



PERSONAL INFORMATION SHEET



Charles in Hong Kong in 1938

Name: Charles Sidney VINER
(Christened Ernest Arthur Albert VINER)

DOB: 3rd July 1917

Rank: Private

Service Identity Number: 6202701

**Service/Regiment/Corps: Middlesex
Regiment (Duke of Cambridges Own)**

Unit: 1st Battalion, C Company

Died: 16th June 1968

Personal history before the war:

Charles was born in Camberwell London, July 1917, to a single mother, Winifred and was initially christened Ernest Arthur Albert.

It is understood that he was placed in a foster home shortly after. He may have been re-united with his birth mother following her marriage in 1923, although it is not known exactly when this happened.

He enlisted with the Middlesex Regiment in Ashford on 10th October 1935 (aged 18). On the 7th September 1937 he was posted to Hong Kong. Whilst in Hong Kong he passed competence to drive a motor vehicle on the 7th December 1939; other than this, little is known about his pre-war experiences including the period when he was posted to Hong Kong in Sept 1937 to when he was captured by the Japanese.

Wartime experience:

He was captured in Hong Kong following the surrender on 25th December 1941. Prior to this I have no detailed knowledge of his life in Hong Kong although I remember it being mentioned at home that he had a Chinese girlfriend and he last saw her lying on the ground as he and his fellow soldiers and captives were marched through the streets – the last time he ever saw her.

Charles survived the sinking of the Lisbon Maru, he was re-captured by the Japanese after what was believed to be “prolonged” floating on a piece of ship debris.

(Continued)



The following was obtained from a transcription of handwritten entries by Frank Waldron in a notebook that was maintained by Capt C M Man of 1st Bn The Middlesex Regt:

2/Lt J.P. Whitham - was holding onto a hatch batten with Pte O'Donnell for some time. Latter had no life belt and he thinks 2/Lt Whitham was trying to take his off when he let go and disappeared. Later was seen floating drowned, by Pte Viner.

He was interned in Kobe Camp and was forced to work on the docks as slave labour. I was told he had his teeth partially knocked out with a rifle butt (the crime was singing) and the only treatment was apparently from an Australian Doctor in the Camp who was only able to give him a basic pain killer. He is mentioned frequently in Robert J Wright's book (published in 1963), "I Was a Hell Camp Prisoner".

I also discovered after reading Tony Banham's book "The Sinking of the Lisbon Maru" that when he and his fellow POWs were liberated by the Americans, it was by chance he wasn't killed as two of the three planes (at that time) taking the liberated British POWs to the US base in Manilla crashed on route; he was on the plane that didn't!

Charles is listed as being liberated on the 2nd September 1945 from Osaka 2b POW camp.

Personal history post war (if survived):

Dad survived the Japanese internment and was put on board the USS Admiral Hughes from the Philippines destined for San Francisco however, the ship was diverted to Vancouver Island. He was, so I was told, offered work in British Columbia (forestry, like many were I believe) but he wanted to return home. This was by train across Canada and then ship from Halifax Nova Scotia to Southampton.

During his time in Kobe he be-friended Wallace Wood (Wally) from the Middlesex who brought Dad home to his family home in Camden Town, London. There he met Wally's sister (my mother), Bessie, and they married in London in December 1945. He transferred to the Army Reserves in July 1946 and was described as "honest, hardworking and reliable" and "above the average intelligence" in his army service record book.

He worked initially for the Post Office, and Nestles but could not settle in those organisations. Latterly he became a Foreman in an industrial cleaning company – the firm had major contracts to clean well-known large office blocks in London – mostly he did this outside suspended in cradles.

I was born in 1956. Mum and Dad had a very happy life together in Camden Town until he contracted cancer in 1968 and died shortly after. I was then just under 12 years old.



Additional photos:



Charles and Bessie on their wedding day December 1945

The above information was provided by Geoff Viner who is the Son of Charles Sidney Viner.



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