

We have all heard about some of the battles that took place between 1939 & 1945. We may not be as familiar with the names of men from Lawford, Manningtree & Mistley who served with Naval, Air and various land forces, who took part in some of these historic events.

The three local war memorials list the names of 24 who died; some were career officers, most ordinary young men, often still living at home when they signed up. A number of civilians originally from the area also died in bombing raids, particularly those on London.

We know of five men who served & died at sea.

Harold Moss from Mistley was one of 33 killed on the Destroyer HMS Panther, sunk by Stuka dive bombers whilst in the Aegean Sea.



HMS Panther

Reginald Smith was on the HMS Southampton a cruiser, also bombed and sunk in the Mediterranean, escorting a convoy from Gibraltar to relieve the Island of Malta.

Robert Hay a Chief Mate from Manningtree went down on a slow merchant ship the S.S. Crusader, part of an Atlantic convey in 1941.

Reginald Sage on the HMS Penzance and **Jack Begg** on the HMS Forfar were also sunk by U boats in the Atlantic.

Four locals joined the Air force and were lost.

Flying officer **Leslie Goldspink** was an air gunner on a Wellington heavy bomber which flew out of Algeria in May 1943; he is listed on the Air Force memorial in Malta.

A month later Sergeant **Frank George Lay-Flurrie** from Manningtree was lost when his Halifax bomber crashed in the Netherlands on the way back from a large raid on factories in Dusseldorf.

Frederick Ward from Lawford was in a Lancaster bomber when it crashed on a night flight in March 1945, killing all on board.

Aircraftsman **Edward Hawkins** worked for Brooks Maltings and joined the air force reserve. His parents ran the Kings Head pub in Lawford. He died in August 1941 (cause unknown) and is buried in the nearby Church yard.



Those who joined the Army were often lost in faraway places. The first to die was **Graham Jackson** a keen mountaineer whose family lived in Mistley Place, a former school behind the Walls. As a reservist he was called up early and in May 1940 was sent to try and prevent the invasion of Norway. He went missing on the 3rd June and is buried near Narvik where the evacuation of British troops eventually took place.

Captain **John Atkinson** from Mistley died in late December 1940, fighting Italian forces in the Sudan for control of East Africa.

'Brooks' was a large employer at the time, with their maltings and offices just past Wherry corner along the Walls, now flats and housing. They left us a record of the one hundred employees who went off to fight, 22 of them with Major 'Atty' Brooks who joined the 2/5th Battalion of the Essex regiment, which sailed first to South Africa.



Some of the 2nd / 5th Essex regiments aboard 'Nureila' on route to Freetown in 1940.

Montague Rist worked at Brooks and became a Gunner with the Royal Artillery and was serving on an armed merchant ship when it was torpedoed and sunk in October 1941.

Percy Fidgett was another Brooks man who sailed with the Essex Regiment.

Promoted to Sergeant he fought in the desert war and died in November 1941 after the British were pushed back into Egypt. He is buried in the Suez War Cemetery.

Harold Askew died in February 1942 and was buried at the port of Haifa, now in modern Israel.

At the same time **Ellis Pearson**, another Mistley Gunner, was with the Royal Artillery in Java, attempting to stop the Japanese invasion, which finally took the island a few weeks after he was killed. Those captured from his unit were taken to build the notorious railway in Burma.

Lance Corporal **Thomas Osborne** from Mistley joined the Queens Own Regiment, part of the 8th Army, known as the 'Desert Rats', He was killed by Rommel's forces during their last offensive against El Alamein on the 5th September 1942.

Ralph Hartgrove from Manningtree was serving with an anti tank regiment when he was killed in October during the second battle of El Alamein, described by Churchill as the turning point of the war.

When the Essex Regiment landed in Italy in 1943 **Herbert Branch** from Mistley was with them and became part of the Moro River campaign launched up the east coast at the beginning of December 1943. He was wounded at the battle of Villa Grande and died just before Christmas.

Of the 'Atty' Brooks men that survived the war, a number were captured in Italy and after being handed over to Italian forces, were mistreated.

In Western Europe **Leslie Townes** from Mistley & **James Hammond** from Lawford were both with the 9th (Essex) Parachute Battalion and in 1944 were dropped behind enemy lines on D-day to storm the gun battery at Merville. Having survived the assault they died later in the breakout from Normandy.

Edward George Cornwall-Smith lived in Mill Cottages, Colchester Road, Lawford and worked at the plastics factory across the river. As part of the D-day operations he landed at Arromanches with the 1st Battalion of the Royal Hampshire regiment and was killed a month later in the fierce fighting around Caen.

Leslie Cook from Mistley was with the Royal Artillery in another landmark operation launched in September 1944 known as Market Garden. He was killed during the battle to hold the bridge at Arnhem.

Arthur Edward Baalham survived the war but died in July 1946 age 37 yrs whilst being treated for cancer at the Netley Naval Hospital. He was brought back and buried in Lawford churchyard.

A number of others fought and eventually returned to Manningtree with their own stories of the world at war and the peace that finally came in 1945.

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