

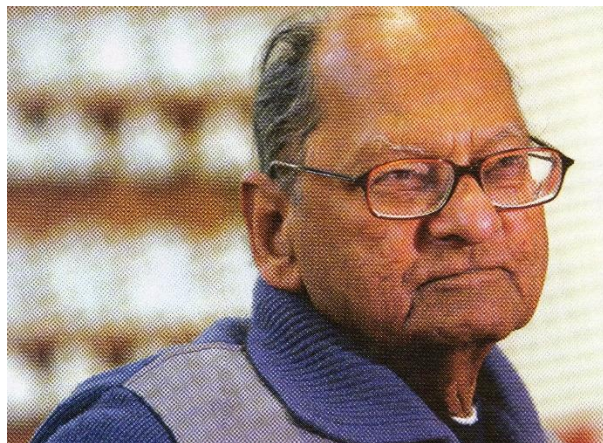
Newham Residents who participated in World War II

Captain Nasib Singh Dhillon



Many people from all over the British Empire fought in both World Wars for the mother country. Captain Nasib Dhillon was in the 1st Madras Regiment of the Indian Army and fought for Britain in the Second World War. He eventually came to settle in Manor Park.

Cedric Dowling



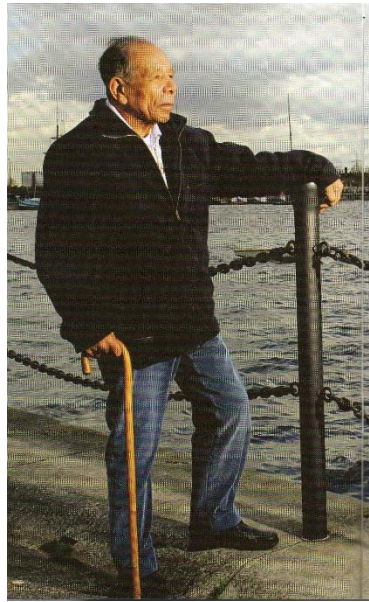
Cedric Dowling was born in 1924 in Rangoon, Burma. His father, who was Anglo-Indian, had moved the family to Calcutta shortly before the war broke out. From there Cedric joined the army. Because he had bad eyesight, he was enlisted into the Royal Army Medical Corps and was sent to the Burma front where he looked after injured British and Indian troops. After the war, Cedric worked as a clerk in Calcutta, before emigrating to Britain. He now lives in Stratford with his wife.

Albert Randolph Still



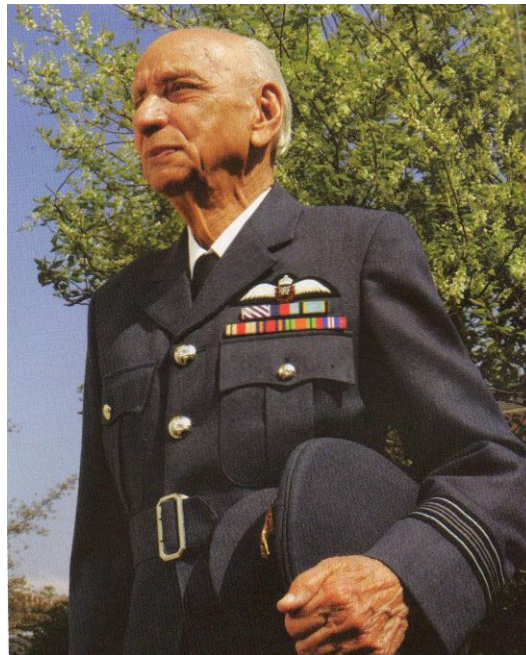
Albert Randolph Still was the son of a Black American seaman called Harry. Still, born in New Jersey in 1880, and his white wife called Ada (née Lee), born in Canning Town in 1892. Family oral history indicates that Albert's grandfather was William Still (1819 or 1821-1902), the son of ex-slaves born in Maryland, who moved to New Jersey where his father, Harry was born. William Still later went to Philadelphia from where his work in helping slaves to escape from the South gave him the sobriquet, 'Father of the Underground Rail road'. Albert Randolph Still served in the army in World War II.

Sidney D. Graham



Sidney D. Graham was born in 1920, the son of Sidney S. Graham, a seaman from Barbados, and Emma Louisa Skingle, born in West Ham. His parents were married at St Luke's Church, Canning Town in 1925 and Sidney was the eldest of six children. He went to a few schools but ended up at South Hallsville School where he met his future wife Esther. The family lived in Crown Street, Tidal Basin and as Sidney recalls 'they called it "Draught Street" because black and white couples and families lived there'. He went to sea when he was 15 and spent many years in the merchant navy. During the Second World War, he was a Fireman on the supply ship M.V. Scottish Star when she sailed from the Victoria Dock on 17th January 1942, bound for Buenos Aires carrying 2000 tons of cargo including whisky. On 20th February, having been dispersed from convoy ONS 63, comprising 31 ships, the Scottish Star was torpedoed and sunk by an Italian submarine. Four of the crew were killed and the Captain and 68 surviving crew members took to the lifeboats. The shipwrecked crew were tossed around the Atlantic Ocean, suffering from severe cold and sea-sickness and existing on meagre daily rations of four fluid ounces of water and a couple of dry biscuits. After seven long days the lifeboats had drifted apart, the sea had calmed and the sun was scorching. Sidney, along with the Chief Officer and 15 other men, realised they had drifted to the Caribbean when they were picked up by a fishing boat from Barbados – the birthplace of his father. Taken to Barbados by the boat, they landed on 27th February. Sidney told local people his family name, and within a few days, his aunt, Dorothy, arrived to take him in. There was no way of letting his family know he was safe, and it was 6 months until a ship was sent to take them back to Britain. Sidney remembers there were tears of joy when he was reunited with his parents and five younger siblings, 'My mother, God rest her soul, had been going crazy when I was away,' he said. He continued as Merchant Seaman until 1953 and then worked in the docks as a ship repairer. When the docks closed he worked as a construction site Foreman. Sidney and his wife Esther, still live in Custom House.

Squadron Leader Pujji DFC



Mahindra Singh Pujji was born in Simla, (now Shimla) India in 1918. His father was an officer in the Department of Health and Education, a very senior and respectable 'establishment' position for an Indian at that time. He received a law degree from Bombay University, and went to work for Shell. In 1937 he qualified as a pilot. In 1940, aged 22, he volunteered to serve with the Royal Air Force in Britain. Of the first 24 Indians who volunteered for the RAF, only seven were selected as fighter pilots. He insisted on wearing his turban at all times and is probably the only Sikh fighter pilot to have done so. He was sent to England for training and was posted to 253 Squadron RAF, flying Hurricane fighters from RAF Kenley, near Croydon, with pilots from Poland, America, Canada and Australia. The Hurricanes – equipped with twelve machine guns – were flown day and night, to intercept German bombers and reconnaissance aircraft. His first action was over France. Later, whilst attached to No.43 Squadron, flying Hurricanes and then Spitfires from RAF Martlesham, he was promoted to Flight Commander and his duties included fighter sweeps over occupied Europe, low-level attacks on enemy targets and fighter escort to RAF bombers. In 1941 during the air-war over the Western Desert in North Africa, he flew Tomahawks. In Burma – serving as Flight Commander of No. 6 Squadron, and then No. 4 Squadron – he flew Hurricanes very low over the jungle to locate army positions. His unit soon became known as 'the eyes of the 14th army'. Whilst there, he helped to locate 300 West African troops who were lost in the jungle. For his services in Burma, Mahindra Singh Pujji was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC). The citation from the London Gazette 37036 dated 17th April 1945 reads, 'Distinguished Flying Cross Flt. Lt. Mahindra Singh Pujji Unit 4 Squadron, This officer has flown on many reconnaissance sorties over Japanese occupied territory, often in adverse monsoon weather. He has obtained much valuable information of enemy troop movements and dispositions, which enabled an air offensive to be maintained against the Japanese troops throughout the monsoon. Flight Lieutenant Pujji has shown himself to be a skilful and determined pilot who has always displayed outstanding leadership and courage'. Squadron Leader Pujji returned to India after the war to work in civil aviation, flying Boeing 707's for Air India. He moved to England in 1974 where he became an Air Traffic Controller. He moved to East Ham after his retirement and became an active member of many voluntary groups in Newham. In 2000, he was made an Honorary Freeman of the London Borough of Newham. He now lives in Kent. Squadron Leader Pujji said, 'Pilots always knew when they took off there was a chance they would not return. At dinner time there would always be one or two of the squad missing, but I was not afraid.'