



George Johnson was born in early 1913, a younger son of Thomas Charles Johnson. Thomas was a Farm Labourer, born in Newton Blossomville, who married in 1898. His wife, Julia Freeman, was born in Lavendon. In 1911 the family lived in a cottage at the Horse Shoe Yard on the High Street. George had at least six siblings, including Mary, Violet, Thomas, Sarah, William and Fred - all born in Lavendon. George was baptised by the Rev George Soames in Lavendon Church on 30th March 1914, together with his brother Fred who was three years older.

George's mother, Julia, became no stranger to tragedy: her brothers, Arthur and Everitt Freeman, as well as her nephew Charles Freeman, all died in the First World War. She was spared knowing the death of her son following her own early passing in 1929 at the age of 54. In 1938 at the age of 25 George married Minnie Harris at Northampton where it appears they went to live.

Following the outbreak of war, George Johnson enlisted and went on to serve with the 2nd Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment. Given George's burial place on Leros Island it must be assumed that he was a casualty of the ill-fated Dodecanese campaign, summarised by Wikipedia as follows:

*"The **Dodecanese campaign** of World War II was an attempt by Allied forces to capture the Italian-held Dodecanese islands in the Aegean Sea following the surrender of Italy in September 1943, and use them as bases against the German-controlled Balkans. Operating without air cover, the Allied effort failed, with the whole of the Dodecanese falling to the Germans within two months, and the Allies suffering heavy losses in men and ships. The Dodecanese campaign, lasting from 8 September to 22 November 1943, resulted in one of the last big German victories in the war."*

In the specific case of the Island of Leros, the Germans had planned an operation against the Allies to take place on 9th October 1943, but the Royal Navy intercepted and destroyed a key German convoy including their heavy landing craft. However, by 5th November the Germans had assembled a fleet of light infantry landing craft initially camouflaged and hidden around several Aegean Islands. Despite the earlier Allied efforts they managed to assemble an invasion force on 12 November. Prior to then the Island had been subjected to a prolonged aerial bombardment causing significant casualties and damage. The invasion force approached the Leros on the east and western sides and managed to establish a bridgehead. The Germans succeeded in quickly cutting the Island in two with the result that the Allies surrendered on 16 November. Some 3,200 British and 5,350 Italian soldiers were captured. Evidently Private George Johnson lost his life defending the Island on that day and he was eventually buried in the Leros War Cemetery.



The **Commonwealth War Graves Commission** records that Leros Cemetery “was made by the military authorities, who moved into it all graves found on the island from isolated positions and from various civilian cemeteries. The total number of burials is 183. This is made up by 13 sailors, 162 soldiers and 4 airmen belonging to the forces of the United Kingdom; 2 airmen of the Royal Canadian Air Force; and 2 soldiers of the South African Forces. Owing to the loss or destruction of the local records by the enemy occupying forces, the identities of many of the graves were lost...”



The graves of some 58 men are not identified, but fortunately that of Private George Johnson is known to be at Plot 3, Row C, Grave 10.

Below: Map showing location of Leros Island, a part of Greece in the Dodecanese Islands.

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