 2275
姓名 Name	Freeman. Philip Roy Clifford. フリーマン フィリップ ロイ クリフォード	生年月日 Date of Birth	1915-5-7. 28才
國籍 Nationality	英	所屬部隊 Unit	No. 565537. R.A.F.
階級身分 Rank	Sergeant. 伍長		
捕獲場所 Place of Capture	タレマヨア (ジャワ)	捕獲年月日 Date of Capture	昭和 17 年 3 月 8 日
父ノ名 Father's Name	Freeman. Clifford.	母ノ名 Mother's Name	Freeman. Florence Nightingale.
本籍地 Place of Origin	Farcham. Hampshire. Eng.	職業 Occupation	Scholar. 学生
通報先 Destination of Report	Freeman. D. Mrs. 77, High St, Felixstowe, Suffolk. Eng.	特記事項 Remarks	

Of the 6500 Allied prisoners (Australian and British) sent to Sandakan in 1943 the only survivors were six Australians who managed to escape. Of those who were left incarcerated every single one perished – either through disease, malnutrition, brutality, execution or on one of the notorious "Death Marches".



Phil died in camp on 3rd April 1945 aged 29 years – officially from malaria.

He was initially buried in the No. 2 Cemetery at Sandakan – but his remains were later interred in the War Cemetery on Labuan Island, just off the Coast of Northern Borneo on 16th June 1949.



His family had the following inscription added to his headstone.

FOLD HIM IN THINE ARMS, O LORD, NOW THAT HE IS THINE. GOOD-NIGHT PHIL, GOD BLESS



Phil was awarded these medals posthumously.

He is commemorated on the Haverhill WW2 Memorial Plaque and also on his parents' gravestone.





His widow Doreen never re-married, and lived in Felixstowe until her death in 1987.

Phil's sister, Doris, married Reginald Thomas BLACK in the autumn of 1939. Just a couple of months later on 18 December 1939, Reginald, aged 20 and a corporal in 9 Sqn, RAF, was on a reconnaissance flight over Wilhelmshaven. His plane, a Wellington, was last seen with the engine on fire. There were no survivors. His name is also on the Haverhill WW2 Memorial Plaque.

Phil's uncle, Daniel Freeman (brother of his father, Cliff) served in the Royal Garrison Artillery in WW1 and was killed in action on 28 March 1918. He has no known grave and is commemorated on the Pozieres Memorial, Somme. He is also remembered on the Haverhill WW1 Memorial.

Information and photograph of Phil Freeman kindly provided by his nephew, Paul Freeman and the photo of Phil's medals by his younger brother, Colin.

Information from the CWGC website: After the fall of Singapore several thousand British and Australian Prisoners of War were sent to camps in Borneo, mainly in the Sandakan area on the eastern coast of North Borneo, where they were employed on aerodrome construction. The Australians belonged to the 8th Australian Division ("B" force numbering 1,494 and "E" force 500). In October 1943 most of the officers were separated from their men and sent to Kuching. Thereafter conditions at Sandakan greatly worsened; the men were starved, beaten and overworked by their captors. In February 1945 the Japanese, anticipating Allied landings in North Borneo, decided to move the Prisoners of War westwards to Ranau, more than 160 miles inland from Sandakan. Although many had already been transferred to other centres, more than 1,900 British and Australian servicemen remained to take part in the "Death march to Ranau". Those who fell, sick or exhausted, on the journey were killed; the survivors who reached Ranau were made to perform superhuman work on starvation rations. Out of the 2,000 men who left Sandakan only 260 arrived at Ranau, and most of these succumbed later. Only six survived the end of the war. These six escaped from Ranau and were living with the natives when rescued. When the Australian Army Graves Service entered Borneo they followed the route from Sandakan to Ranau, and found many unidentifiable victims of this infamous march. These and other casualties from Battlefield Burial Grounds and from scattered graves throughout Borneo were taken in the first instance to Sandakan, where a large number of prisoners of war were already buried. This flat coastal area, however, was subject to severe flooding and it proved impracticable to construct and maintain a permanent cemetery. The Sandakan graves, numbering 2,700 of which more than half were unnamed, were therefore transferred to Labuan War Cemetery, specially constructed to receive graves from all over Borneo. As well as the graves from Sandakan, about 500 are from Kuching where there was another large prisoner-of-war camp. The total number of burials is 3,922. The preponderance of unidentified graves is due to the destruction of all the records of the camps by Lieutenant-Colonel Suga, the Japanese commandant, before the Australians reached Kuching, his headquarters. When apprehended, this man committed suicide rather than face questioning on his conduct of the Borneo Camps.