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## 5. The Story of John P Couzens

**Lieutenant John Philip Couzens, Royal Artillery 3 Lt A Regiment .[90419] was captured at the fall of Singapore 15 Feb 1942 . After horrific experiences he died on Ballali (Balalle / Balalae) Island on about 5/3/1943.**



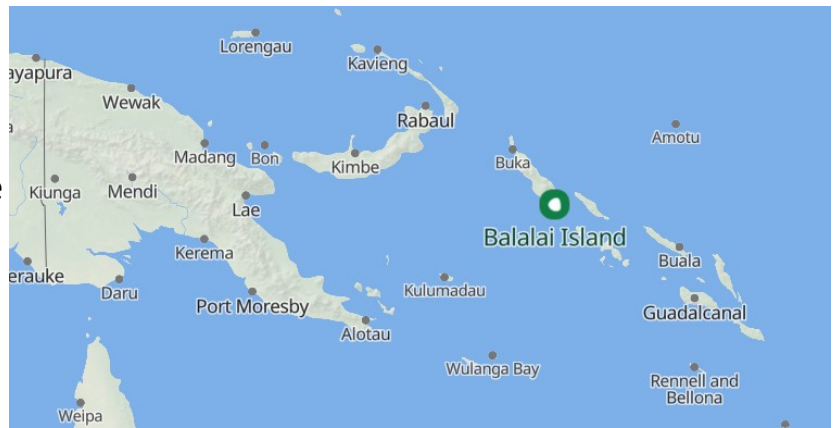
John attended Radley College, a leading Public School, and was in the Officer Training Corp there. He was commissioned as 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt in June 1939



On the 18th October, 1942, 600 men of the Royal Artillery were marched to Singapore Docks and put aboard a ship, the Kenkon Maru, in horrific conditions.

The prisoners were disembarked at Rabual.

On the 15th November 1942, a parade took place at Rabaul where the fittest 517 men, out of the remaining 599, were chosen to go to Ballali (Balalle / Balalae) Island, part of the Solomon Islands, to build an airstrip.



They were taken by trucks to board another hell ship for the two day journey to Ballali.

*On the 21st of January, 1943, the U.S. Navy submarine SS 212 Gato torpedoed and damaged the Kenkon Maru and it was scuttled. This was the action that led to the Japanese lie that the 600 Gunners had been "Lost at Sea".*

At Ballali prisoners were forced to crush coral to surface the runway. Reportedly, the Japanese forbid the British prisoners from taking shelter during attacks or building air raid shelters for protection.



Some 70-100 of the prisoners died from overworking, exhaustion and tropical diseases, and an unknown number of prisoners were killed by B24 raid on the night of 12-13 March 1943.

On the 29th June 1943, an American warship bombarded the island. The next day the remaining prisoners still alive were lined up by the Japanese and killed by sword or bayonet.

He died age 22 with 517 other gunners – all are recorded as dying on 5/3/1943.



The remains of 438 bodies found found are laid to rest, unidentified, at Bomana War Cemetery 12 miles north of Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.

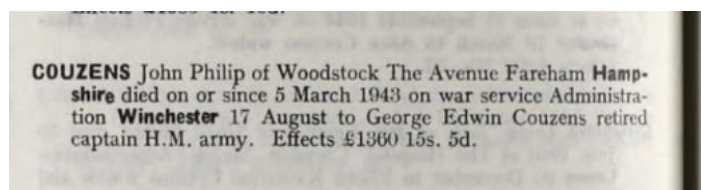
Although the island is uninhabited there is a memorial at the still operational air strip in the form of a cairn with a wooden cross atop, and a plaque donated by the Royal Artillery Association. There is also a Memorial in Singapore

In 1993 a 'John Philip Couzens Scholarship' was founded at Radley College by his father as attribute to his son . Since its founding 39 boys have benefited, receiving life-changing access to an education they would not otherwise be able to afford. The fund is currently valued at just over £3million.

*(see also story on Edmund Neville).*

**Catisfield connection:** John was the son of Capt. George Edwin Couzens and Mrs. Bel Couzens; and stepson of Mary Couzens, of Hindhead, Surrey

According to the Probate notice the home was at 'Woodstock', The Avenue, Catisfield.



*Various other Couzens lived in the area, eg at 8 and 10 Fairthorne Cottages, Catisfield Lane, and in Titchfield.*