



FLOWN HOME BY LANCASTER

The archive display of a WW2 Kensington Regiment Prisoner of War Soldier Staff Sergeant Desmond Thain 1st Battalion Princess Louise's Kensington Regiment

In May 1939, Desmond Thain who lived in Hammersmith enlisted in the 1st Battalion Princess Louise's Kensington Regiment. Basic training followed the Declaration of War in September 1939 and in April 1940 the Battalion was deployed to France, initially stationed on the Maginot Line. After seeing some action around Beauvais, North of Paris, the 1st Kensingtons arrived at St Valery en Caux near the French coast on the 12th of June.

After some confusion about what was happening the Kensingtons were first ordered to disable their vehicles and then to surrender to the Germans.

For Desmond Thain, his 5 years of captivity started with the long journey across Europe on foot through France and Belgium then by train to Holland and then to Poland, arriving for the winter of 1940-41 at Stalag XX-B in Eastern Prussia.

Having made himself known to his captors as a German speaker he now started his wartime career as an interpreter. Throughout the duration of his captivity in various camps and working parties he wrote home prolifically, and his letters (carefully preserved by his mother) give a fascinating insight into the day to day PoW life of British Other Ranks.

Desmond was finally liberated in Lubeck on May 19th 1945, and along with other British PoW's was flown home by RAF Lancaster to be reunited with his family. Due to his linguistic skills, he did not return to the Kensingtons but was posted instead to work as an interpreter at a German PoW camp in Nottinghamshire until his demobilisation in 1946.

Shortly after this he joined the Civil Service and worked at the War Office and subsequently the Ministry of Defence until his retirement in 1985.

Kensington Central Library

Archives & Local Studies Search Room, Phillimore Walk Kensington London W8 7RX

From 3rd November until 30th November 2026

Opening times: Tuesday 1pm - 5:00 pm Wednesday. 10:00 am - 5:00 pm.

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PRINCESS LOUISE'S KENSINGTON REGIMENTAL ASSOCIATION

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