

April 1945

By April 1945, it was obvious that the war in Europe was nearly over, although the war in the far-east was still being fought.

On 1 April, American troops took Okinawa, the last island held by the Japanese. Then, on 12 April, US president, Franklin D Roosevelt died from a massive stroke. He had led his country through its most turbulent time, to the impending defeat of Nazi Germany, and with the Japanese in full retreat. The next day, Russian forces captured Vienna, and on 15 April, British troops liberated the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. On 18 April, all resistance in the Ruhr ended and 370,000 German prisoners of war were taken. On 30 April, with Soviet troops less than 500 metres from his bunker, Adolf Hitler committed suicide.

Milborne Port had one last death to accept before the end of the war. Frederick Martin, son of Frederick and Ethel Martin, was born at Peasemash, Gillingham in June 1914. In June 1938, he married Kathleen Bennett of Yeovil and at the time of his death, his father was living in South Street. Frederick Martin was a Petty Officer aboard HMS Jupiter when she sank in the Java Sea on 27 February 1942; he was one of 75 men taken prisoner by the Japanese and died in captivity, aged 32 years, on 19 April 1945. On the night of 27 February 1942, whilst in action against the Japanese invasion force in the Battle of the Java Sea, the Jupiter struck a Dutch mine off the north coast of Java. 78 men got away in lifeboats before the ship sank. It is not known if PO Martin was one of those who got away in a lifeboat or if he, like many others, swam through shark-infested waters to a nearby island only to find the Japanese waiting for them. PO Martin spent next 3 years 2 months as a PoW, first on Java and then on Celebes (now Sulawesi) where the men were forced to work either in a lime making factory or repairing and expanding the airfield at Mendai. From January 1943 they also worked in the nickel mines at Pomelaa, all the time working with totally inadequate tools. They were in a pitiful state having survived, since their capture in 1942, on just a cup of rice a day and occasionally some watery vegetable soup. Frederick Martin's PoW Record Card shows that he was on the island of Muna when he died in April 1945.