

Dennis Roy Thomas
Gunner 323 Bty., 30 (Surrey) Searchlight Regt. Royal Artillery
Service Number 5728104
Aged 21

Dennis, known as Roy was born at the end of 1922 at Axbridge, the son of Frederick and Vivian Nellie Thomas.

Frederick Thomas married Vivian Nellie Wiseman at Axbridge in 1916. They had three children, Dennis was the last born, and their only son.

When Dennis was aged three in the middle of 1926, his mother aged 34 married again to Reginald Cottrell aged 36 at Corfe Castle. Reginald's brother William died at the Somme in 1916. Reginald himself served in the Dorsetshire regiment from 1908 until 1919. Reginald died in 1953 and Vivian died in 1975.

In Sept 1939 Dennis was in the Dorset regiment, but he then joined the Royal artillery.

On 3 September 1943 the Allied invasion of the Italian mainland began with landing in the south near Reggio and, a few days later, in the Gulf of Salerno. The invasion coincided with an armistice made with the Italians who then re-entered the war on the Allied side. Allied objectives were to draw German troops from the Russian front and more particularly from France, where an offensive was planned for the following year. The site of Bari War Cemetery was chosen in November 1943. There was no serious fighting in the vicinity of the town, which was the Army Group headquarters during the early stages of the Italian campaign, but it continued to be an important supply base and hospital centre, with the 98th General Hospital stationed there from October 1943 until the end of the war. There are burials here from throughout Italy.

Here too are buried men who died in two disastrous explosions in the harbour at Bari, when ammunition ships exploded in December 1943 during a German air raid. One of the US ships in the harbour had mustard gas stored on its deck. Held in store for use only in the event that the Germans resorted to its use themselves. There were 617 mustard gas casualties, of whom 84 died.

Dennis died as the result of an accident on 5th December 1943 and is buried at Bari War Cemetery, grave reference X. E. 34.

INSCRIPTION

SWEET IS THE MEMORY THAT NEVER FADES OF THE ONE WE LOVED BUT COULD NOT SAVE

Commemorated on the memorial at Corfe Castle