



## APA KHABAR

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14<sup>TH</sup> EDITION  
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### A BUSY YEAR AHEAD

It has been a very cold Easter time, with snow in places, for those MVG Members who live in the Northern Hemisphere – a real “Blackthorn Winter”, to use an old country expression. However, with a hint of spring in the hedgerows and gardens, this may only be short-lived, and with some important events to look forward to, as well as our regular annual events, 2008 promises to be an interesting year for MVG members.

The first event, as already advertised, is the Second International Conference organized by the Researching FEPOW History Group, which takes place at the National Memorial Arboretum at the end of May. With a wealth of well-known national and international speakers, the emphasis is on the Fall of Hong Kong and Singapore, and the impact of these catastrophic events on civilian internees as well as on the FEPOWs. Those of you who have booked to attend this conference are in for a fascinating 2 days, and the chance to meet Mr. Jeyathurai, Director of the Changi Museum, and our good friend Rod Beattie from the TBRC Museum in Thailand.

We also hope that as many of you as possible will be able to attend the Presentation of the MVG's Memorial Board to the Changi Museum on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2008 in Singapore. A high profile event is being planned in the presence of Singaporean Dignitaries and Officials, as well as British Embassy Personnel. It will also be twinned with a book launch in connection with the Museum.

The MVG is delighted to report that it has been invited to provide a folder of information about the Malayan Volunteer Forces for the Archival Section of the FEPOW Memorial Building at the NMA, by the COFEPOW Chairman, Carol Cooper. The material will be collated by Jonathan Moffatt, and should be ready for use by the summer. We thank Carol Cooper and COFEPOW for this offer, and feel pleased that the MVG's Research Material will be available to the general public in this building, along with the rest of the FEPOW information.

On a more poignant note, it was deeply disturbing and distressing to read about the shameful way in which our wonderful Gurkha soldiers have been treated by the British Government. Those of you whose families have had dealings with the Gurkhas will know that they would not have given away their medals lightly. Loyalty, awesome bravery in the face of the enemy, tradition and a proud independent spirit, appear to count for nothing to-day – a sad indictment of our present government's so-called “values”. They deserve our full support to right this wrong.

[The Editor apologizes in advance for any shortcomings in this newsletter – it's due to the fact that “newsletter writing” and “puppy minding” do not go together very easily!]

#### SINGAPORE REPORT – FEBRUARY 2008

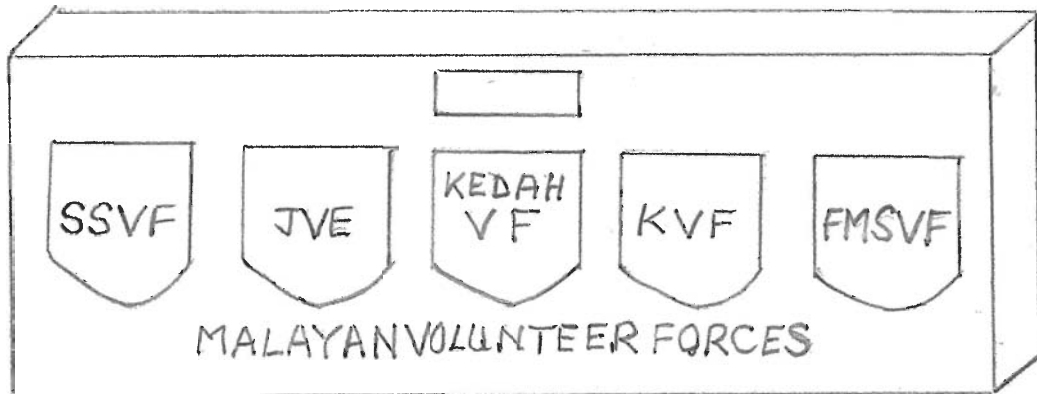
Donald and Rosemary Fell's visit to Singapore in February had a two-fold purpose. The first was to visit the Changi Museum to finalize the plans for the Memorial Board and its presentation on 12<sup>th</sup> September, and the second was to attend the 41<sup>st</sup> Memorial Service for the Civilian Victims of the Japanese Occupation, at the Civilian War Memorial Park in Beach Road.

#### The MVG Memorial Board for Changi Museum.

At an hour-long meeting with Mr. Jeyathurai, Director of the Changi Museum, and Mr. Simon Goh, Manager of the Museum, the following details for the Memorial Board were discussed and agreed. Due to the proposed position of the board above the many rows of Badges already fixed to the walls of the Museum, it was decided to have the words “Malayan Volunteer Forces” carved along the bottom of the board so that they may be read more easily from below. A fifth Badge – that of the Kelantan Volunteer Force - is to be added to the board in place of the carved “V”. It was also suggested that a small brass plaque should be fixed to the top of the board, bearing the following words:-

Presented to the Changi Museum  
by the Malayan Volunteers Group  
on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2008.

If there are any queries or comments about the new design, please let Rosemary Fell know as soon as possible, because the order for the board has now been placed with the craftsman who is making it. Unfortunately, the cost of the board has gone up, due to various factors including an increase in the price of teak, and higher charges for the letter carving by £3 per letter. The total cost is now estimated at £600, which, luckily, we have in hand. The cost of the 5 Badges has also been donated.



The board should be ready by the end of May – in time for the RFH Conference at the NMA. If so, it will be available for viewing at the Conference for those MVG Members who are there.

The Presentation of the Memorial Board will take place at the Changi Museum on Friday 12<sup>th</sup> September in the late afternoon, followed by a Reception at the Museum. The event is to be twinned with a Book Launch in the presence of a Minister, Ambassadors and other Dignitaries from the various branches of the Civil Defence Organisations.

The MVG has suggested that, in view of the historical significance of the occasion, the Museum may wish to invite a small number of school children to the event. The history of what happened to the Island during the Japanese Occupation in the Second World War is now being taught in Singapore schools, so that the children of to-day can understand what their grandparents and families went through. This was demonstrated very clearly at Kranji Cemetery, where several busloads of boys from a nearby Catholic High School were attending a Memorial Service with their History Teachers, a couple of days before the anniversary of the Fall of Singapore. However, when questioned, they knew very little about the Malayan Volunteer Forces, or the fact that several battalions of the SSVF were deployed to defend the south and east coasts of the Island of Singapore after mobilization in December 1941.

**If you are hoping to attend the Presentation, please would you let Rosemary Fell know so that numbers can be given to the Museum. Further details of the event will be sent to those attending, when available.**

**If you are intending to travel to Singapore, you are strongly advised to book your flights and accommodation as soon as possible, because Singapore is hosting the first night time Formula 1 Grand Prix at the end of September, and both may be fully booked early on.**

#### **Memorial Service at the Civilian War Memorial.**



*About 1,500 people turned up at the War Memorial Park in Beach Road yesterday to pay their respects to civilians*

*who died during the Japanese Occupation. It is estimated that between 35,000 and 50,000 perished here in World War II.*

*The memorial service, organised by the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry every Feb 15 since 1967, is among the highlights of Total Defence Day.*

*Among the guests were representatives of the Singapore Armed Forces Veterans' League, religious organisations and 59 schools.*

*Some like Mrs Margaret Mary Evans, 82, came from overseas. The Australian, who flew in from Perth, has attended at least 12 memorials with her husband Frank, until he died in 2003 at age 81.*

*He was captured as a soldier with the Australian Army and was a prisoner of war during the Japanese Occupation.*

*Mrs Evans said: "He never spoke much about his life during the war. He was a very kind person and a good man."*

The 41<sup>st</sup> Memorial Service for the Civilian Victims of the Japanese Occupation took place on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> February, in the presence of Dr. Lee Boon Yang, Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts. The War Memorial Park on Beach Road had been transformed with awnings and school bands, and by 8.45 a.m. there was a good gathering of Dignitaries, Ex-Services Associations, Religious Organizations, school children and the general public. We took our seats by 9 a.m. prior to the arrival of the invited guests and the Minister. At 9.30 precisely, the "All Clear" was sounded by the Singapore Civil Defence Force to mark the start of the Service.

The Honour Guards took their places at the 4 corners of the War Memorial accompanied by 2 Buglers and 2 Ghurka Bagpipers. A one-minute silence preceded prayers by inter-religious organizations and the wreath-laying.

"The Last Post" was sounded by the buglers before a second one-minute silence and the sounding of "The Rouse".

After the service it was interesting to meet up with people who had been at the ceremony in February 2007, including the Australian war-widow and her daughter; Simon Goh; Ex-Service Veterans and their President Roy Muthiah; and a couple from England whom we had met last year.

Later we found the old SSVF building in Beach Road, just as Michael Pether described it in the January newsletter. The building was closed up and looked very old, sad and neglected amongst the skyscrapers of modern Singapore. More than 70 years on, it was a nostalgic reminder of things very much in the past, but which should not be forgotten.

### **FEPOW MEMORIAL BUILDING – NATIONAL MEMORIAL ARBORETUM, ALREWAS.**

Following Carol Cooper's invitation to include some information about the Malayan Volunteer Forces in the archival section of the FEPOW Memorial Building, Jonathan Moffatt has agreed to put together some material which will form a good base to which other material can be added in the future. It is proposed that we supply a box file(s) with the following information:-

1. Information from "A History of the Singapore Volunteer Corps 1854-1937" by Captain T.M. Winsley.
2. Information from the SSVF Yearbooks 1937-1940.
3. Brigadier Moir's FMSVF Lines of Communication document.
4. A reading list of both published and unpublished sources including IWM holdings.
5. "The Organisation of the Volunteer Forces 1941" by Audrey Holmes McCormick. (Under copyright)
6. Some photographs of Volunteer Units such as the Armoured Car Brigade.
7. Copies of the MVG newsletter "Apa Khabar" – with articles of interest to those with Volunteer connections.
8. An updated CD of Jonathan Moffatt's database – with accreditation to him.
9. A copy of John Brown's data – with accreditation to him.

It was also suggested that the books in the FEPOW Building relating to or by former Volunteers, should be placed in a section labelled "Volunteer Section" e.g. Ian and Ron Mitchell have written their memoirs; and Drs. Hardie and Pavillard have written their autobiographies.

The upper section of the building should be complete by the 17<sup>th</sup> August, and open to members (including, we presume, MVG Members) on that day, which is the 3<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary of the opening of the Memorial Building.

The MVG is grateful for this recognition of the Volunteers and of their part in the FEPOW story.

### **LEWIS RONALD (RON) PEEK – BY IAN PEEK. Armoured Car Company, Straits Settlements Volunteer Force.**

Ron was born in Shanghai, China, in 1920, the son of English parents. His brother Ian Denys (Denys) Peek, was born about one year later. Their father, Sidney, worked in the business district of Shanghai.

At an early age, Ron was sent to school in England, initially at a primary school near Battle in Sussex and later at a public school called Framlingham College at Framlingham in Suffolk.

In about 1938, Ron sailed to Singapore, his father having moved there from Shanghai. There he joined a rubber broking firm as a trainee rubber broker. In the same year, Ron and Denys joined the Armoured Car Company of the Straits Settlements Volunteer Force. I think at this time the Company must have been equipped with Lanchester armoured cars, because Ron was trained as a second gunner/wireless operator. Parades were held every Tuesday after work – they lasted for about 2 hours.

After the War broke out in 1939, training was stepped up, with two weekly parades, four weekend camps and one two week camp. On 1 December 1941, Ron was called up to full time military service, and his armoured car was sent to Seletar Airfield. Whilst there, he saw the arrival of the "Prince of Wales" and the "Repulse" and their escorting destroyers, which gave a boost to morale.

Shortly afterwards, the Armoured Car Company lost its armoured cars and was re-equipped with Bren Gun Carriers. I think it must have been decided at this time to reduce the company to a platoon. The platoon was sent to Selarang Barracks, where the Gordon Highlanders were based, for the purpose of being trained in the use of the Carriers. One night, Ron and the other members of the platoon were suddenly ordered out of their barrack block, so that room could be made for the survivors of the "Prince of Wales" and the "Repulse". For some reason, they did not appear. Ron recounted to me that before the armoured cars could be handed over to their

new owners, all the bullets for the machine guns had to be removed from the belts which fed the guns – a very laborious task. Army regulations apparently stipulated that while the belts belonged to the cars, the ammunition belonged to the unit.

Once the training was finished, the Carrier Platoon was sent to the headquarters of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the SSVF, which was near Kallang Airfield. At the time of the surrender of Singapore, Ron was in Grange Road, in the Tanglin area of Singapore.

Following the surrender, Ron and the other British prisoners were marched to Changi, where it seems he remained for about three months. After that, the Japanese organized work parties, and Ron was moved to a prison camp on River Valley Road, and later to another camp on Alexandra Road, where a number of warehouses were to be built. At this camp, Ron, Denys and two other men decided to open a “shop”. They pooled their money and made contact with a Chinese lad while marching to and from their work site. Ron would write his “order” for peanuts, sugar, salt etc., and place it, together with some money, in an army pack, which he would drop into the basket of the Chinese lad’s bicycle as he rode past. The lad would “deliver” the goods in the afternoon, and they would be carried back to camp in army packs. Ron and the others would keep what they wanted, and sell the remainder. In about October 1942, the Japanese announced that parties of prisoners would be moved to a place where there was proper accommodation, good food and a hospital. Ron’s party (D Battalion) was marched to the Singapore railway station and loaded into railway wagons for the trip to Ban Pong. The journey was very slow, and there were two official stops each day – one for breakfast and the other for dinner. The steel of the wagons got very hot with the sun beating on it, and at night the steel sweated, making the journey very uncomfortable.

The camp at Ban Pong was flooded and in a state of disrepair. A couple of days later, Ron and his party marched to Kanchanaburi (Kanburi) where they rested for a day before moving on to Tarsao. At this time, Tarsao consisted of two huts, one of which was the cookhouse and the other for the guards. The prisoners were put to work in building huts for their accommodation. Some time later they were taken back to Wampo South, where they worked on building a bridge for the railway. It was at this camp that Ron nearly lost his life. He was working on staging high above the ground, with a Japanese engineer working on some staging above him. The engineer motioned to Ron to pass something to him, but Ron misunderstood what he wanted and unsuccessfully handed up a number of items before giving the engineer what he wanted – a long bolt. The impatient engineer swung the bolt at Ron’s head. Fortunately for Ron, the bolt flicked the brim of his hat – otherwise he would have been knocked out and fallen from the staging.

From Wampo, Ron moved up to Tonchan, where he first witnessed an outbreak of cholera – a terrifying experience. His next move was to Kanyu, where he developed a jungle ulcer on his right leg which he attributed to his skin being pierced by bamboo. Initially, Ron and Denys were able to treat the ulcer using a paste made from a ground up “M & B 693” sulpha tablet which they had been able to obtain. The ulcer was showing signs of healing when the party was ordered to ready itself for a move further up the railway to Hintok. Ron was told that the state of his ulcer precluded him from undertaking the march, and he was sent back to Tarsao. At Tarsao, gangrene set into the leg with the ulcer, and it was amputated in the makeshift hospital there. Ron was able to recover with the assistance of Denys, who managed to get to Tarsao shortly before the operation took place. This occurred in October 1943. Ron’s subsequent movements are unclear, but he was at Nakhon Pathom when the war ended.

After the War, Ron was repatriated to England, and learnt to use an artificial leg at Roehampton.

In 1947, Ron returned to Singapore, and became the managing director of a transport and warehousing company established by his father. He married Helen, an Australian, in Singapore in 1950, and I was born there in 1954 and my sister Rosemary in 1958. The family moved to Western Australia in 1968. Ron worked here for a few years and then retired. He died in 2006.

Ron was not embittered by his experiences and led a full and active life all the years that I knew him.

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Shortly before the surrender of Singapore in February 1942, Ron’s father, Sidney, was working in the cipher section at British military headquarters at Fort Canning, Singapore. Sidney was a civilian, so I assume he must have volunteered for military service. I have no idea of the name of his unit – presumably it was a signals unit of some kind.

At this time Sidney was over 50 years old. When it became apparent that Singapore would fall to the Japanese, he was discharged from military service, with the result that he was interned in Changi Gaol as a civilian for the duration of the War.

Sidney’s wife, Ethel, left Singapore shortly before the surrender. I understand that she was taken to a freighter (name unknown) in Singapore harbour, which sailed for Java. From there she made her way to Colombo. She spent most of the War in Simla, India and Durban, South Africa. She returned to London shortly after the end of the war in Europe.

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Sidney, Ethel, Ron and Denys were reunited in London in 1945.

## THE BATTLE OF KAMPAR – CALL FOR THE PRESERVATION OF THE BATTLE SITE.

Local Malaysian historian **Chye Kooi Loong** has repeatedly been telling the story of the Battle of Kampar over the years. Although he was 79 on January 22<sup>nd</sup> 2008, his one wish is that he lives to see the day that the Green Ridge battleground, with its over 60 remaining machine gun nests, bunkers and war trenches, is finally turned into a well-preserved historical site. During a visit by delegates from the British High Commission to the site in Kampar recently, Mr. Chye said, "I do not know how many years this body of mine has left, but I am willing to fight to the very end – just like the soldiers did during the battle".

He also voiced his disappointment that the site has yet to be preserved. In the Battle of Kampar, the British Battalion (including two platoons of the Perak Battalion – 1/FMSVF – who had been amalgamated with the remnants of the 1<sup>st</sup> Leicesters and 2<sup>nd</sup> East Surreys) together with the other Indian Units of the 6<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Brigades, put up a valiant four-day stand beginning 30<sup>th</sup> December, 1941, against an overpowering Japanese army. Mr. Chye went on to say, "History is not the work of just one race alone. We must remember that the lives lost were those of the Indians, the British and the Japanese amongst others".

Colonel Paul Edwards, a member of the delegation visiting the site, and British Defence Advisor agreed with Mr. Chye and added, "The defence of Malaya was a joint contribution of many races. I hope the Malaysian Government will preserve this place. It is through remembering what happened that we know what to do in the future".

Even with his walking stick in hand, Mr. Chye is still willing to take those interested in learning about the Battle of Kampar to visit the hilly site. Through his efforts to preserve the ridge, he was recently awarded the Member of the British Empire (MBE) by HM The Queen.

**Note:-** In the 6<sup>th</sup> Edition of "Apa Khabar", John Mackie wrote a first hand account of the involvement of the FMSVF in the Battle of Kampar. One platoon (machine gunners) was commanded by 2/Lt. Bill Greetham and the other platoon by John Mackie himself.

**Historical insight:**  
Chye, with Col Paul Edwards (left) and assistant adviser Warrant Officer II Chris Hardman, squatting in one of the machine gun nests at Green Ridge.



## THE ULYSSES STORY



## THE ULYSSES STORY – A Blue Funnel Line Ship. Report by CAPT. JOHN BAX.

Although in trouble herself, she reached Singapore and embarked as many women and children evacuees as she could, slipped her lines, and headed for Fremantle in Australia.

### **MV Ulysses (4) 1913-1942 torpedoed and sunk off Cape Hatteras in position 34° 23' N 75° 35' W**

Ulysses (4) was built in 1913 by Workman Clark & Co. at Belfast with a tonnage of 14,499 grt, a length of 563 ft 2 ins, a beam of 68 ft 4 ins, and a service speed of 13.5 knots. Sister of the NESTOR, she was completed for the China Mutual Steam Navigation Co. and deployed on the Glasgow – Liverpool – Brisbane service. She became a troop ship in 1915 and ferried troops from Australia to Suez. In 1917 she trooped in the North Atlantic, carrying American soldiers. She resumed commercial activities in September 1920 and operated on the Glasgow – Liverpool – Cape Town – Australian ports – Brisbane service. In 1928 her Master was Capt. R.D. Owen OBE, who flew the swallow-tailed house flag of Commodore of Blue Funnel Line.

By 1941 Britain was being subjected to continual bombing. ULYSSES urgently required an overhaul, but it was too risky to do this task in the U.K., so she was sent to Hong Kong for the refit. After calling at Cape Town and Durban, it was across the Indian Ocean to Ceylon and Penang, then Singapore. Soon after, she arrived in Hong Kong. Here she was met by a tender who delivered a few hundred workers. They immediately got to work chipping the paintwork off the ship's side, and off the masts and railings. Before she even tied up, half the paintwork had been stripped.

Apparently there must have been paint remaining from the First World War, as all the crew were billeted ashore while the ship was in the hands of the dockyard. ULYSSES had a good soccer team and played games against the different Army and Royal Navy ships' teams. After the games they had great social evenings with the soldiers and naval boys. Most of those lads would eventually be slain or made POWs by the Japanese.

Then one day, Hong Kong got a typhoon warning. The ULYSSES was in dry-dock with all her engines lying on the dock. She was taken out of dry-dock and towed to a point where she was moored to buoys fore and aft. This is normal practice, except that a ship is meant to drive full speed against the wind just to remain steady. But she had no engines. When the typhoon struck, she was soon torn from the buoys. The helpless ship was blown at considerable speed until she came to a grinding halt. She was pushed on to an islet, Little Green Island, and grounded. So she delayed further and remained in Hong Kong until December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941 – Pearl Harbour Day.

ULYSSES immediately left Hong Kong and was ordered to make for Manila in the Philippines. However, the wireless operator gave the Captain (Captain J.A. Russell) a message that Manila was under severe attack from the Japanese, so Captain Russell decided to make for Singapore, although low on fuel. She was sailing with one engine; the second one was lying on the deck, such was the rush to get away from Hong Kong. ULYSSES was doing five knots and although she was attacked a few times, none of the attacks was concentrated. She did eventually reach Singapore, much to the surprise of people there, who believed she had been lost.

ULYSSES was very lucky to have survived when faster ships were being sunk, including the REPULSE and the famous PRINCE OF WALES, the newest battleship in the fleet. These were dark days indeed, with the Japanese conquering all before them. She made a quick stop in Singapore to obtain more bunkers from other ships and to embark many women and children who desperately needed to leave before the Japanese Army reached Singapore.

The situation was dire and ULYSSES took on as many evacuees as she could possibly carry and accommodate with life-saving equipment. The crew, by this time, was desperate for rest, but in the true tradition of the Blue Funnel Line, they served above and beyond expectations. ULYSSES slipped her lines, leaving them on the dock, and sailed.

It is not known how she obtained the extra bunkers but it is thought they obtained them from the Blue Funnel Ship, TALHYBIUS. Possibly the transfer was done with drums or even buckets. For certain the crew accomplished it with determination in the face of danger. TALHYBIUS, damaged by bombing, was on fire at the Empire Dry Dock. Eventually her crew managed to drag her across the entrance to the dry-dock and scuttle her, thus disabling the dry-dock. The Japanese later shot several of TALHYBIUS's crew on the wharf. Some escaped, only to become POWs, while some managed to flee Singapore on other ships.

MV ULYSSES left Singapore on December 12<sup>th</sup> 1941 and made Fremantle, Australia, on December 31<sup>st</sup>. When she arrived in Fremantle there was no room to berth at the quay, so she had to tie up alongside another ship. All her evacuees were taken ashore and looked after by the various refugee organizations. These groups were well organized in Fremantle, which was a front line arrival port for the evacuation of Singapore.

Again ULYSSES was put back together and became a seaworthy ship once more. Meanwhile, the crew had become friendly with the crew of the ship lying alongside. When ULYSSES was leaving Fremantle, the entire crew of the other ship assembled on the after-deck and sang a song called, "The Maoris' Farewell". They continued the serenade until well out of sight. Such a romantic event for a bunch of tough and tired seamen.

The next port of call was Adelaide, where the ship was to get the final touches to her repairs. ULYSSES stayed in Adelaide for a few weeks. However, all good things come to an end, and she had to continue her voyage, as she was still a long way from home. After Adelaide came Melbourne, and then Sydney, where more cargo was loaded for England. At Sydney, ULYSSES took on more passengers who had escaped from Singapore on other vessels and were heading back to England. After departing Sydney with her cargo and new passengers, she would see more action. With a now rested crew, she headed for the Panama Canal, but her trip was far from over. It was known that her transit through the Panama Canal would be

reported by enemy agents. ULYSSES made the Canal transit in good time and again entered dangerous waters. She proceeded up the Florida East Coast, possibly intending to reach a point further north before altering to a NE by E course for Liverpool.

Everything seemed to be going well until the night of April 8<sup>th</sup> 1942, when she collided with a Panamanian tanker GOLD HEELS. ULYSSES's bow was extensively damaged below the waterline and speed was reduced to 7 knots. Her Master Capt. J.A. Russell, altered course for the nearest port, Newport News. He may not have been aware that German submarines were operating in the area. There is some doubt as to whether he received an Admiralty advisory about U-Boat activity in the area.

**On April 11<sup>th</sup> 1942, at 16.30 hrs, ULYSSES as torpedoed by U-160 (Kapitan Leutnant Georg Lassen – Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves). She was 45 nm south of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, in position 34o 23' N 75o 35' W.**

The first torpedo struck the No.6 hold. A second one hit ULYSSES abreast of the funnel and she very quickly settled deep in the water. A third torpedo may have struck her, but failed to explode after glancing off the ship's hull plating. Several persons said that the submarine never surfaced. Some said that children were playing on deck when the first explosion occurred. Everyone fully realized the situation, but proceeded to their stations with calm and order. This was attributed to the fact that the passengers had participated in many drills in their three weeks aboard ship. Nine of her lifeboats were launched successfully and stood off the now sinking ULYSSES.

The very last of ULYSSES's crew to abandon her were Captain J.A. Russell and the on watch quartermaster who had been at the wheel at the time of the attack. The quartermaster refused to leave Captain Russell on his own and assisted in searching the ship. In spite of the danger, they ensured that nobody was left on board. They also made sure that "essential documents" were thrown overboard in special weighted bags. The ship was settling very fast and was well down by the stern, and could have sunk or rolled over at any moment. They eventually abandoned her on the last life raft.

Before abandoning ship, the wireless operator had sent out the distress call of the day for a vessel being attacked by a U-Boat. This brought United States Army patrol bombers to look for the lifeboats. Seventy-five minutes after the last explosion, a United States Navy warship, USS MANLEY, picked up the survivors. MANLEY picked up the ten lifeboats from ULYSSES, about 290 souls. One injured crewman sustained an injury boarding a lifeboat, but there was no loss of life to any crew member or passenger.

Included among the passengers were Mrs. D.J. Wickett of Singapore, who was known in England as Vera Wood, an opera singer; her seven-months old son, Peter, the youngest passenger aboard; Mrs. Charlotte Pugh, eighty-six, of Mountain Ashe, South Wales, the oldest survivor; George H. Davies, a London exporter, and Miss Katherine Lacy of Wallesey, England, a ship stewardess who had twice before had ships torpedoed under her. She was decorated with the British Naval Cross. The ship's company was appreciative of the reception given them in Charleston. Disembarking at the navy yard, they were taken in charge by a trained naval group; H. de C. Harsten, British vice-consul; and Red Cross workers. Despite short notice, they managed to put together a real meal and a big supply of sandwiches, cakes and coffee for the nearly three hundred survivors.

After a stay in Charleston, all were sent north to New York and from there, even further north. Here they boarded a vessel bound for England in a North Atlantic Convoy. In due course, they docked at Greenock in Scotland. Many months after leaving Singapore and Australia, everyone was home at last.

### **A Tribute to a Merchant Navy Crew who were glad to be able to help.**

**"We Never Give Up"**

**Blue Funnel Motto**

**"Certum Pete Finem"**

**(Hold Course to Destination.)**

The sinking of the ULYSSES was reported in two Charleston newspapers, "The Charleston Evening Post", on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> April 1942, and "The News and Courier", on Tuesday morning 14<sup>th</sup> April 1942. Neither was permitted to name the vessel, nor the American warship which rescued the crew and passengers, under war-time news restrictions.

MVG Member, Kathleen Reeve was also on board the ill-fated ULYSSES, with her 2 year-old daughter Rosemary. Her personal account of how they survived the sinking is told in graphic terms:-

"..we sailed across the Pacific and through the Panama Canal into the Caribbean Sea. One afternoon, I was in our cabin while Rosemary was having her afternoon sleep, when there was a terrific thud and bang, and the alarm bells rang. I gathered Rosemary up, grabbed a small blanket; my "panic bag" containing our marriage certificate and birth certificates;

my husband's will and some Horlicks Malted Milk Tablets, and left with our life-jackets for our life-boat stations. On the way upstairs, I met people coming down to their cabins to collect their life-jackets.

There was no panic, but I learned that a torpedo had hit the bows of the ship. Lifeboats were lowered and we got into them, and although the sea was quite rough, we all managed to get away from the ill-fated ship.

Living in the crew's quarters, I was the only woman with a child in our life-boat. The rest were mostly Chinese crew with one or two European Officers. We saw another torpedo streaking through the water and hit the ULYSSES mid-ships, and the ship sank very majestically beneath the waves. The Captain and Chief Engineers sailed by us on a raft, and we took them into our life-boat. I remember seeing boxes of cheese and other debris floating around us.

The sea was rough and I was very sick and I suppose I must have had one arm hanging over the side of the life-boat because the Captain shouted at me, to warn me that there may be sharks around. The boats seemed to drift apart, and twilight came.

It began to get cold, and I became increasingly afraid that we would never be rescued. The Chinese crewmen were restless and the Officers had to strike some of them with the oars to restore order. Then, out of the twilight, loomed a big ship. It was an American Destroyer, which had apparently picked up our May Day call. They threw a net over the side of the ship, which stood high out of the water. When my turn came I had to wait my time until the life-boat was near enough so that I could jump and grab the net. I climbed up with Rosemary clinging on to me. Near the top, a sailor grabbed Rosemary by one arm, and I screamed at him, "Don't drop my baby". He told me to throw my bag up on deck, but I had seen others doing the same and their bags had landed in the sea, so I ignored him and kept it with me. We had to be quick getting up the net, because the submarine might still have been lurking. We were taken to the Officer's Ward Room and I noticed a Teddy Bear sitting on a shelf. It looked exactly like the one Rosemary had, but I had left hers in our cabin on the ULYSSES. I remarked about it to the Stewardess, who confirmed that it was Rosemary's and that she had picked it up when she was checking our cabin. Rosemary still has the Teddy Bear to this day. [Editor: when the Duke of Edinburgh visited my father's grave in Chungkai in October 1996, I told him the story of my Teddy Bear, which he found highly amusing.]

We were given the Officers' Quarters to sleep in. I had a top bunk and as the sea became increasingly rough, the destroyer dipped and tossed from side to side, and I had the greatest difficulty in holding on to Rosemary and the bunk-rail throughout the night, to avoid being pitched on to the deck.

Later the next day, on 13<sup>th</sup> April 1942, we were landed at Charleston, South Carolina. We were greeted by an enthusiastic crowd, and a band, as we were the first women and children survivors to be landed there. A coach took us to a hotel, and we were given a hot meal. We were also allowed to send one cable to a relative. I didn't want to frighten or upset my parents, so I sent mine to my brother in New York. He immediately wired to the British Consul to detain me, and he would come to meet me. However, I never received the message from the Consul, and I left for New York by train with the other survivors. On reaching New York, we were taken to another hotel and the ladies who made up "Bundles for Britain" gave out clothing. I felt that my brother and his wife - a paediatrician - would see that Rosemary and I had sufficient warm clothing for crossing the Atlantic, so I didn't accept any clothing. The British Consul also loaned us all £20.

My brother finally caught up with us, and took us to his home, but my sister-in-law and I had differences about whether I should stay and work in America, which would mean leaving Rosemary in a crèche, or go home. So I decided to return to England, as I had promised Eric. No mention was made about clothing, and I was far too proud to ask them, so I had to go humbly back to the "Bundles for Britain" depot, and ask for warm clothing, at least for Rosemary. That very day, some kind person had donated 100 dollars for the survivors of the torpedoed ship, as we were called, and they decided to take me out shopping. First they bought me a suitcase and then some beautiful clothes for Rosemary, and a blouse suit and overcoat for me.

The American Red Cross organized our passage back to England, and we sailed from New York to Nova Scotia, where we waited for nearly 2 weeks until a convoy of nearly 100 ships had assembled. In the meantime, our ship had filled up with survivors from other torpedoed ships. To start with, Canadian Corvettes sailed with us, rounding up any stragglers as it was essential that we all kept together. Halfway across the Atlantic, British Corvettes took over from the Canadians. It was then the wolf-packs of German Submarines became a menace, and many times during the voyage depth charges were dropped. Thanks to the brave sailors manning the Corvettes, all ships in the convoy arrived safely at Greenock.

Although we were all refugee-survivors, we had to be questioned by the Military Authorities. I was questioned at great length because I had more money than the others. Nearly everyone else had spent their money, plus the £20 loaned by the British Consul, but I had saved all mine. I angrily told the Authorities that my husband was a Japanese Prisoner of War and that they should mind their own business, so they let me go.

We were just in time, with the help of a lady from the Women's Voluntary Service to catch the one train leaving for London and home, nearly 3½ months after leaving Singapore".



## MY MOTHER'S WAR – BY JENNIFER HOWE

**Jennifer's account of how she and her mother, Thyra Godber, spent the war years far from home.**

A six-month old infant when the Pacific war began, I was five years old when I first met a gaunt, somewhat forbidding, dark stranger. This was my father? For those interminable years leading up to that reunion, it had been just me and Mum – she was my world, my all!

Now, looking back, it strikes me that while those long-ago wars were played out by big boys with rough playground tactics and dangerous toys, the more low-key valour of women tended to go un-remarked. We know that so many people suffered in the Pacific War – the POWs – both male and female, thousands of Malayan Chinese who were massacred by the occupying forces; and those Indians who received ferocious treatment because they refused to join forces with the Japanese. Yet, while their men were fighting or incarcerated in prison camps, women around the world kept the home fires burning. They worked in offices, munitions factories, raised the kiddies and struggled to maintain an even keel. Week after week they wrote chatty, *chin up darling* letters, while their own chins trembled.

In mid-January, 1942, my father, John Godber sailed on the *Gorgon* from Fremantle in Western Australia, to join his armoured car company in the FMSVF. Ten days after the ship arrived in Singapore, the city fell. In May 1942, my mother received word that both my father and her father were alive and had been interned by the Japanese. She didn't discover her own mother's fate until after the war ended. (In fact, her mother had drowned when the *Tanjong Pinang* was shelled by the Japanese on February 16 after it sailed from Pom Pom Island, where she and a few others who had survived the shelling of the *Kuala* had sheltered for several days.) For months, my mother pictured her parents and husband together, somewhere in Singapore, supporting one another.

Not until July, 1942 was Mum given leave to write monthly single-page letters to John. He received very few of those letters. She received only a few censored post cards, which John personalized by appending ridiculous coded sentences, so that she would recognize him. Until the war ended, she wasn't to know that he was keeping a diary whose daily entries were in effect an ongoing open letter to her. In those – occasionally darkly humorous entries – he recorded everything from the prosaic matters of food and health to his dreams – *Last night I dreamed that I was being married again but I'm faithful even in my dreams. It was to you I was being married ...* and a few days later: *Three years ago at this hour we were at Cluny having tea and we had been married about 6 ½ hours. Well people always say the first 3 years are the worst so I think we ought to make out all right ...* He scribbled too, his hopes, occasional despair, his eternal preoccupation with food and always – between the lines – his love.

Meanwhile, stranded in Australia, cash-strapped and with no prospects of any immediate funds, my mother struggled to make ends meet. For a while, she worked as a secretary in Sydney, juggling her job with raising a child. Finally, some kind people offered her a safe haven for a peppercorn rent in a station overseer's hut on Hazeldell sheep station, in the outback north of Sydney. She continued writing her loving, reassuring letters to John. She never knew whether he would receive them – posting those letters must have seemed akin to popping them in a bottle and tossing the bottle into the sea. On October 15<sup>th</sup>, 1942, she wrote: *My Darling – It is a cold, wet night and I am sitting by my cottage fire with my feet tucked into those black bedroom slippers you gave me. They are lasting me well and the toe of one slipper is darned with blue wool and that of the other with red wool!* The pathos of this letter – and many more like it – becomes unspeakably poignant when you reflect on the stories tucked between the lines.

Child of a planter and married to one too, she had become used to a leisurely life and a houseful of servants. Now, like thousands of other women, she put her shoulder to reality's wheel. Raising her first child alone, she wrote to the mother-in-law she had yet to meet: *I know all about loneliness now Mother ...* She learned to grow vegetables and wrote to John: *Do you remember how bad I was at gardening? I am getting better at growing things here ... I do my gardening when I have put Jennifer to bed and I am unhampered by continually watching that she does not dig up my precious plants ...* She chopped wood for heating and cooking and together we gathered kindling from the yard outside. During our sojourn at Hazeldell, she shared the station chores, milking cows, stoking the hay, helping to cook enormous meals for gangs of sheepshearers; and of course she did her bit for the war effort by weaving a huge camouflage net.

It was a small two-bedroom wooden cottage with a corrugated iron roof. In the sittingroom-cum-diningroom-cum-kitchen she cooked on a wood-burning range; and for extra heat, she coaxed the huge open fire-place into a roaring blaze. The lean-to bathroom was equipped with a chip heater – a tall cylinder with the water pipe running up its centre. Stuffed with gum bark, twigs and rubbish, you set a match to it, turned the tap on ... and presto! Instant hot water! On cold, winter evenings, Mum heated water in buckets on the range, and on the floor of the dim room, lit only by the logs crackling in the fireplace, we soaked in the zinc hipbath. In high summer, I bathed outside in a tin tub; or simply splashed in the creek.

For the weekly wash, she lit the fire under the big copper up at the homestead. When the steam began to rise, we bundled all the clothes into the bubbling soapy water and Mum would agitate the tangled mass with a

long stick. I can still smell those hot, soapy clothes stewing, was fascinated then by the little cotton-wrapped lozenge of Reckitt's Blue – "Out of the blue comes the whitest wash ..." Later, my job would be to lay the handkerchiefs on the grass to dry. Later still, it would be my job to fold them.

For shopping expeditions, my mother caught gentle old Laddie from the horse paddock and harnessed him to the sulkie. Beneath silvery gum trees we bowled along to the little town of Bungandor, crossing sun-bleached paddocks, rattling across cattle grids and splashing through creeks. Mum was a bit scared of Laddie, but the temperamental old station car represented a far greater challenge. On the rare occasion that she borrowed it, she battled 'manfully' with the crank which had a kick like a mule and seemed to have an extraordinarily spiteful will of its own; and how she dreaded stalling on cattle grids!

Oh and the food, glorious food! ... Butter, cheese and milk, lamb chops, sausages, lamb's brains egged and breaded, fried and served on toast; and lamb's fry – fried lamb's liver – a specialty for the sheep shearers' breakfast. On special occasions, lamingtons and Pavlova cake with lashings of cream. Although there was some rationing in Australia, we ate like kings on the station and the comparison between our relatively lavish provisions and John's meagre diet scarcely bears contemplation.

A bout of measles hit us both simultaneously. Desperately ill, my mother recalls lying in her darkened room, weakly calling out to me that I would have to fetch my own drink of water. Notwithstanding, she remembers our time at Hazeldell as a peaceful interlude, where she was contented and the station owners became staunch friends.

A year passed peacefully – indeed it might have seemed almost an idyll, had it not been for the circumstances that brought us there. But in a community of kindly adults, with no other children to keep me in my place, I was becoming spoilt and she realized that it was time I started mixing with other children. In April 1944, she took a job as a live-in housekeeper at a C of E orphanage operated by Anglican nuns in Goulburn, near Sydney. Here she was responsible for mending, supervising and – because the nuns were a cloistered order – she took the older girls on outings – perhaps a challenging task for a shy, genteel young woman. She had a small room to herself and I slept in an adjoining room with the youngest children. I remember our time there – swimming with hordes of girls in the billabong; sitting with my mother as she mended clothes in her little room; eating meals with a lot of other girls, who soon cut me down to size, teasing me and saying that 'Jenny speaks posh'!

Mostly from broken homes, the girls seemed a rough tribe. When a child arrived at the home, one of the Sisters would give her a thorough cleanup – a steaming hot bath with scrubbing brush and don't spare the carbolic soap, hair washed squeaky clean and finally, to a chorus of outraged yells a thorough de-lousing. One day, Mum lost her engagement ring. She always suspected that it was stolen by one of the girls. On that day, she read in the paper that a ship transporting prisoners from Malaya to Japan had been sunk by our bombers. At the time, it seemed like an omen and she says that this was her lowest ebb.

In February 1945, with the war in Europe drawing to a close, my mother decided to return to England to stay with John's parents, so that upon his eventual release, he would be able to reunite with us all. Before we departed, a generous Australian woman pressed large packages of sugar on Mum to take to the folk in 'the old country'. In April 1945, we boarded a huge, converted troop ship, packed with women and children, all crammed into tiny cabins. Tensions ran high. It can't have been an easy voyage. To avoid submarines, we took the interminable southern route via Wellington, New Zealand and the Panama Canal. In Wellington, the citizens welcomed us warmly, taking us to the Botanical Gardens and organizing sports for the 'boat children'. Mum came in a close second in the mother's race!

News of the European War's end came in as the ship lay anchored in the clear blue waters off Bermuda. My mother says that it was uncanny to hear the clipped BBC accents as the momentous news crackled over the loudspeakers, while beyond, gentle waves lapped on the pink tropical beaches and the palm trees sighed. A few hours out of Bermuda, we saw distant ships and, full steam ahead, we gradually caught up with them to take our place in the convoy, which would snake its way across the Atlantic. There were still German submarines out there.

It was Whitsun when our ship entered Liverpool Harbour. We were greeted with ships' sirens and water hoses sending glittering shafts of water into the air, while pleasure boats encircled us, scooting to and fro across the waves. Everyone shouted and waved and there were few dry eyes along that ship's railing. Later that year, on October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1945 – ten days after my fifth birthday – *MV Worcester* docked in England, with John on board. My mother and father were re-united in a relative's London Club. In my mind's eye, I see her sitting waiting for him to come through the door of her room. For me, even thinking about that reunion is still unbearably moving.

#### **WEBSITES TO VISIT**

Tony Banham is one of the keynote speakers at the RFH Conference in May. He is the leading researcher on the Hong Kong Volunteers. His book "Not the Slightest Chance" can be accessed on the following website. His new book will soon be out.

[http://www.hkupress.org/asp/bookinfo.asp?PD\\_NUM=9622097804](http://www.hkupress.org/asp/bookinfo.asp?PD_NUM=9622097804)

## **THE BEDOK HILL MASSACRE**

Following the extracts from Chan Cheng Yean's harrowing account of what happened to him during this massacre, and the miraculous way in which he escaped, two other stories of Volunteer Officers can be told.

Haji Mubin Sheppard was determined to trace the events leading up to the deaths of two personal friends and brother Volunteer Officers in late February 1942 - Captain Raja Aman Shah and Lieutenant Dato' Othman bin Kering, Dato' Naning.

### **Lieutenant Dato' Othman bin Kering**

The Lieutenant was the sixteenth holder of the title Dato' Naning, bestowed on him in 1935 in recognition of his outstanding work in the administration of regulations covering a range of topics from land ownership to religious observances and agricultural practices. He joined the Malacca Volunteer Corps as a private, and encouraged many other Malays to follow his example. Having worked his way up through the ranks, he became the first Malay Machine Gun Officer in the Malacca Battalion or, indeed, in any other Volunteer Battalion. When mobilized on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1941, he went down to Singapore as a Lieutenant, along with his platoon of machine-gunners, where he showed himself to be an excellent leader of men.

### **Captain Raja Aman Shah**

Married to a daughter of the then Sultan of Kedah, Captain Raja Aman Shah was the son of the late Raja Kechil Sulong of Perak, and considered to be one of the most able Malay officers in the Malayan Civil Service. When the Japanese invaded, he was District Officer in Port Dickson, but he obtained his release from the MCS so that he could join his Volunteer unit when it was mobilized at the beginning of December 1941. With the Negri Sembilan Battalion (3/FMSVF) he was first posted to Port Swettenham, then back to Port Dickson, before going to Malacca and finally to Singapore. Many other locally-born Volunteers, when offered the option of returning to their homes when they reached Port Dickson, decided to be demobilized, but the Captain elected to remain in uniform, and served in a combined company of Volunteers from the FMS in defence of Singapore.

After the surrender of Singapore on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1942, all locally-born military personnel were collected at Farrer Park and were then allowed to disperse. Those who lived on the mainland peninsular stayed with friends until they were able to cross the Causeway to go home. About a week later, the Japanese directed that all those who had served in the Armed Forces of the Federation, and who lived on the mainland should report to specified centres, from where they would be sent home. Many, fearing a trap remained in hiding, but Dato' Naning, Raja Aman Shah and Lieutenants Ariffin and Wahid of the Malay Regiment reported to the Japanese as directed. Together with about 30 Malacca Chinese, they were taken back to Farrer Park and detained in the Club House. There they were given daily work on very meagre rations.

The Malay Officers were interrogated on a daily basis by Japanese Officers, including, on at least one occasion, Captain Mohan Singh, of the Indian National Army, who tried, unsuccessfully, to persuade the Malay Officers to join the INA. News of the detention of Raja Aman Shah reached his relatives in Perak and they, together with his brother-in-law Tunku Abdul Rahman, tried to get him released. Refusing to leave without his fellow Malay Officers, Raja Aman Shah remained at Farrer Park.

On 28<sup>th</sup> February, two Japanese Officers arrived at the Park, accompanied by a Malay wearing a special band on the left arm of his uniform bearing the letter "F". (for Fujiwara). This man was Ibrahim Ya'acob – president of the Kesatuan Muda Melayu, a Malay political organization. He had been imprisoned by the British for his activities in this organization. One of the Japanese – an American trained man, who spoke fluent English - wanted to release the five Malay Officers, but Ibrahim Ya'acob violently opposed this, saying that they were pro-British and anti-Japanese.

When the Japanese and Ibrahim had gone, the Malay Officers and the rest of the Malayan detachment at Farrer Park were ordered to march to Tanjong Katong Road, where they were left under guard without food or drink in a field. At dusk, they were taken to a large house with a fenced compound, where a well-armed guard of Japanese soldiers was waiting. All personal belongings, including their unit badges and badges of rank were removed from the men. With their hands tied behind them, they were roughly bundled into three military vehicles and driven to the East Coast Road. At the site of a British anti-aircraft gun emplacement, on a low hill near the sea front at Bedok, the men were ordered to get out. They were grouped into three sections of about thirty men each, with Dato' Naning, Raja Aman Shah and the other Malay officers in the second group. The third group was made up of the Malacca Chinese Volunteers of which Chan Cheng Yean was one. The three groups of men were marched up a small lane which wound its way up the low hill. By this time darkness had fallen, and in turn, each group was marched to an area further up the hill where trenches had been dug by the British gun crews as shelter from the bombers. Here they were massacred, and their bodies, falling into the trenches, were covered with planks of wood. But for the miraculous survival of Chan Cheng Yean, no-one would have known about the Bedok Hill Massacre.

Haji Mubin Sheppard's research into how his two friends met their deaths, and his regard for them can be summed up in his own words:-

"The names of Captain Raja Aman Shah and Lieutenant Dato' Othman bin Kering are inscribed on the towering stone monument at Kranji, but those who knew and loved them will hope for a living monument as well. If the qualities of courage, devotion to duty, and love of their fellow-men and a staunch faith in their religion, which both men possessed in full measure and demonstrated steadfastly during their all too short lives, are cultivated and practiced by those who honour their memory, they will not have died in vain".

## **VOLUNTEER MEDICS – A medal collector’s perspective.**

**By Paul Riches.**

Earlier medical personnel had paved the way in dealing with the often unique diseases found in the East and were often considered as the pioneers in their field. Many of them felt it was their duty to join the local volunteer unit and consequently there are to be found some interesting combinations of awards to medical personnel.

During the Second World War medical personnel who served in the volunteer forces played an important role none more so than in times of adversity especially during their period of internment under the Japanese. Not only did they have the continual problem of combating disease within the camp, they were often exposed to considerable risk when treating their patients or negotiating with the Japanese for medicines or trying to prevent seriously ill patients from joining the working parties, often receiving ill treatment themselves from the Japanese in trying to keep their patients alive. This on top of adjusting to life as a prisoner of war!

I have several medical volunteer recipients in my collection of whom I will focus on two.

The first of these is **Dr. William R C Middleton** who was born in India of Scottish extraction and was educated in Aberdeen.

Shortly after qualifying as a doctor he emigrated to Singapore to take up his new post eventually rising to be Medical Officer of Health in Singapore in 1894. He joined the Singapore Volunteer Corps and for his long service received the Colonial Auxiliary Forces Decoration. Middleton was considered a medical pioneer in Singapore and in recognition of his 27 year medical career in Singapore, the Middleton Hospital was named after him. In 1985 the hospital was absorbed into the Tan Tock Seng hospital and renamed the Department of Communicable Diseases.

During the First World War he served in Singapore with the Singapore Field Ambulance and was mentioned in despatches for his home service. He retired to the UK where he died in 1921.

There is a stained glass window in the Glenmuick Parish Church at Ballater which commemorates his father, the Rev. William Middleton, which was paid for by Dr. Middleton and his brother.

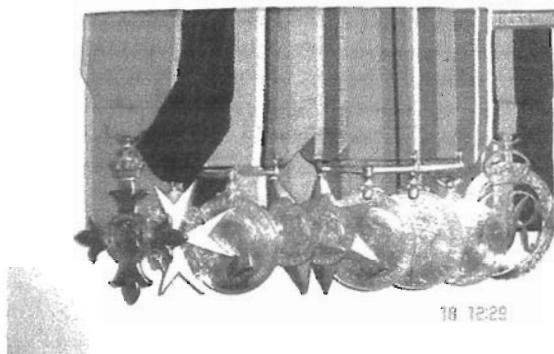


*The Colonial Auxiliary Forces Decoration awarded to Middleton*

The second of my recipients is **Dr. William Edward Hutchinson** whose medal group is a wonderful example of both military and civilian service.

A graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, Hutchinson served in France during the First World War with the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) which has always struck me as odd as theoretically he should have joined the Royal Army Medical Corps but perhaps he objected to the war and yet still felt a moral obligation to do his bit.

He emigrated to Singapore after the war and immediately joined the SSVF eventually commanding the Singapore Volunteer Field Ambulance HQ. Like the other Volunteers he was interned by the Japanese. He is mentioned in David Nelson's book on Changi as a particular friend. I haven't established whether he went up country to Thailand. That research is still to be done. After the war he re-joined his employer the Singapore City Council and Government Health Service and was awarded the OBE in 1955 as the Assistant Director of Medical Services. A prominent lecturer he published several papers and lectured extensively at the University of Malaya. Prior to his retirement he was made a Commander of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem



His medal group consist of ; OBE, Order of St John of Jerusalem, British War Medal (1914/18), 1939/45 Star, Pacific Star, Defence Medal, War Medal, Coronation Medal, Efficiency Decoration top bar Malaya.

And then there are our two famous Volunteer medics; Dr. Robert Hardie and Dr. Stanley Pavillard. Hardie's autobiography, "The Burma Siam Railway", was published by the Imperial War Museum in 1983, whilst Pavillard wrote a racy little novel, "Enemy No. 19", published by the Pentland Press in 1977. Pavillard was also author of, "Bamboo Doctor", published in 1960 by Macmillan & Co. Pavillard's war services were recognized by the MBE in 1947, whilst Hardie received nothing. Pavillard's obituary was published in the BMJ of 20<sup>th</sup> September 1997. A "google" of Pavillard reveals several entries all of which are worth reading.

[www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=2058143](http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=2058143)

[www.bmj.com/archive/7110/7110c.htm](http://www.bmj.com/archive/7110/7110c.htm)

[www.cofepow.org.uk/pages/medical\\_experiences.htm](http://www.cofepow.org.uk/pages/medical_experiences.htm)

#### **FROM KEPPEL ROAD STATION TO BUTTERWORTH BY TRAIN – by D. & R. Fell.**

For 20 years we had planned to travel by train from Singapore to KL, and then take the overnight sleeper to Butterworth – NOT on the Orient Express, but on the normal *keretapi ekspres*. With great excitement, we went down to the station to book our seats. Imagine our disappointment to be met with the words "Oh, the overnight sleeper no longer runs from KL to Butterworth. It was taken off last month."

So, we booked first class tickets (at half price for OAPs!) on the day train, which was scheduled to leave Singapore at 7.40 a.m. and arrive at Butterworth at 9.30 in the evening. It seemed a long journey, but we arrived at the station at 7a.m. armed with books, games, a packed breakfast and mounting anticipation for an exciting day. The 1<sup>st</sup> class carriage looked alright. "We'll be able to stroll down to the dining car for lunch and dinner", said my husband hopefully. One look at the buffet car told us that this was not to be – a cup of coffee and a bun, or, perhaps, a *nasi goreng* if we were lucky!

We set off – slowly. Out we got just before the Causeway to go through Customs, and the whole train was checked. Then we were off. We settled down to enjoy the marathon journey, and it was quite an adventure. Before we had gone very far, the carriage door fell off. A fellow passenger mended this, and we started again amid lots of very black smoke from the diesel engine. About 2 miles from KL we came to another halt, and eventually had to be pulled into the station by a relief engine! Finally we arrived at Butterworth at 10.30 p.m. after the lights and air conditioning failed, and we had to move carriages. Perhaps we'll wait for the trains to be upgraded before we try them again. We flew back to Singapore!

## INFORMATION EXCHANGE

John Hedley writes:-

May I correct one small error in Audrey McCormick's footnote (to the article on Dr. P.M. Kirkwood in "Apa Khabar" Edition 13) on Page 4 Paragraph 3. Q.A. Lydia McLean became Mrs. Gordon Bennett and Q.A. 'Woody' Woodman became Mrs. Philbrick. I have spoken to Audrey, and she is happy for this correction to be made. I didn't hear from 'Woody' at Christmas. She was widowed, and I am assuming she must be no longer with us.

Alison Brierley writes:-

Your very kind thoughts and sympathy in your card (sent on behalf of the MVG) reached me soon after Louise, my mother, died. The funeral was solemn but very loving, and there were many clear recollections of Louise's active days, in wartime and later as a mother and grandmother. The family get-together, including cousins I hadn't seen for a long time, was heartwarming. The funeral had to take place barely a week after she died, due to the crematorium's timetable over Christmas, but it seems that the notice in the Telegraph has brought further messages in, which my brother reads to Geoffrey. I was very touched to read your obituary for Louise. I drew on the book, too, ("The Rainbow through the Rain") in some of my words at the funeral. That other mine of information is the album 'Lulu's War', put together by my parents. We had a worrying time, when it seemed that Geof had pneumonia. We were reconciled to the fact that this could worsen, however he rallied tremendously when we all visited him. It was quite a little party, gathered around him. Ever since, he has been recovering, amazingly, even without antibiotics. His mind and conversation continue to be alert, when awake.

Andrew Hwang from Kuala Lumpur writes:-

Thank you for your e-mail. I am back in Kuala Lumpur. It is indeed a pity that I could not stay longer in Singapore, as my wife and I had hoped to meet you.

I will try to find out some more about Melvin Sheppard's article. I am a registered researcher with the Malaysian National Archives and I am sure I would be able to track down this article there.

I have made contact with Ivan Ho and we spoke briefly. He is retired and helps out with the Malaysian Association for the Blind when he is not at his club. He has never heard of the Memorial Sunday ceremony in K.L! I will try to get him involved this year. Is it alright for me to arrange to get MVG officially represented at the ceremony? (Editor: The MVG is very grateful to Andrew for this offer, and has accepted gratefully.) I do not think MVG is represented, but I could be mistaken. I thought I had better check with you first in case there is some sort of MVG procedure I need to comply with. In "Apa Khabar" you mentioned there was a 3<sup>rd</sup> member from Malaysia. Do you have his/her contact details? I will try to get him/her involved too. [Note: Bentley Giles Choi has now decided not to join the MVG – his area of research is not covered by the Group.]

I am planning to attend the 12<sup>th</sup> September 2008 event in Singapore. Would you be there?

If you are reading this in Singapore, do try to get books from Monsoon Books Pte Ltd. This is a Singaporean publisher specializing in re-publishing long out of print colonial/wartime non-fiction books like Walter Gibson's "The Boat" (1952) and Edwin Brown's "Indiscreet Memories" (1937). These books are very much cheaper in this part of the world and should be found in any decent bookshop in Singapore. "Indiscreet Memories" is a tongue-in-cheek account which also features the Singapore Volunteer Rifles. I could write reviews of some of these books for "Apa Khabar" if you wish? I used to write book and performing arts reviews for various newspapers to supplement my meagre income when I was much younger and I still do from time to time if the topic interests me.

John Hay from the USA writes:-

I am now wondering whether you might post a second enquiry, if it seems appropriate. A partial solution of the birth certificate problem has led to another problem, of citizenship, and I'm guessing that some of your members are also affected by it. Namely, that the further citizenship legislation, meant to prevent residents of Penang and Hong Kong moving en masse to the U.K. (and I seriously doubt whether this fear was justified), also seems to have swept away the U.K. birthrights of those born to British civil servants who had been serving their King, as then was, in that part of the world. Thus the British authorities in Washington D.C. are telling me that **the 1983 act reduced me from British-by-birth to British-by-descent, and this made my children born outside the U.K. ineligible for British citizenship.** Have you ever come across this?

My post would read:-

Many thanks to all who wrote to me, John Hay, about birth certificates in Penang. I have tried to reply to you all. Due to this help, the birth certificate problem seems to be on its way to a solution. This has produced a bigger problem. I am informed by consular authorities that I lost my status of British-by-birth in a 1983 act, thus my children born later than that have no rights to citizenship. This seems to mean that all those MCS families on duty, whose children were born in Penang (and Malaya and Hong Kong?) could not pass on their citizenship rights after 1983. Those whose children were born on leave, if back in the U.K. were not so deprived. Does anyone have experience of, or comments on, this remarkable disparagement of service in the MCS? Please e-mail me on:- [johnhay50@yahoo.com](mailto:johnhay50@yahoo.com)

**Hamish Patterson** writes:-

To add to your list of evacuees on ships from Singapore:-

Hamish Patterson (born Batu Gajah August 1941) evacuated on the "Empress of Japan".

On another matter, my wife and I were dining in a pub in Wales last summer which is run by a Chinese family. My wife asked the waitress where in China she came from. She said that she came from Malaysia. I asked where in Malaysia, and she said not KL but somewhere that I would not have heard of – near Ipoh. Again, I asked where, and she said Batu Gajah and was astonished to hear I was born there!! We had a GOOD meal!

**Bentley Giles Choi** from Johore Bahru writes:-

I am no longer interested in joining the Malayan Volunteers Group. As far as I am concerned, I will reimburse the cost of the printing materials and postage to the MVG. I will donate the equivalent sum in Malaysian Ringgit in favour of the MVG to a charitable organization in Malaysia. The cost belongs to the MVG members. Later, I will send the receipt via postal service to Ms. Rosemary Fell

By the way. In "Apa Khabar" 12<sup>th</sup> Edition October 2007 showing the photograph of the POWs from **GLODOK CAMP in JAVA, GLODOK is CHINATOWN, North Jakarta (Batavia)**.

**Rethi Govin** from Singapore writes:-

[Rethi is a History teacher at the Boys Catholic High School in Bishan, Singapore. She was with a group of boys, attending a Memorial Service at Kranji Cemetery in Singapore on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2008. In conversation, it transpired that she knew Mr. Jeyathurai from the Changi Museum, but did not know anything about the role of the Malayan Volunteers during the Malayan Campaign or the defence of Singapore. Having given her the MVG website address, this was the message she sent.]

I just realised that I gave you the wrong directions today when I pointed out Bukit Chandu to you. I am sorry! Somehow, I thought it was the same as Labrador Park. Please accept my apologies.

I had a look at your website and I must say it's very interesting. I intend using it to enrich my lessons. I am sure my students will love it.

It was lovely meeting you and your husband today at Kranji War Memorial. I hope you will have a wonderful time in Malaysia as well.

## **SUPPORT FOR THE GURKHAS**

Let us not forget, amongst all the hand wringing over the often quoted misdeeds of our imperial and colonial past, that a present-day wrong is being carried out and, indeed, defended by the British Government, under our very noses. This is the blatant refusal to allow many Gurkha ex-servicemen to settle in Britain because they retired BEFORE July 1997. It was on this date that the unit was moved to Britain from its base in Hong Kong. Over 22,000 former Gurkhas are not eligible to live here, and must apply for the right to remain here.

In a cynical attempt to defuse the building sense of grievance, it was announced in September 2004, after an 18-month Whitehall Review, that Gurkhas who has served with the British Army for at least four years, and wanted to settle here with their families, would be allowed to apply for citizenship. This decision also gave them the right to a pension, to remain in Britain and to apply to become British Citizens. BUT, in the small print it became clear that ONLY Gurkhas who had served at least four years and were discharged AFTER 1<sup>st</sup> July 1997, would be eligible for 'fast-track' citizenship. There were Gurkhas, already living in this country after many years of service, who were in danger of being deported. This decision contrasts starkly with others made under EU directives, for example, which have allowed convicted murderers and robbers to remain here. The Home Office defends its decisions by saying that pre-1997 Gurkhas may not stay here because they cannot demonstrate "close ties" to this country!! What an outrage! Over the past 10 years the British Government has allowed hundreds of thousands of people, with no claim to settle here, to do so. Even serving Gurkhas are not treated as equal citizens. Their children are counted as foreign students and it is only when citizenship is granted to their parents after leaving the Army, that they are treated as home students in the UK.

Let us be quite clear about the Gurkhas' claims. They have been part of the British Army for nearly 200 years, and about 200,000 of them fought for Britain in both world wars. In the region of 43,000 were killed or wounded and they have won 26 Victoria Crosses – sadly, one VC, 86 year-old Havildar Bhanubhakta Gurung has recently died in Nepal. His citation for bravery under fire is second to none. His VC was awarded while serving as a rifleman in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Gurkha Rifles in Burma in 1945. Under the present rules of immigration, Bhanubhakta Gurung was not eligible to live in Britain, and would be facing deportation had he been living here. His three sons have followed their father into the Gurkhas.

"Exceptional" cases have been made to issue visas to Gurkhas to enable them to come to this country – e.g. Tul Bahadur Pun VC aged 85 who was in need of medical attention, but why should they have to beg for entry?

To quote from Philip Johnston's article on the Gurkhas in the Telegraph (Monday 24th March 2008):-

"Given the sheer scale of immigration to Britain in recent years, this is a small group of people who are rightly insulted by the suggestion that their ties to this country are "insufficiently strong" when they see so many here who have none whatsoever, including some who would do us great harm".



**Angry Gurkhas hand back medals**

**FIFTY Gurkha veterans handed back their medals in London yesterday. They were protesting at what they claim is "immoral discrimination".**

The retired soldiers gave their long service and good conduct medals to the Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg, who agreed to pass them on to the Prime Minister. Nepalese

Gurkhas have been part of the British Army for nearly 200 years, but they are unhappy that they receive lower pensions than UK soldiers. If they retired before 1997, they have no automatic right to remain in the UK.

Damber Ghafy, the chief co-ordinator of the protest estimated that more than 2,000 Gurkhas were at the demonstration. Last

year, the Government announced that Gurkhas could transfer into the Armed Forces' pension scheme, greatly increasing their income. But 22,000 former Gurkhas are not eligible and must also apply for the right to remain here, because they retired before July 1997, when the unit was moved to Britain from its base in Hong Kong.

**OBITUARIES**

**BHANUBHAKTA GURUNG, VC.**

Havildar Bhanubhakta Gurung's death was announced in the Telegraph on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2008, aged 86. He was awarded a VC when serving as a rifleman in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Gurkha Rifles in Burma on 5<sup>th</sup> March 1945.

He was a Gurung, one of the two main tribes from which the second (King Edward V11's Own) Gurkha Rifles (the Sirmoor Rifles) enlisted their men. Born in September 1921 at Phalpa, in western Nepal, he joined the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Gurkhas in 1940. In 1943, he was part of the first Chindit operation under Brigadier Orde Wingate in which some 3,000 men penetrated behind Japanese lines in Burma, on a destructive mission. By 1944, he had achieved the rank of Naik (corporal), but due to an offence of which he was wrongly accused, he was reduced to the rank of Rifleman again. The injustice of this event made him all the more determined to prove his worth, and show that he had been unfairly treated.

By March 1945, the Fourteenth Army was making a drive towards Mandalay in central Burma. The 25<sup>th</sup> Division (of which the 2<sup>nd</sup> Gurkhas were part) was assigned the task of creating a diversionary action along the coastal section of the Arakan. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion landed at Ru-Ywa and advanced to the high ground east of Tamandu. The area was vital for the British to reach the Irrawaddy, but it was guarded by the Japanese 54 Division and a machine-gun battalion. The British forces took up their positions on two hills – Snowdon and Snowdon East – without opposition, but the Japs attacked Snowdon East during the night, killing half the Gurkhas on it. The remainder, out of ammunition, managed to reach their comrades on Snowdon. The following day, Bhanubhakta's company was ordered to retake Snowdon East "regardless of cost".

In his citation, Bhanubhakta was said to have shown "outstanding bravery and a complete disregard for his own safety. His courageous clearing of five enemy positions single-handed was in itself decisive in capturing the objective and his inspiring example to the rest of the Company contributed to the speedy consolidation of the success."

He left the regiment in January 1946 to return to his widowed mother and young wife, but not before he regained his former rank of Naik with the honorary rank of Havildar (sergeant).



## **AIR COMMODORE HENRY PROBERT**

The announcement of the death of Air Commodore Henry Probert was made in the Telegraph on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2008. Aged 81, he was recognized as one of the most eminent authorities on the history of the RAF; he was head of the RAF's Air Historical Branch and before that the RAF's director of education.

Joining the RAF for his national service, he remained in the service for 30 years. While stationed at RAF Changi, Singapore, he developed a deep interest in the role of the RAF in the Far East and in the Japanese occupation of Singapore. On his retirement, from the active list in October 1978 he started to write extensively and contributed to many learned journals and historical narratives. His "History of Changi" the RAF's largest air base in Singapore, occupied by the Japanese during the war, was first published in 1965, and then updated in 2006 at the request of the Changi Museum in Singapore.

## **ROBERT McCALL**

We are sorry to announce the death of Penang Volunteer Robert Wyndham Lockhart McCall on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2007, and extend our sympathies to his two sons and their families. Born in 1914 and educated at Notre Dame Hill School and Haileybury College, Robert joined the Customs and Excise department in the Federated Malay States in 1935, becoming Customs Officer in Port Wellesley. During the 1930s he became a Private in the 2nd Battalion FMSVF (Selangor) in the Scottish Platoon. Later he joined the 3/SSVF (Penang & Province Wellesley) and as Private 5416 was taken prisoner in Singapore. Sent to Thailand with Y Battalion in March 1943 he ended the war at Nakorn Nayok.

His wife Marye, a New Zealander, whom he married in KL in 1940, was evacuated to NZ with her infant son Andrew. After the war, they returned to Malaya in 1946 when Robert again became a Customs Officer, with posts in Penang, Kelantan, Kedah and Perlis. When he retired he took up a teaching post at a prep school in Folkestone, retiring eventually to Hythe in Kent, where he died.

Robert and his family were good friends of MVG members Tom and Betty Evans, and we extend our sympathies to them, too.

## **SPENCER MILLER**

The death of Spencer Sydney Miller on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2007, aged 86, has been brought to the notice of the MVG. We are sad to report the loss of another Volunteer. Spencer was born in 1921 and went to Singapore as an Assistant at Fogden, Brisbane & Co. Havelock Road. He became Private 13620 in the 1/SSVF and was sent to Thailand with D Battalion on 12/10/42. After the war he settled in Perth Western Australia. His brother James Percival (Jimmy) was also 1/SSVF with D Battalion. We have no other information about him.

## **BOOKS**

**"ETERNAL VIGILANCE – The Price of Freedom."** Published by ASIAPAC BOOKS PTE LTD. ISBN 981-229-395-7  
This is a Singapore/Heritage book based on the Chinese Book published in August 1999, compiled and edited by FOONG CHOON HON and translated by YUEN CHEN CHING.

The book features 300 wartime pictures interspersed with essays, interviews and excerpts from wartime documents. It provides a vivid portrayal of life in Singapore before and after the Japanese Occupation. There are heartrending accounts of survivors such as Professor Maurice Baker, Justice of the Peace Lun Tue Sheong and artist Liu Kang who witnessed many massacres.

**"CHANGI PHOTOGRAPHER – George Aspinall's Record of Captivity."** Written by Tim Bowden and published by Times Edition Marshall Cavendish. ISBN 981-204-240-7

This book was first published in 1984 and was the result of the author's meeting with George Aspinall during research for the POW radio series which was surveying the experiences of the Australian prisoners-of-war of the Japanese. It tells George's remarkable personal story, and documents for the first time the full collection of surviving photographs which he took under extraordinarily difficult circumstances in captivity.

**"SECRETS OF THE BATTLEBOX – The History and Role of Britain's Command HQ in the Malayan Campaign."**

Written by Romen Bose and published by Marshall Cavendish Editions. ISBN 981-261-064-2  
Beneath Fort Canning in Singapore lies 'The Battlebox.' It was Britain's Command HQ in the Malayan Campaign during World War 11. It was sealed off and forgotten until the late 1990s. Now it can be viewed as part of Singapore's 'Heritage Trail'. Romen Bose spent 17 years researching into this area of Singapore's war time history, which has still not been investigated fully. With very few survivors and most documents on the subject highly-classified, and only now available for research, there has been no opportunity to put forward the story of the Battlebox until now.

**"THE HISTORY OF CHANGI."** By Henry Probert. Published by Changi University Press Publication. ISBN 981-05-5580-6  
Henry Probert uses first hand information from veterans and scholars covering nearly 80 years to chart Changi's dramatic transformation from jungle to regional air hub. It also closely mirrors Singapore's growth and its wider history, providing a record of major milestones in the country's steady progress to developed nation status.

**“Don’t ever say again ‘IT CAN’T BE DONE’. The Story of Changi Industries Inc.”** This is the story of how FMSVF Officer Captain John Clementson, together with Captain Bellingham Smith and a group of fellow Malayan Volunteers, set up a pioneer workshop for the benefit of their fellow prisoners. Published by Changi University Press. ISBN 981-05-4257-7. John wrote the story of Changi Industries Inc. during his voyage home, after his release from POW camp, aboard the SS Monawai.

**“The Angel of Changi – and other short stories.”** By Goh Sin Tub. Published by Angsana Books. ISBN 981-3056-90-8 This collection of 65 short stories is Goh Sin Tub’s finest. The very first account, ‘The Angel of Changi’, is about Mrs. Mary Seah - a Singaporean war heroine who has been honoured in Australia for her assistance to the POWs in Changi.

**“The Glass Palace.”** By Amitav Ghosh. Published by Harper Collins. ISBN 978-0-00-651409-1 Although this is a novel, it is an extraordinary tale of love, war and family spreading across Burma, Malaya and India and following the fortunes of three generations, ending with the invasion of the Japanese into South East Asia and the chaos this caused throughout the region.

## **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

**31<sup>ST</sup> MAY – 1<sup>ST</sup> JUNE 2008. RFH Group. 2<sup>ND</sup> International Conference at the National Memorial Arboretum, Alrewas.** The focus is on FEPOW and Civilian Internment in Singapore, Malaya and Hong Kong 1942-1945, with Keynote Speakers from those countries, plus other Guest Speakers. If you are interested in attending this 2-day conference, there still may be vacancies or cancellations. Please contact **Meg Parkes** on e-mail:- [mm.parkes@talktalk.net](mailto:mm.parkes@talktalk.net) for further information.

### **FRIDAY 15<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 2008. V-J DAY**

We are hoping to arrange a Service at the NMA in the MVG Memorial Garden. This will depend on sufficient numbers attending.

### **FRIDAY 12<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2008. Presentation of the MVG Memorial Board at Changi Museum, Singapore.**

The Presentation will be combined with a Book Launch, in the presence of Embassy Personnel and other invited Guests from Civil Defence Units. It will be a prestigious event, organized by the Chang Museum Director, Mr. Jeyathurai, and after the presentation, there will be a reception for the Guests.

**Please let Rosemary Fell know if you are hoping to attend this event, so that the Museum will know how many MVG Members to expect.**

### **SATURDAY 4<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2008. The London Lunch.**

This is the provisional date set for the London Lunch. Details and venues will be announced in the July newsletter.

### **SUNDAY 9<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2008. Remembrance Sunday. The Cenotaph Parade in Whitehall.**

We now have a core of regular marchers at this event. If anyone else would like to join the group, please let Rosemary Fell know early. We were allocated 12 tickets last year, and it will probably be the same number this year.

## **2008 – 2009 SUBSCRIPTIONS.**

Thank you very much to all members who have paid their subscriptions so promptly – and added a donation to the MVG funds. This is much appreciated, and means that the MVG has sufficient funds to pay off another part of the debt still owed to the Arboretum (£1,500), and pay for the Changi Memorial Board.

Please may I remind you that the 2008 – 2009 subscriptions are **NOW DUE**. Cheques for **£15 per household** should be made payable to:-

**Mrs. R. Fell, Volunteers Bench Fund.**

Receipts for the subscriptions will not be sent, unless requested, but donations will be acknowledged.

**N.B.** Overseas members may pay in their own currency, provided it is equivalent to £15 sterling. However, if it is possible to pay in sterling, it would be appreciated!

## **CONTACTS**

**JONATHAN MOFFATT.** For research on British Malaysians/Volunteer Forces/Argylls & Royal Marines  
49, Coombe Drive, Binley Woods, Coventry CV3 2QU. E-mail: [JonathanMoffatt@aol.com](mailto:JonathanMoffatt@aol.com) Tel: 02476 545013

**SANDY LINCOLN.** For the MVG Lunch and contacts with other Volunteers/Volunteer Children.  
19, Burke Street, Harrogate, Yorkshire HG1 4NR. E-mail: [anlujincoln@googlemail.com](mailto:anlujincoln@googlemail.com) Tel: 01423 500351 **NEW E-MAIL**

**ROSEMARY FELL.** Editor of “Apa Khabar”/Membership Secretary/Subscriptions/Donations.  
Millbrook House, Axminster, Devon EX13 5EE. E-mail: [dinraf-millbrook@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:dinraf-millbrook@tiscali.co.uk) Tel: 01297 33045

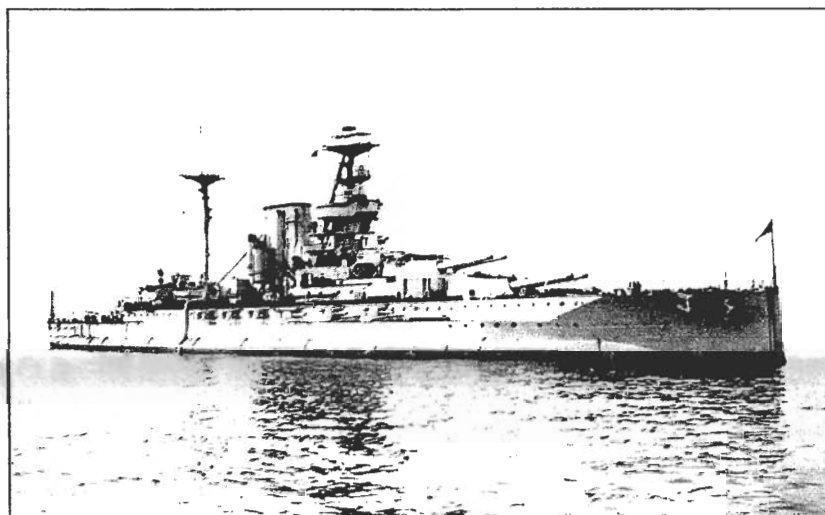


Naval Historical Collectors & Research Association  
[www.nhcra-online.org](http://www.nhcra-online.org)

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## The origins of the Royal Malaysian Navy

THE FORMER colonial naval forces of British Malaya, which in 1958 united to become the independent Royal Malaysian Navy, this year celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The *Tentera Laut DiRaja Malaysia*, is now one of the largest and most technologically advanced naval forces in South East Asia. Its role in the 21<sup>st</sup> century remains essentially unchanged to the pre-Second World War era, when surface units safeguarded the Malaysian coastline, patrolled territorial waters and repelled any seaborne threat.



Photograph: The Author's Collection

**The *Queen Elizabeth*-class battleship HMS Malaya, built with funds provided entirely by the Federated Malay States she served with distinction in both World Wars before being scrapped as a result of post-war austerity measures.**

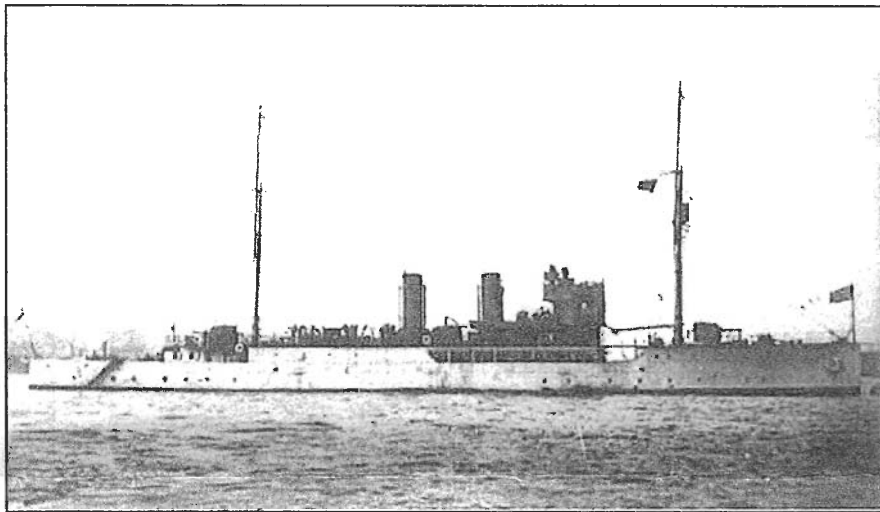
The origins of the Royal Malaysian Navy can be traced back to the eve of the First World War. In the years preceding 1914, the Admiralty and the British Government began to question whether the imperial defence burden should continue to be borne solely by the mother country. In response, a number of the Dominion governments had opened negotiations to build or sponsor capital ships and patrol forces. One of the first colonies to take up the challenge had been the Malay States. On 12 November 1912 the Federation council passed a resolution, moved by the Sultan of Perak, to fund the whole construction of a capital ship for the Royal Navy and offered £2¼ million. So unexpected was this gesture that one commentator wrote 'this gift from native states, offered with remarkable unanimity, is most gratifying'. In response, the new *Queen Elizabeth* class battleship was named MALAYA.

The First World War demonstrated to the far-flung British colonies that with the main fleet engaged in operations in the Northern Hemisphere, it would take some time before a naval task force could be dispatched to the Far East. Some form of permanent naval force was required. The British colonial government in Singapore reluctantly agreed to form the Straits Settlement Naval Volunteer Reserve (SSNVR) on 27 April 1934. Unlike a number of other Reserve units, this section was not permitted to use the prefix 'Royal' as it did not come under the jurisdiction of the Admiralty. Only after 1936, when it joined the Admiralty listings, did the SSNVR become the SSRNVR.

Plans had been drawn up to form a Singapore & Malaya branch of the RNVR in the mid-1920s, but in 1926 the Governor of the Straits Settlement, His Excellency Sir Laurence Guillemard, led a prolonged campaign against the defence departments in London and the military command in Singapore. The colonial administration questioned how the cost for a RNVR in Malaya and Singapore

was to be apportioned between local defence, for which the colonial government was responsible and imperial defence, resulting from the development of the naval base.

The Singapore Straits Naval Volunteer Reserve was therefore formed to 'assist' the Royal Navy in the defence of Singapore and by default the entire Malay Peninsula. The formation of a second branch of the reserve in Penang in 1938 saw a major expansion in reserve force numbers. On 18 January 1935, the Admiralty presented the SSNVR with the ageing *Acacia*-class sloop HMS LABURNUM, which would serve as the Reserve Headquarters and drill ship, berthed in Telok Ayer Basin. The LABURNUM flew the defaced Blue Ensign of the Straits Settlement, as colonial RNVR units were not entitled to wear the White Ensign, except in the situations where they were deployed in service of the empire outside their territorial waters, as directed under the Colonial Defence Act of 1931. The Governor of the Straits Settlements, Sir Cecil Clementi, requested that LABURNUM should be permitted to fly the White Ensign at the ensign staff and gaff, and the flag of the colony at the jack staff. On 13 November that same year the Commander-in-Chief China Station suggested that Singapore should do the same as the Hong Kong RNVR, which flew the Blue Ensign defaced with the badge of the colony at the ensign and jack staff.



Photograph: The Singapore Naval Museum

**The *Acacia*-class sloop HMS Laburnum. In the 1930s she was presented to Singapore by the Admiralty to serve as a drill ship and headquarters for the Straits Settlements Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. Although she was not seaworthy, Laburnum was scuttled in February 1942.**

The Royal Navy's extensive naval base at Singapore was established in 1923, partly in response to Japan's increasing naval presence in the region. A costly project, construction of the base proceeded slowly until the early 1930s when Japan began moving into Manchuria and northern China. A major component of the base was completed in March 1938, when the King George VI Graving Dock was opened; more than 300 metres in length, it was the largest dry dock in the world at the time. The base, completed in 1941 and defended by artillery, searchlights, and the newly built Tengah Airfield, gave rise to the adage that Singapore was the "Gibraltar of the East". The floating dock, 275 metres long, was the third largest in the world and could hold 60,000 workers. The base also contained dry docks, giant cranes, machine shops and underground storage for water, fuel and ammunition. A self-contained town on the base was built to house 12,000 Asian workers, with cinemas, hospitals, churches and seventeen football fields. Aboveground tanks held enough fuel for the entire Royal Navy for six months. The only thing the giant naval fortress lacked was ships!

Throughout the 1920s the Naval Staff hoped that a battlefleet would be permanently stationed in Singapore, but this prospect was soon shot down by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Winston Churchill. In 1924/25 Churchill pushed for more flexible fleet dispositions and argued that there was no sound tactical or financial reason for a fleet to be stationed at Singapore. The cabinet agreed, despite the fervent argument put forward by Admiral of the Fleet Lord Beatty, Chief of the Naval Staff, that a fleet in Singapore would have to be at least equal to that of Japan. The British administration in the Federated Malay States had campaigned unsuccessfully to have its sponsored battleship and namesake, the MALAYA, permanently redeployed to the Far East, but this suggestion was also ignored.

The Singapore naval base was built and supplied to sustain a siege long enough to enable the Royal Navy to reach the area. This theoretical plan had emerged from the so-called 'ten year rule', the notion that the British Empire would not be engaged in a major conflict for at least a decade. The War Office and Admiralty coined a phrase 'the period before relief'. This represented the time between the

moment a situation developed requiring the dispatch of a fleet, and the fleet's actual arrival in the Far East. In 1921 this had been established at 70 days and this was the position maintained until 1937. The time delay arose from the period in which it took to mobilise the fleet, refitting and replenishment of ships' stores and, very important in peace time, to bring the complement of a battleship up to wartime levels. In the meantime a local Naval Volunteer Reserve, possibly reinforced by the Yangtze Flotilla, would have to put up a valiant defence, while the Royal Navy steamed via Suez or round the Cape of Good Hope.

By 1940, it was clear that the Royal Navy was fully committed in Europe and the Middle East and could not be spared to deal with a potential threat in Asia. The main pressure on the Straits Settlements was the need to produce more rubber and tin for the Allied war effort. Both the colonial government and British military command were for the most part convinced of Singapore's impregnability, that their island fortress could withstand an attack, which they assumed would come from the south and from the sea. The only local defence forces were the four battalions of Straits Settlements Volunteer Corps and a small civil defence organisation. Under directives from London, the SSRNVR was renamed the Malayan Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve in October 1941 by the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act of 1939. The MRNVR increased its recruitment, allowing a number of essential RN personnel to be redeployed to the European theatre. The MRNVR personnel, many of whom were indigenous Malays, were called to active duty, augmenting the strength of the Royal Navy Malay Section formed in 1939.

The foundations of the future Malaysian Navy were formed at this critical juncture in the history of the Malayan Peninsula and the Royal Navy Malay Section was known unofficially as the Malay Navy. This new force exploited a loophole in naval regulations allowing the free movement of reserve forces beyond the original remit of their unit. Legislation passed in 1941 and based on the Colonial Naval Defence Act 1931 made Naval Volunteer Forces liable for service outside their colony and permitted Ceylon, Fiji, Gambia, Gold Coast, Hong Kong, Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Straits Settlements and Trinidad & Tobago the privilege of flying the White Ensign. The Malay Navy possessed a total strength of 400 men who were trained at HMS PELANDOK, the Royal Navy's training establishment in Malaya. Recruitment was increased and by 1941, the outbreak of hostilities in Asia, the Malay Navy could boast a strength of 1,450.

Although these units ceased to exist after the capitulation of Singapore on 15 February 1942, **officially the Malay Navy was on attachment with the Royal Navy and the MRNVR transferred to its counterpart in Colombo, Ceylon. Throughout the Second World War, the Malay Navy served alongside the Allied Forces in the Indian and Pacific theatre of operations. When the war ended with the Japanese Surrender in 1945, only 600 personnel of the Malay Navy reported for muster. Post-war economic constraints saw the Malay Navy disbanded in 1947. The MRNVR was to suffer the same fate. Many in Singapore argued for the retention of their Reserve, but this unit was officially disbanded on 11 March 1947.**

Some five decades since independence from Great Britain, the Royal Malaysian Navy remains a powerful surface fleet, now further strengthened by the addition of a submarine force. In 2007 the RMN announced the launch of two new submarines named in honour of Malaysia's first and second Prime Ministers, the KD TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN and the KD TUN RAZAK. These vessels are being built in France and Spain respectively. In 1958 the RMN was made up of a few coastal patrol vessels and some ageing ex-Royal Navy craft. Now, fifty years on, the fleet consists of corvettes, frigates, fast patrol craft and submarines representing a major force in the often complex geopolitics of South East Asia. The navy has come a long way from its humble origins in the *Acacia*-class LABURNUM at Singapore.

#### Postscript



THE CELEBRATED Second World War battleship HMS PRINCE OF WALES had a short and tragic career, but now her bell is providing a unique cultural and historical focal point for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of modern-day Malaysia and the Royal Malaysian Navy. For sixty years this unique artefact lay undisturbed within the upturned wreck, lying keel up in 155 feet of water off Kuantan in the South China Sea. This is where it would have remained, were it not of reports of unauthorised attempts to salvage it along with other valuable artefacts. These reports led the British High Commission in Singapore, in partnership with the Royal Navy to locate and if necessary recover the bell.