

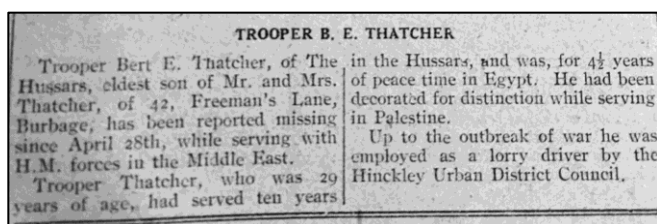
TROOPER BERT EDWARD THATCHER

Service Number: 551639
 Enlisted: 4th Queen's Own Hussars
 Royal Armoured Corps
 Born: 13th August 1912
 Died: 9th February 1945, Aged 33
 Memorials: Klagenfurt Commonwealth War Cemetery, Austria
 Plot 2, Row E, Grave 1.
 Burbage War Memorial



Bert Edward Thatcher was born in Stoke, Coventry, the son of Mr Bertie Edward and Mrs Kate Thatcher of 85 Chandos Street. By the time Bert was ten they had moved to Burbage, where Bert and his elder sister Florence May attended the National School.

Bert was a reservist and was recalled on the outbreak of war. He had seen six years' service, of which four and a half had been abroad, and had been at home for two years before the outbreak of war. He was employed by Hinckley Urban District Council and was living with his parents at 42 Freemans Lane, Burbage.



Hinckley Times Report 13 June 1941 – missing

He was taken prisoner in Greece in April 1941 and died whilst held prisoner in Germany on 9th February 1945. Bert is buried at Klagenfurt Commonwealth War Cemetery, Austria.

Records indicate that Bert was held prisoner at Stalag 344 at Lambinowice, Poland and most probably died whilst being marched to Germany. In January 1945, the Soviet Army advanced into Poland and the Nazis made the decision to evacuate the POW camps to prevent the liberation of the prisoners by the Russians.

Many of the prisoners were marched westward in groups of 200 to 300 in the so-called Long March or Death March. Many of them died from the bitter cold and exhaustion.

Austria was annexed by Germany in March 1938, and many labour, prisoner-of-war and concentration camps were established there by the Germans. The principal POW camps were at Döllersheim, Gneixendorf, Kaisersteinbruch, Lienz,

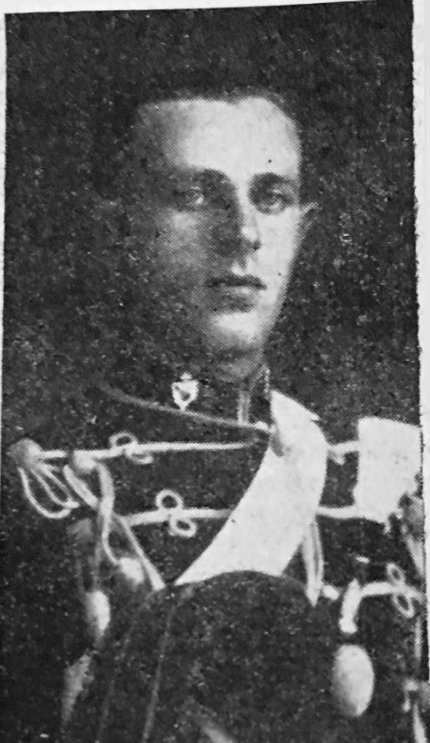
Spittal an der Drau, Wolfsberg and Graz. Commonwealth war dead buried in Austria were mainly servicemen who died in these camps in captivity, airmen who were shot down or crashed while flying over the country and those who died while serving with the army of occupation after the war. Klagenfurt, the only Commonwealth war cemetery in Austria, was begun in June 1945 by the British occupying forces, who moved graves into it from all over the country. It now contains 589 Commonwealth burials of the Second World War.





Klagenfurt Commonwealth War Cemetery, Austria

**TROOPER BERT THATCHER
DIES IN GERMANY**



Trooper Bert Thatcher
Mr. and Mrs. B. Thatcher, of 42, Freeman's Lane, Burbage, have received the sad news that their eldest son, Tpr. Bert Thatcher, of the 4th Hussars, died on February 9th last while a prisoner of war in German hands.
Tpr. Thatcher was a reservist and had only been home two years, after six years service, including four and a half years abroad, when he was re-called on the outbreak of war.
He was taken prisoner in Greece in April, 1941.
Before the war he was employed as a driver by the Hinckley Urban District Council.

The Long March

The Long March was during the final months of the Second World War in Europe. About 30,000 Allied PoWs were force-marched westward across Poland and Germany in appalling winter conditions, lasting about four months from January to April 1945. It has been called various names: "The Great March West", "The Long March", "The Long Walk", "The Long Trek", "The Black March", "The Bread March", but most survivors just called it "The March". It has also been called "The Lamsdorf Death March".

As the Soviet army was advancing on Poland, the Nazis made the decision to evacuate the PoW camps to prevent the liberation of the prisoners by the Russians. During this period, also hundreds of thousands of German civilians, most of them women and children, as well as civilians of other nationalities, were making their way westward in the snow and freezing weather and many died. January and February 1945 were among the coldest winter months of the twentieth century, with blizzards and temperatures as low as -25°C (-13°F), even until the middle of March temperatures were well below 0°F (-18°C). Most of the PoWs were ill-prepared for the evacuation, having suffered years of poor rations and wearing clothing ill-suited to the appalling winter conditions.

Each Stalag was responsible for co-ordinating the movement of POW at the outlying labour camps as well as those at the main camp. In the case of Stalag 344 Lamsdorf (formerly Stalag VIII-B) they took a northerly route via Dresden.