

## 2365466 Signalmán Thomas Walls



Tom's parents were William R. Walls and Jean Walls (née Ross). They married in 1919 in Glasgow, where Tom was born. When the family came to Orkney, they lived at Store Cottage, Rousay. They moved to Kirkwall and Tom was joint Dux of Kirkwall Grammar School in 1938. Tom worked for a couple of months delivering letters for the Post Office in Kirkwall, while he waited for his call up papers to arrive.

Tom joined the Royal Corps of Signals when he was called up. After completing his training he joined the Headquarters signal unit of 18th Division, a Territorial Army division based in East Anglia. It left the UK at the end of October 1941, in convoy on its way to the Middle East. 18th Division secretly transferred in late November in Halifax, Canada onto US naval transports (although America was not yet then at war).

When the Japanese entered the war and invaded Malaya, 18th Division was diverted at the Cape of Good Hope to Bombay. Most of 18th Division had spent a fortnight in India, when General Wavell, the overall British commander in the Far East, decided to send it to reinforce the British Commonwealth force that was being driven down the Malaya peninsula by the Japanese. The leading 53rd Brigade arrived in time to join the fighting at the southern tip of the peninsula, but the rest of 18th Division reached Singapore on 29<sup>th</sup> January 1942, the day before the causeway linking Singapore island to the Malaya mainland was blown up after the last Allied troops crossed.

18th Division was deployed along the NE coast of Singapore Island. Two Japanese divisions crossed the western end of Johore Strait during the night of 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> February and landed on beaches defended by 8th Australian Division. Three battalions of 18th Division were sent to reinforce the Australians on the 10<sup>th</sup>, but the Japanese, strongly supported from the air and with tanks, drove forward and the defences soon collapsed. The British lead, but including Australian and Indian divisions, force that surrendered at Singapore on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1942 was the largest in British military history to do so.



Tom Walls was taken prisoner at the fall of Singapore in February 1942. He had to endure the harsh treatment to which the Japanese subjected those who worked on the Burma-Siam railway. More than 16,000 POWs and 100,000 impressed local labourers died from disease and starvation building 415 kilometres of railway in Thailand and Burma between September 16<sup>th</sup> 1942 and 25<sup>th</sup> December 1943. Tom died of malaria, aged 24, in a POW Camp in Thailand on 6<sup>th</sup> July 1945, less than two months before the surrender of Japan. Thomas Walls is buried in Grave 6.E.40, Kanchanaburi War Cemetery, Thailand.