

Tom was born on the 16th of February 1913 in Alloa, Clackmannanshire where his father, also named Thomas was employed in one of the local breweries. His early years were not happy. When he was 6 years of age his mother died and his father subsequently re-married. His homelife thereafter was miserable. The family were split. Tom and his elder sister Fay removed to Dundee with his father and stepmother while his two younger siblings went to live with the maternal grandmother in the village of Carnbo.



This state of affairs endured for 3 years until finally, after a family conference it was resolved that Tom should come to live with his paternal grandparents. They had a small dairy farm at Tullicoultry, a little town nestling at the foot of the Ochil Hills. When Tom reached the age of 13 his grandparents took in a lodger to augment the family income. This man had come to establish a regular bus service in the area and had brought with him a 32 seater bus for the purpose. He taught Tom to drive and also how to maintain the vehicle. On Sundays Tom would also assist him on the run, even on occasion driving the bus!

On leaving school at 14 Tom's first job was to help about the farm, but the skills he had acquired from the lodger soon enabled him to take up an apprenticeship as a fitter at a garage in the nearby town of Dollar.

Money was ever in short supply in those days, so for recreation Tom would take himself off for walks among the hills. During one such excursion he made the acquaintance of a shepherd and they became fast friends. This man encouraged the young Thomas to enrol in the local Red Cross first aid group. So it was that his twin passions for driving and first aid were forged.

When he had served his time as a fitter Tom went of to Glasgow to work as a mechanic with the Glasgow Corporation Bus Service. Soon after he transferred over to be a bus driver. In the summer of 1936 his attention was drawn to an article in a local newspaper calling for volunteers to join an ambulance unit that was being raised to serve in Spain.

The S.A.U. was the brainchild of Sir Daniel Macauley Stevenson. Sir Daniel was a Liberal grandee, a philanthropist, Chancellor of Glasgow University and a former Lord Provost of the city. Tom saw in this initiative an ideal opportunity to use his skills to good effect. He approached his General Manager at the corporation and was granted unlimited leave for the duration of the war. He was also promised that his job would be held open for him until his return. In the end he was to serve for over two years during some of the bloodiest engagements of that pitiless war. He served on several fronts from Toledo, the siege of Madrid and the Battle of Jarama to the fall of Teruel and the Aragon retreats.

The S.A.U sent 3 expeditions to Spain and Tom served in all of them.

He was atypical of most who left these shores to go to that war. Throughout his life he held no party affiliation or political ideology. Tom was truly neutral; his motivation entirely humanitarian. He never bore arms, electing in stead to hazard his life to save

lives rather than to take them. He was seldom far from the action. On one occasion his ambulance was destroyed by aerial bombardment. Both he and his Commandante who was travelling with him barely escaped with their lives. As Tom expressed it, "If you go in to the target area, whatever the target is you've to take what comes. I had a few close shaves but was fortunate enough to make it. Plenty others didn't." In 1938 Tom was awarded the O.B.E. [civil division] for meritorious service in providing humanitarian aid during the war in Spain This was a remarkable acknowledgement considering the stance of the British Government of the day on the question of Spain.

On his return to the U.K Tom took up his old post for a time, but shortly before the outbreak of the world war he re-located to Hertfordshire, taking up a position at Handley Page in Hatfield. When the war broke out the job became a reserve occupation and he was to remain employed in the aeronautical industry for the duration of his working life.

He married his wife Constance, whom he had met in Madrid during the Civil War. They were wed on boxing day 1939 and set up home together in St. Albans. Tom was immensely proud when at long last the post franco democratically elected government in Madrid awarded him and other survivors with their Spanish passports. He died a fortnight after his 99th birthday in the QE2 Hospital following a fall at his home in Upton Avenue. With his going the last living Scottish link with that war was broken, but gone was not forgotten. The Parliament in Edinburgh held a minutes silence to honour his memory.

It is my ambition to see a more tangible and enduring memory established, not just in that portion of these islands where he was born and grew up, but here in St Albans, the city which he loved and in which he was loved and found contentment. Tom spent a total 73 of his 99 years in this place.

He is by adoption both Spanish and Albanian!

I have created a portrait study of Tom in sculptors wax. It shows Tom half length and is one half life size. The work is ready to be sent to the foundry when funds allow. It is my earnest hope that two casts be made, one to go on permanent public display here in this city to which he contributed so much. I would like a separate appeal to take place in the county of his birth so that the second portrait might be placed in Tullicoultry.

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