

Stanley WILLEY

5953196, Private, The Bedfordshire & Hertfordshire Regiment
died Thursday 21st September 1944, aged 24.

Memorial Book text:

*Home address was 92 East Street, Olney.
Son of Mr Alfred Willey.*

*1940 – Pte. S Willey, HQ Pioneer Platoon,
5th Battalion, Beds. & Herts. Regiment,
Thetford, Norfolk.*

*1941 – Same unit, c/o Army Post Office,
1635.*

1942 – Reported “missing”.

*1943 – Prisoner of war in Japanese
hands.*

1944 – ditto.

1945 – Did not return.

*Please see the letter adjoining explaining
the fate of Stan. This is a copy of the letter
from one of Stan’s comrades to Mr Leslie
Willey (brother).*

*The photograph was kindly provided by
Mr Les Willey of Yardley Hastings.*

*Information kindly provided by the
Commonwealth War Graves Commission,
Maidenhead, Berks. – Stanley died as a
POW on 21 September , 1944, aged 24.
His death is recorded on the Singapore
Memorial (MR Column 64).*



CWWG information:

Stanley WILLEY
5953196, Private, 5th Bn.,
Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire
Regt.
Son of Mr. and Mrs. Alfred
Willey, of Olney.
Died Thursday 21st
September 1944, aged 24.
Named on Column 64 of the
Singapore Memorial.

Transcript of letter:

1 Ridge Road
Kempston, Beds.
18th August, 46

Dear Mr Willey,

Your letter is not the first that has arrived asking for particulars concerning the sinking of the HOFUKA MARU, the prison ship on which your brother and I were travelling.

Ever since I have been home the War Office and the Regt. have been writing asking for all sorts of information and I have had the very unpleasant task of going through the Battn. lists confirming at least 50 deaths. Before I try to answer your questions please accept my sincere condolences in the loss of your Brother Stan who I can personally say was indeed a most pleasant and cheerful companion.

If my letter is the cause of contenting your mind as to the exact circumstances under which he died I shall at least feel that I have done something to show how eternally grateful I am for being spared to join my family once again, sufficient to say that I have now settled down and daily forgetting the awful past 3½ years.

I'll not bother you with all that happened prior to the sinking of the ship, enough is to say that the conditions on board hardly bear mention but if you are round this way at any time and you are really interested it will be my pleasure to tell you.

Two days before the sinking, 21st Sept 1944, I was moved from [where] there were four Bedfords (Cpl. Wilton, Cpl. Gaylor, your brother and myself) down into the bottom hold amidships as I was suffering from beri-beri. All the fellows were in good health (as standards went at the time) and spirits were of the best. Each day the Bedfords managed to come and see me in turn and had on the day of the sinking returned to their space about 15 minutes before the attack [at] 10.30am. Our position at the time was 1½ days sailing at 10 knots per hour from Manila sailing in a NW direction and the course lay through very close waters as the Japs were trying to avoid the Allied Navy. The attack which was carried out entirely by USA planes was over in 1 ½ hours and our ship was singled out being the biggest and it got two aerial torpedoes and 3 bombs all being direct hits. The ship sank well within 5 mins being completely blown in two.

letter continued ...

I feel sure that your brothers death must have been instantaneous for that part of the ship was completely blown out of the water in addition all hatch ladders were destroyed and the men batted down and overcrowded very badly. I myself was in the water about 4 hours and contacted Pte. Foro who managed to stay with me until the end of the war. Every effort was made after the sinking right up to the time of my reaching England to try and trace any possible survivors of the Battalion.

In Manila where we were taken after release I visited every reception centre and went through the complete rolls and was able to gain information about quite a few.

Once again let me say I that I feel sure your Brother could not have suffered any agony or discomfort (apart from those prevailing on the ship) before meeting his death which as I repeat must have been instantaneous. Hoping this letter will ease your anxiety and help you to bear your loss with greater comfort of mind.

Yours truly,

A N BURGESS

Extract from Mr L A Willey's letter, 5 Sunnyview, Yardly Hastings 12/10/92.

"He was taken a prisoner at the fall of Singapore, forced to work on the death railway and was being transported to Japan to work down the copper mines. The ship he was on was sunk by USA planes. He was one who did not survive."

This refers to 5953196. Pte. Stan. WILLEY, (East Street, Olney). Pioneer Platoon, HQ Coy. 5th Bn. Bedfordshire & Hertfordshire Regiment.

Additional Information:

from www.members.iinet.net.au/~gduncan/maritime-1b.html

HOFUKU MARU; September 21, 1944

Japanese transport carrying 1,289 prisoners-of-war enroute from Singapore to Japan was attacked and sunk by U.S. torpedo carrying bombers. Loaded with British and Dutch POWs, it stopped at Manila to unload the sick and dying. It sailed again in convoy and was attacked again when only three days out. It took only a few minutes for the ship to go down drowning around 1,047 men who were trapped in the holds. Less than 250 survived.

and at www.west-point.org/family/japanese-pow/photos.htm

Taifuku Maru #1 Class (the U.S. Navy referred to these as Aden Class ships). This class of about 42 ships includes ten ships that were 'Hellships'. They were Brazil Maru, Celebes Maru, England Maru, France Maru, Hofuku Maru, Nagato Maru, Pacific Maru, Singapore Maru, Thames Maru and Ume Maru. Built in 1917-1920, they were known as Kawasaki stock boats or standard steamers. These ships had a Gross Tonnage of approximately 5,870 tons, were 385 feet long and were 51 feet at the beam. They were capable of maximum speeds of about 14.3 knots.



Brazil Maru, sister ship of the Hofuku Maru