

**Private Thomas George ATKINSON +
434762 – 54th Australian Infantry Battalion
NX58448 - 2/19th Australian Infantry Battalion**

Brief biography

Thomas George Atkinson was born on 2 Feb 1906 at Great Ayton, North Yorkshire, England. He was a son of Frank Robinson Atkinson and Anna Katherina (nee Pauls) Atkinson. They were married on 7 Aug 1901 at St Nicolai, Heligoland, Germany (a small archipelago in the North Sea), and had four children: Helga, Benjamin, Thomas and Yvonne.

In the 1911 England Census, the family were living at Picton House, Redcar, Yorkshire, and also listed living with the family is a cook, a nurse and a housemaid. Frank's occupation was listed as a shipowner. Frank Atkinson died, aged 35 years, at Redcar on 26 Mar 1914. He left his wife £2120 14s in his will.

Anna Atkinson and her four children moved to Low Farm, Coatham, Yorkshire, by the 1921 England Census, when Thomas was 15 years old. In 1921, Benjamin, aged 18 years, and Thomas, aged 16 years, left London on the SS *Esperance Bay*, and arrived at Sydney on 11 Sep 1922.

Their mother, Anna Atkinson, aged 41 years, and her two daughters, Helga aged 23 years, and Yvonne aged 14 years, departed London on 9 Feb 1926 on the SS *Moreton Bay* and arrived in Sydney on 22 Mar 1926.

Benjamin married Kathleen Dodds at Adelong (in the Riverina region) in 1928. By the 1930 Australian Electoral Roll, Benjamin, Kathleen and Thomas had moved to Cumnock and were orchardists and had leased land at Burrawong orchards.

The Molong Express & Western District Advertiser (WDA) - 21 Apr 1934, p12, reported:

"At the Orange Show Messrs Atkinson Bros., of Burrawong orchard, won the following first prizes: Packham's Triumph pears, Walnuts; seconds for Winter Nelis pears, three largest dessert pears; and the Championship for pears."

The Leader, Orange - 27 Feb 1935, p1, reported:

"Messrs Atkinson Bros, who have a lease of Mr A Reynolds' orchard at Cumnock, have installed an outsize in fruit graders. The machine is capable of handling 1000 cases of fruit daily. They state that their crop is of excellent quality, and they intend to export the major portion of the fruit direct to England."

Thomas Atkinson enlisted in the Australian Militia, on 31 Jan 1939 at Molong. His enlistment form states that he was a fruit grower, aged 33 years, 5 feet 10 inches tall, had brown eyes and hair, and that his mother Anna Atkinson of Cremorne, Sydney, was his next of kin. Thomas served as a Private in No 2 Company, 54th Battalion.

The Wellington Times - 28 Aug 1939, p2, reported:

"The engagement is announced of Elizabeth May, daughter of Mr and Mrs FE Badgery, of 'Burgoon' Cumnock, to Thomas G Atkinson, son of the late Mr FR Atkinson, of England, and Mrs Atkinson of Cremorne."

Thomas Atkinson and Elizabeth Badgery were married on 22 Jun 1940, registered at Molong. On 22 July 1940, Thomas enlisted in the Australian Army. As part of the 2/19 Btn, he was first sent to 9 RR Btn at Wallgrove (now known as Eastern Creek, NSW), a staging and training camp, on 25 Jul 1940. He had home leave from 20 Sep - 30 Sep 1940.

On 16 Nov 1940 he was admitted to 6 Australian General Hospital, Ingleburn and discharged to rejoin his unit at Bathurst on 10 Dec 1940. Pte Atkinson was granted pre-embarkation leave from 20 Dec - 28 Dec.

Right: Tom Atkinson (far right) with his brother-in-law, Brabazon Badgery, in Sydney, 1940. L/Cpl Badgery, NX58441 - 2/19 & 2/27 Btns. Died of illness as a POW, 9 Jul 1943, Thailand. Aged 25 years.



Private Atkinson embarked at Sydney on 2 Feb 1941 with the 2/19 Btn and disembarked at Singapore on 18 Feb 1941, as part of the 22nd Brigade of the 8th Australian Division.

A letter to his wife Elizabeth living at "Windowrie" Cumnock, from Pte Atkinson dated 9 Mar 1941 from Company Headquarters, Malaya, reads: "... *We had a very interesting trip from where we were, about two hundred miles mostly through rubber plantations or virgin jungle with occasional palm oil plantations, paddy fields and peanuts, and a few banana and sago palms. The roads are excellent as far as the surface is concerned but there were many twists and turns and one has to keep one's wits about one, which is rather an effort in this climate.*"

13 Apr 1941, and Pte Atkinson had heard that Elizabeth had given birth to a son, Roger. "*I am still bewildered at being a father. It seems so unnatural being so far away and not being able to see you both. How are you getting on dearest one and is our little one behaving himself and meets with your approval? What a night we had on Good Friday. Roger and yourself were toasted with good Australian beer and (we) must have consumed enough to float at least a canoe...*"

19 Apr 1941. "*We have been kept pretty busy... we moved out before daylight and took up our dispersal position... Just before we got into our first harbour, one of the kitchen trucks turned turtle, slipping over the side of the road which was both narrow and greasy. Luckily nobody was hurt... there were three cooks out of the back and Jim Betts was in the front with the driver. It was funny to see the cooks emerging out of the back covered in sugar and tea and using very lurid language.*"

[Staff Sgt James Betts, NX59898, from Orange, died on 12 Apr 1945 as a POW on the Sandakan Death March]

2/19 Btn Australian War Museum: www.awm.gov.au/collection/U56062:

"Immediately upon its arrival in Singapore on 18 February, the 2/19th moved north to Seremban in southern Malaya, where it would train for service under tropical conditions. The battalion remained in the area until early-September, rotating between Seremban and Port Dickson on the coast. It spent most of September based around the airfield at Kluang and on 3 October began to move to Jemaluang on the east coast. The 2/19th stood to arms on the night of 6 December 1941 but a month would pass before the first of its men were in action.



On 7 January 1942 D Company was detached to form half a special force deployed to delay the Japanese approach to Endau, a town further north along the coast. One of its platoons was involved in a clash with the Japanese on 14 January. D Company returned to the battalion in time for its redeployment to the west coast on 17 January. The 2/19th was rushed forward to reinforce the beleaguered 2/29th Battalion at Bakri. It held the vital crossroad there throughout 19 January, long enough to allow for the withdrawal of the remnants of the 2/29th and the 45th Indian Brigade from the direction of Muar. At Bakri, from 18 to 22 Jan 1942, Lieutenant Colonel Charles Anderson's 2/19th Battalion repeatedly fought through Japanese positions before running out of ammunition near Parit Sulong. Anderson's battalion was forced to leave behind about 110 Australian and 40 Indian wounded, who were later massacred by the Japanese. One man survived the massacre and recounted the story at war's end."

Pte Thomas Atkinson was reported missing on 19 Jan 1942 and was presumed dead. He was aged 35 years. He has no known grave and is commemorated at the Singapore Memorial, located within Kranji War Cemetery. The memorial bears the names of over 24,000 casualties of the Commonwealth land and air forces who have no known grave. Thomas is also commemorated at the National War Museum, Canberra, and the Cumnock Memorial Gates.



Thomas's brother Benjamin and his wife Kathleen, left Cumnock in March 1941 to move to Batlow. Benjamin died, aged 95 years in 2000. Their mother, Anna Atkinson died, aged 99 years, at Narrabeen in 1982. Their sister Helga died, aged 90 years, at Sydney in 1993 and the youngest sister, Yvonne, died aged 99 years, at Toowoomba in 2010.

Elizabeth Atkinson remarried in 1950 to Roderick Edwards, at Moss Vale, NSW. They had 4 children. Elizabeth died, aged 90 years, in 2004, at Sutton Forest, NSW.

Pte Thomas Atkinson features in *The Molong & District Servicemen and Servicewomen Portrait Gallery book*, 2nd edition 2016, compiled by Helen Haynes. Photo at the top of first page provided by Roger Atkinson.