

**Private Thomas William Jackson, Royal Army Ordnance Corps  
of Marshbrook**

died 17 June 1940, aged 28



Railway Cottages, Marshbrook

Thomas Jackson was born on 18 March 1912 in Marshbrook, in the parish of Wistanstow, one of eight children of John and Margaret Jackson nee Roberts. His father John worked as a plate layer on the railway at Marshbrook – the family lived at 1, Railway Cottages, Marshbrook.

John Jackson's family were local – his father was an agricultural labourer from Acton Scott, and his mother was from Rushbury. Margaret's family were from near Wrexham, in Denbighshire, where her father was a labourer. John and Margaret married in Ruabon in 1902, where John and his brother Thomas were working as brickyard labourers.

In the 1921 census the family were still living at Marshbrook, with six of the children still at home including Thomas. But at the time of the 1939 Register Thomas was living with both his parents at 98 Mobberley Road, Knutsford, Cheshire. He was a grocery manager, and his father was recorded as a retired "permanent way ganger". It is not known why Thomas and his parents moved to Knutsford, but it may be that the employment opportunity was worthwhile. However, in January 1940 his father, John, died and was buried in Ludlow.

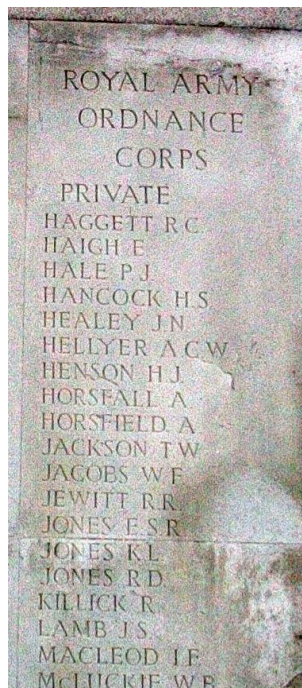
At the start of the Second World War Thomas enlisted as a Private in the Royal Army Ordnance Corp (service number 7624263) and was part of the British Expeditionary Army Corp in France. The RAOC was responsible for the storage and distribution of army ordnance, ammunition and clothing.

The collapse of Allied forces in 1940 in the face of the fast-advancing German army meant an urgent rescue operation. This was the famous Dunkirk evacuation which extended from Normandy and down the west coast of France.

Thomas was evacuated from St. Nazaire on the Bay of Biscay via small boat to the HMT Lancastria, which was lying some miles off the coast. The Lancastria was previously a cruise ship and had been converted to a troop ship. It had already, in 1940, supported the evacuation of troops from Norway and, along with HMT Franconia, was sent from Liverpool to pick up soldiers in western France.

The speed and chaos of the evacuation meant that the Lancastria was badly overloaded with British and French soldiers, plus some civilian women and children. The normal number of passengers and crew was around 2,180 but the captain said he could take a maximum of 3,000. It is unclear exactly how many troops and merchant seaman were on board, but estimates have varied between 4,000 and 7,000.

On the 17 June 1940 the Lancastria was attacked and bombed by a German Luftwaffe JU 88 aircraft. The ship went down very quickly, in around 25 minutes. Many of those on board died as a direct result of the four bombs which exploded in the ship, but it is recorded that many also subsequently died in the oil covered sea.



Dunkirk memorial

There is no information on the precise circumstances of Thomas's death, but he is commemorated, alongside his comrades, on a number of war memorials. These include the Dunkirk Memorial, the Church Stretton War Memorial and Little Stretton Roll of Honour, and Knutsford War Memorial. He is also recorded in the Army Roll of Honour.

The sinking of the Lancastria was the greatest single shipping loss of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Between 4,000 and 6,000 soldiers, sailors and civilians are thought to have died when it was sunk. The disaster was so great that Prime Minister Churchill ordered a blackout of all information – a "D Notice" – concerning the sinking. This was because news of the evacuation of France was already so bad that he did not wish to further lower British morale at a crucial time. The story of the sinking of the Lancastria remained known only to relatively few people for many years. There are now numerous books and a BBC documentary on the sinking of the Lancastria.



RMS Lancastria sinking off St Nazaire, June 1940