

APA KHABAR

Patron: Her Grace The Duchess of Norfolk

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**38TH EDITION
APRIL 2014**



Mrs. Rosa Daniel unveiling the Sumatra Plaque

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PRESENTATION OF THE SUMATRA PLAQUE TO THE CHANGI MUSEUM SINGAPORE A MEMORABLE VISIT TO FOLLOW THE ROUTE OF THE SUMATRA RAILWAY

Two very rewarding and inter-related visits were made by MVG members to Sumatra in February. Australian members, led by **Judy Balcombe**, travelled to **Muntok** on **Bangka Island**. In her party was one of MVG's Honorary Members, **Neal Hobbs**, who was interned aged 17 with his father – both as civilians – in the prison in Muntok. The poignant photograph of **Neal** and **Judy** outside the very prison cell where he was imprisoned with 2 other civilians, shows that very little change has occurred in the 70 years which have elapsed since **Neal** was last in **Muntok**.

The second group of 7 ladies, together with **Frans Duiniveld**, a very special Dutch friend of the **Moggie** family who acted as guide, was led by **Liz Moggie** from Kuala Lumpur. There were 4 MVG members in this group, **Liz**, **Yvonne Wurtzburg**, **Imogen Holmes** and **Rosemary Fell**. The other three members of this group became temporary honorary members of the MVG for the 10 day trip, and their interest and contribution to the group was very much appreciated by everyone. **Susan Jalaluddin** a former Honorary Council Member of **Badan Warisan Malaysia** acted as botanist-in-chief with her special knowledge of the flora of that region, while **Noor Azlina Yunus** and **Edda de Silva** are both interested in the history of Sumatra, and what happened there during the Second World War. [A detailed report will be included in July.]

The presentation of the Sumatra Plaque to The Changi Museum, which took place on Saturday 22nd February, was an important and unique event. Placed next to the MVG's own Volunteers' Plaque, presented in September 2008, in the Memorials Section of the Museum, this plaque is probably the first one to commemorate civilian internees as well as military POWs, and it also included mention of the massacred Australian Army nurses. The idea of the plaque came from the extended family members of the **Warburton Gray** family, some of whom belong to the Australian branch of the MVG, rather than from a military source. This was a different concept for the Museum. It has taken nearly 3 years for the plaque to come to fruition, but at a wonderfully well thought out and appropriately organised ceremony, The Changi Museum, together with the MVG, saw the unveiling of the Sumatra Plaque by **Mrs. Rosa Daniel**, Deputy Secretary of Culture at the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, and CEO of Singapore's National Heritage Board. The unveiling was attended by over 20 members of the **Gray** family together with members of the MVG, and other invited dignitaries and guests, including Defence Advisors from the High Commissions of Australia, India, Malaysia and New Zealand. Sadly (and for the second time at an MVG event at The Changi Museum) the U.K. High Commission was unable to send a serving Defence Advisor. It was only able to muster a retired DA in mufti.

It was an enormous privilege that **Mrs. Rosa Daniel** agreed to unveil the plaque. She was really interested in the history behind the plaque, and it is very helpful to know that the CEO of the National Heritage Board understands the concerns of the families whose civilian relatives were imprisoned in such degrading circumstances and that very little is known about their plight. The MVG presented **Mrs. Daniel** with a copy of the January newsletter, together with the report on last October's Vocal Orchestra Concert and a programme of the concert. [Ed: See Ps. 2 – 4 for a full report on the presentation.]

During the last couple of months, **Jonathan Moffatt** has been in touch with a former FMSVF Volunteer called '**Bill**' **Pearson** who has just celebrated his 100th birthday. We send him many congratulations, and hope he will accept MVG's offer of Honorary Membership. He had an extraordinary war as a Volunteer – from CSM HQ Coy 1/FMSVF to 2nd Lt. 1/FMSVF attached to 3 Indian Corps. He joined 'Stay Behind' Party No. 2 but was captured and sent to Pudu Gaol in K.L. From there he was sent to Thailand with 'U' Party, and in early 1945 was arrested by the Kempeitai in Kanchanaburi, and taken to Bangkok where he was tortured. He was promoted to Captain Special Forces in 1945 and mentioned in Despatches. MVG's second centenarian, who celebrated her 100th birthday on 3rd April is **Brenda Macduff**. The MVG wished her a very happy birthday and sent a card and personal greeting through **Michael Pether** who visits **Brenda** regularly in her Retirement Home. He celebrated her birthday with her and her family and friends. **Michael** has sent a short report about **Brenda's** life and her war-time experiences in Bankinang Camp in Sumatra where she and other survivors from the bombed "S.S. Kuala" were sent for their final year and a half as civilian internees, together with over 2,400 Dutch women and children. The surviving evacuees from Singapore who were sent to the Bankinang Camp also deserve recognition for their fortitude in equally terrible conditions as those internees in Muntok, Palembang and Loebok Linggau.

Finally, we are pleased to announce that **Jon Cooper**, battlefield archeologist for The Adam Park Project, has offered to help the MVG in its plans to present a commemorative plaque at the Sime Road Camp Site in Singapore. **Jon** is now attached to The Changi Museum, and attended the plaque presentation. We are very grateful to him for his assistance with our next project.

**PRESENTATION OF THE SUMATRA PLAQUE TO THE CHANGI MUSEUM
on Saturday 22nd February 2014**



Robert Gray with his aunt Nola Hudson and her son Michael

At an exceptionally well organised ceremony, the Sumatra Plaque was finally unveiled on Saturday, 22nd February at The Changi Museum by **Mrs. Rosa Daniel – Deputy Secretary (Culture) from the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth and CEO of the National Heritage Board in Singapore.** A great deal of planning had gone into this plaque, from its inception by the **Warburton Gray** families, to its presentation to The Changi Museum. The wording on the plaque was by mutual agreement of all the parties concerned; the choice of brass for the plaque was at the request of the museum; the dedication of the plaque in Perth W.A. was by joint arrangement between the MVG's Australian Branch and the MBVA WA Inc; and finally it was carried to The Changi Museum by **Bill** and **Elizabeth Adamson** who had overseen the making of the plaque in Perth. Thus it was a truly joint international effort between the extended **Warburton Gray** families; the MVG in Perth W.A. and in the U.K.; and The Changi Museum. The discussions were conducted by e-mail and it was due to the co-operation between the various parties that the etched brass plaque, with a finished, lacquered finish and mounted on a Jarrah wood frame, bore the final wording which had everyone's agreement.



The plaque was the brainchild of **Tony Daintry**, cousin of **Robert Gray** – MVG member in Perth W.A. – following a visit early in June 2011 to The Changi Museum in Singapore where he lives with his family. He thought it would be a good place to have a memorial to the evacuees who lost their lives while fleeing from Singapore in 1942. **Tony** felt that he and his cousin **Robert** should jointly propose such a memorial, and a letter dated 13th June 2011 was sent to the museum. The idea came from a request by their centenarian aunt **Nola Hudson** (daughter of **George** and **Ruth Gray**) and the late **Deborah Crow** (daughter of **Eric** and **Marjory Gray**) who had expressed a wish for there to be some sort of memorial to the civilian internees in Sumatra, especially those in Muntok where **Nola's** father **George** and **Deborah's** mother **Marjory** had died in internment, and were buried in the former cemetery where a petrol station and houses now stand.

The letter of 13th June 2011 was followed up by several e-mails to the museum to arrange a meeting to discuss the possibility of a plaque, but without success. In early 2012, **Robert Gray** joined the MVG in Perth W.A., and in November 2012, in another letter to The Changi Museum, **Tony Daintry** advised the museum that he had been trying to arrange a meeting with **Mr. Jeyathurai Ayadurai** (the Director of the museum) to explore the idea of a memorial to these civilian internees in Muntok. **Tony** also mentioned that **Robert** was a member of the Malayan Volunteers Group in Australia and that they had been in contact with the MVG in the U.K. about support for a memorial at The Changi Museum.

The MVG's approval may have helped to raise the profile of the plaque, because on 6th July 2013 **Tony Daintry** met **Jeya** and **Hugh McMenamin** to discuss the proposal. A brass plaque was chosen and the family was asked to submit the draft wording to be used. Later in July 2013, **Elizabeth Adamson** contacted

Jonathan Moffatt and **Rosemary Fell** in the U.K. to seek financial help for the plaque. In accordance with the MVG's recently extended aims to commemorate civilian internees and evacuees as well as military personnel, this plaque seemed to fulfill these criteria and it was agreed that the MVG would help to pay for the plaque. After that there was an extended discussion by e-mail between family members, the MVG in Australia and the U.K. and The Changi Museum about the wording and finish of the plaque, and the date on which the plaque could be presented and unveiled to suit everyone concerned. It was finally agreed to hold the ceremony on Saturday 22nd February. However, due to an unforeseen change in timing members of the Balcombe party, who were in Sumatra, were unable to arrive until after the unveiling.

On the morning of Friday 21st February, **Bill** and **Elizabeth Adamson**, together with **Liz Moggie** and **Rosemary Fell**, met The Changi Museum team to discuss the final details about the ceremony. The team, led by museum manager **Julian Wan**, took us through the ceremony so that we knew exactly what was going to happen during the 3 separate phases. **Jeya** was able to come for a short while during lunch to make sure that we were happy with the arrangements.

On Friday evening, members of the extended **Warburton Gray** family gathered for a party in the Claymore Room at the Tanglin Club, to meet each other (some for the first time) and celebrate the successful outcome of the plaque negotiations. Hosted by **Tony** and **Gunilla Daintry**, and their daughter **Alex**, and supported by the **Hudson** and **Close** families from the U.K., it was an extraordinary meeting of the family members who had travelled from Australia and various parts of the world to attend the plaque presentation. Also invited to attend the party were MVG's Australian secretary **Elizabeth Adamson** with her husband **Bill**, and U.K.'s secretary **Rosemary Fell** with MVG member **Liz Moggie**. It was a kind and generous gesture to include us at a private family party, and much appreciated.

At the beginning of the evening when everyone had arrived, **Tony Daintry** gave a short introduction outlining the family history, and how, due to the vagaries of war, the families became split up; some were evacuated to Ceylon on the '**USS West Point**'; three of the menfolk, **Tony's** father **Pat Daintry**, **Deborah Crow's** father **Eric Gray** (who died in Changi), and **Nola's** husband **Dr. Jack Hudson**, stayed behind and were interned; and three other family members were evacuated on the '**Mata Hari**' and taken prisoner when the ship was captured by the Japanese in the Banka Strait. The latter were **George** and **Ruth Gray**, and **Eric's** wife **Marjory**. Sadly **George** and **Marjory** died in the civilian camps in Muntok and Palembang, Sumatra, but **Ruth**, one of the oldest ladies in the camps, survived. For many years **Nola Hudson** (daughter of **George** and **Ruth**) together with **Deborah Crow** (deceased daughter of **Eric** and **Marjory**) suggested that the family should put a plaque or headstone in the Dutch War Cemetery at Bandung, in Java, where they thought the British graves had been moved when the Dutch moved their graves. This was not, in fact, the case and, disgracefully, the British have consistently refused to take responsibility for their own civilian graves which remain in Muntok on what is now foreign soil. The land on which the former cemetery stood has been used for building houses and a petrol station, and the remains of the British civilians buried there were removed and reburied in a communal grave. But, at last, the wishes of these two ladies to commemorate their family members with a plaque, has come to fruition.

On the day of the presentation, Saturday 22nd February, guests were asked to arrive by 10 a.m. to attend a reception in the Bark Café to meet other guests and the invited dignitaries before the start of the ceremony. At 10.25 precisely there was a Call to Order by a Bugler, with a second Call at 10.29 a.m. Exactly at 10.30 preceded by a Piper – ably played by a kilted lady piper – the Guest-of-Honour, **Mrs. Rosa Daniel** together with **Mr. Jeyathurai** led the way into the outdoor Changi Chapel, followed by **Robert Gray**, **Rosemary Fell**, **the Defence Advisors** and other guests. Seating had been arranged according to colour coding, so that everyone knew where to go.

The ceremony was opened by **Mr. Razeen Chan** (from the Singapore History Consultants) who gave a short speech, before **Rosemary Fell** was asked to deliver her talk on behalf of the Malayan Volunteers Group. She outlined the history of the MVG from its low key beginning in October 2003 until the present day – its aims and achievements. The recent widening of its aims to include commemorating evacuees from Singapore in 1941-42, and civilian internees as well as military POWs, has resulted in the support of the Group for this plaque. Her talk was followed by the first reading – an excerpt from Pericles' Eulogy – by **Col. Craig Stewart**, Defence Advisor at the New Zealand High Commission. **Mr. Jeyathurai** – Director of The Changi Museum – gave an inspiring speech without reference to notes, which was well received by the assembled guests and family members. Two verses of the poem "For the Fallen" by **Lawrence Binyon**, written during the First World War, were read by **Capt. Vineet Samuel McCarty** from the High Commission of India. Then followed the wreath-laying by **Mrs. Rosa Daniel** as Guest-of-Honour; **Jeya** on behalf of The Changi Museum; **Rosemary Fell** on behalf of the MVG; and **Robert Gray** with his niece, on behalf of the Gray family members. During the wreath laying a lament was played by the Piper. Everyone stood for the last Post, the minute's silence and the Rouse.

This completed the first part of the ceremony, and it was a relief to be moving out of the hot sunshine and into the air-conditioned museum. Each colour-coded group was taken by a member of the museum staff to a

designated gallery, and given a talk about that particular part of the museum. The red-coded dignitaries and Gray family members were taken into the Changi Murals section with **Jeya**; the green-coded family members went into the Gallery where the prison paintings are displayed.

Finally, everyone was assembled together in the plaques' gallery ready for the unveiling. **Razeen Chan** opened the last part of the ceremony and called **Robert Gray** to give his speech on behalf of the family members - all descendents of **George** and **Eric Gray**. **Maj. Michael Doyle**, Acting Defence Advisor to the Australian High Commission gave the final reading of **Kemal Ataturk's** poem, "Our Sons." Then **Mrs. Rosa Daniel** stepped forward to pull the cord of the curtains covering the plaque, which she did with great dignity and the ceremony was concluded by **Razeen Chan**.

Other official guests who attended the ceremony were **Col. Hashim Bin Aman Shah** from the High Commission of Malaysia and retired former Defence Advisor **Clive Coombes** from the U.K. High Commission. Also present were The Changi Museum staff and members of the Singapore History Consultants.

A delicious buffet lunch was served outside in the Bark Café. During the conversation, **Mrs. Daniel** was made aware that members of the MVG were planning to attend events being arranged in Singapore in 2015 to mark the 70th anniversary of the signing of the surrender by the Japanese on 12th September 1945. The Heritage Board is also working closely with the Singapore Government on the 2015 celebrations to mark their own 50 years of independence. The two celebrations will inevitably overlap to a certain extent.

After lunch, there was time to meet MVG's veteran Honorary Life member **Neal Hobbs** who had been a child civilian internee in Muntok. It was a great privilege to meet him together with **David** and **Judy Balcombe** and **Anthony Pratt** who that day had just returned from a trip to Muntok to visit the prison cell where **Neal** had lived with 2 other inmates in WW2. Sadly they arrived too late for the actual unveiling. It had been an extraordinary and very successful day, with people travelling from across the world from Australia, New Zealand, Europe, the U.K. Malaysia and Singapore to attend the event.

A very special vote of thanks is owed to **Jeya, Julian Wan, Hugh McMenamin** and all the staff at The Changi Museum and from the Singapore History Consultants for making it such a special day for all concerned. The beautifully co-ordinated ceremony, sensitive readings and presence of **Mrs. Daniel** to unveil the plaque, made it an important milestone in bringing the plight of civilian internees in the former Dutch East Indies to the attention of the public. The truly awful situation faced by those civilian men, women and children, who managed to escape from Singapore but were then shipwrecked and imprisoned under horrifying circumstances, has now been highlighted by the presence of this plaque in The Changi Museum.

The Malayan Volunteers Group, with its close connections with the museum, and the families whose relatives lie buried in Sumatra, both military and civilian, are grateful for the recognition of this group of refugees by The Changi Museum.

Compiled by Rosemary Fell and the Gray family members.

RETURN TO MALAYA -- BY ANNE HINAM

My sister, **Jean Goyder**, and I travelled to Singapore in February 2014 for the MVG Plaque Ceremony at Changi Museum. While in Singapore we visited St. Andrew's Cathedral to see our father's name on the MCS Memorial Plaque.

On Saturday February 22nd, we shared a taxi with **Imogen Holmes** and **Yvonne Wurtzburg** from our hotel to Changi Museum, arriving a little before 10 a.m. The Museum's organization of the event was impressive and efficient. As we arrived we were welcomed, given a coloured dot to indicate our group (we were green, to indicate Family Members) and conducted to the Bark Café to join other guests and dignitaries for drinks and an opportunity to greet and talk.

Just before 10.30 came a Bugle Call to Order, and we were led in our groups by a piper to the Changi Chapel for a Service of Dedication and wreath-laying. There were some interesting readings – from Pericles, a poem by Ataturk – speeches, and the last Post and minute's silence after the Laying of Wreaths.

Then, in our groups, we were taken into the Museum and each group had a talk from one of the staff. We green dots stopped in the section displaying prison camp art, including paintings by **Angela Bateman**, and we heard how these had been acquired.

Through to the Memorials section of the Museum for the unveiling of our Plaque following a short ceremony. Then we moved forward to read the Plaque and photograph it high on the wall, (a kind gentleman, seeing my arms at full stretch, offered to take my photo for me), and we were ushered back to the café for lunch. The Australian MVG members who had been visiting Sumatra had arrived, having been unable to get there for the revised time of the ceremony. **Jean** and I spoke to **Neal Hobbs** and asked him if he remembered our father in the Camp, and he said he did, vaguely – which pleased us very much.

After lunch and conversation we had a leisurely look round the Museum. The Changi Murals, painted by **Stanley Warren**, were there – replicas, as the originals have been conserved in the Changi Air Base by the Ministry of Defence.

The following day, **Jean** and I set off for Segamat, armed with old photographs of the Government house which we had left

in August 1941 to go on leave to Australia, aged two and a bit and ten months. We also had photographs our mother took of the house when she visited 30 or so years ago. On that occasion she had found it was still a Government house and had been invited in.

We travelled by train – a journey our father would have done many times. We had booked in first class, very spacious and comfortable, but first class air-conditioning was chilly enough to have us delving into our luggage for the fleece jackets which we didn't expect to need again before Heathrow.

Now Segamat is not known as a tourist destination, and when the ticket inspector looked at our tickets he queried "Segamat?" in tones of disbelief. We nodded enthusiastically. He still wasn't sure that these two eccentric old English ladies knew what they were doing, and checked again, "Segamat?" As we arrived the station was announced over the intercom, but the ticket inspector still came to give us the information personally.

The driver who met us found the Police Station and took our photo in to enquire about the house. (We had no idea where to find it, except that in one of our father's letters he mentions going downhill to the station.) He returned to the car saying, "It's not there any more, it's a palace for the Sultan of Johore." When we got there we found it was still recognisably our house, though enlarged and altered. Not easy to see much of it, but we stuck our cameras between the railings and angled them upwards over high walls. The place seemed deserted, even the guard house at the gate. On the wall was written:

RUMAH REHAT KENAMAAN

HOUSE HOME WELL-KNOWN PERSONAGE

which Google tells me means

After that exciting rather than disappointing end to our search, **Jean** and I became tourists – Malacca, Taman Negara, Kuala Lumpur. It was my first time back to Malaya (shorter than saying Singapore and the Malay Peninsula, and it was Malaya last time I was there). **Jean** had a trip with her husband 20 years ago, when she visited her birthplace, Penang. We enjoyed every part of our tour, and found the people so friendly. They seem very much at ease with their British past, and once or twice at passport checks seemed genuinely delighted to see that we had been born there.

A RETURN VISIT TO MUNTOK – by Judy Balcombe

Some years ago, I read an article about **Neal Hobbs** in Wurtilla, Queensland. **Neal** was aged 17 in 1942 when he was captured by the Japanese on board the 'Mata Hari' and taken to Muntok, Banka Island. Between 1942 & 1945, **Neal** and his father were interned in Muntok, Palembang and Belalau camps. During their second period of imprisonment at Muntok jail when there were many deaths, **Neal** joined the burial party. Several internees died each day from dysentery, malaria and beriberi. They were placed into rough coffins and carried by their friends a mile down the main road to the Muntok town cemetery. **Neal** was given a little extra food ration for this work, which he gave to his father.

My grandfather died in Muntok jail in August 1944, and was very likely buried by **Neal**. I wrote to **Neal** c/o his Queensland golf club and thus began a very strong friendship.

In February this year, we travelled to Palembang and Muntok to visit the former internment sites, the Charitas Hospital in Palembang, which cared for internees until it was shut down by the Japanese in 1943, and the newly opened Muntok Museum. **Anthony Pratt**, who had visited before and whose father died in Muntok jail in 1945, accompanied us as did my husband **David**. To our delight **Neal Hobbs**, now 89, joined us on the trip. It was his first visit to Indonesia since 1945.

In Palembang, we visited the Charitas Hospital and met the Director, Professor **Hardi Darmawan** and the Sisters. **Neal** had been a patient at the Hospital in 1942, being admitted for 9 weeks with dysentery. When the hospital was later closed, the staff were either killed or interned. **King George VI** of England presented the Sisters with a medal after the war, for their care of the hospital patients and for their work in the internment camps. The medal is now treasured in the Nun's museum.

We carried donations from former camp families to help the work of the Charitas Hospital, in particular to help students from poor villages undertake nursing training.

We were also permitted to visit the jails in Palembang and Muntok, where **Neal** and his father were imprisoned. The jails, which now hold 250 people, held 900 internees during the war, under very harsh conditions, cramped and with inadequate food. The prisoners in both jails now have an excellent menu and learn useful skills.

In Muntok, we stayed in a heritage homestay opposite the jail and new Tinwinning Museum. This large Dutch-style house had been used by the Japanese camp commandant **Captain Saiki Kazue** during the war. **Captain**



Neal Hobbs at the door of his original cell, Muntok Jail, with Judy Balcombe. Feb 2014

Saiki was later sentenced to 15 years imprisonment by the War Crimes Tribunal for his ill-treatment of the internees.



Neal Hobbs with a photo of the original Charitas Hospital in Palembang. Feb 2014

Muntok, and to take the plaque to Muntok in September 2015. This will commemorate 70 years since the camps were liberated.

We also presented the Charitas Hospital with copies of the music which was sung at the Vocal Orchestra concert held in the U.K. in October 2013, and first performed in Palembang in 1943. This music can also be heard in the movie "Paradise Road." We hope the Sisters will perform the music in a concert at the Hospital next September. In Singapore, we visited the Changi Museum and saw the plaque to the military and civilian evacuees and internees unveiled that day. We are very pleased that this plaque is now displayed in the museum. It is important for survivors, families and historical accuracy that the fate of the refugees from Singapore is noted.

BRENDA MACDUFF'S 100TH BIRTHDAY – by Michael Pether

MVG honorary member **Mrs. Brenda Macduff** happily celebrated her 100th birthday in Auckland, New Zealand, on 3rd April this year in the company of her family and friends.

Brenda, originally from the U.K. was a nurse at Batu Gajah Hospital, married to lawyer and FMSVF Volunteer **Ken Macduff** when the Japanese invaded Malaya in December 1941. She soon had to evacuate to Singapore where she immediately volunteered for nursing duties at Alexandra Military Hospital. She was part of the large group of nurses ordered to leave Singapore on 13th February 1942 aboard the '**S.S. Kuala**'. The ship was bombed the next day whilst at anchor at Pom Pom Island in the Riau Archipelago with the resulting great loss of life. **Brenda**, with most of the other women, had to swim through bombs and machine gun fire from the Japanese planes to the rocky shore of the uninhabited island. The surviving nurses set up camp amongst the trees and nursed the several hundred wounded, and by a stroke of good fortune was one of the few nurses on night duty and therefore left behind on the island when some 200 women, children and walking wounded men were picked up by the ill fated '**S.S. Tandjong Pinang**' a few days later. That ship was sunk by Japanese warships a matter of hours later with only about 10 survivors reaching land.

Brenda eventually reached Sumatra and because she dedicated herself to nursing a wounded soldier in the long slow journey across the island she reached the port town of Padang 12 hours too late to embark to safety on an evacuation ship. Along with some sixty other British women and children (including 7 other nurses) who had suffered similar fates on the '**S.S. Kuala**', '**H.M.S. Grasshopper**' and other vessels (plus 2,400 Dutch women and children) she was firstly interned by the Japanese for sixteen months in the '**Fraterhuis**' camp in Padang. **Brenda** became part of a tight-knit group of nursing staff in the camp under the redoubtable and courageous surgeon **Dr. Marjorie Lyon**. In October 1943 all 2400 plus women and children were ordered to leave '**Fraterhuis**' and walk to the local prison which had been built for 500 men prior to the war. Only 5 weeks later all the women and children were moved by train and truck hundreds of miles north to their final camp at Bankinang. This was a group of wooden huts with attap roofs and earth floors situated in the jungle, actually quite near the mens' camp at Pakenbaru although the only contact that women had with their husbands was when they were abruptly told to attend funerals. **Brenda** spent all her time nursing in the camp where severe malnutrition and diseases such as malaria, dysentery, diphtheria took a real toll.

After the Japanese surrender, **Brenda** re-joined her husband **Ken**, who had survived as a POW on the Burma-Siam Railway, in Singapore and they lived in Ipoh until 1950 when they migrated to New Zealand.

The entire hospital staff for the Bankinang Camp, both doctors and nurses, came from the survivors from the '**S.S. Kuala**' – including the following:

- The redoubtable **Dr. Marjorie Lyons**, a Government obstetrician and surgeon. She was an Australian from Melbourne who acted as the representative of the internees and suffered many a slapping for standing up to the Japanese on behalf of the internees.

- Her friend **Dr. Elsie Crowe** who suffered serious brain injuries during the bombing of the 'S.S. *Kuala*' and for whom **Dr. Lyons** cared during the whole of their internment.
- **Marjorie de Malmanche** – a Government nursing sister from Singapore.
- **Heather Fisher** – an Australian nurse
- **Jean Smith** – a Scottish nurse from Batu Gajah hospital
- **Sarah Service** – a Scottish nurse from Johore
- **Miss Jenkins** – Army Nursing Service
- **Miss Harley** – Army Nursing Service
- **Miss Lydia McLean** – Army Nursing Service
- **Mrs. Brenda Macduff** – Army Reserve Nursing Service from England and Batu Gajah Hospital

The MVG salutes a very courageous lady and hopes she will celebrate many more birthdays to come.

A VISIT TO THE CITY OF STIRLING, PERTH W.A.

Report by Marilyn Hywel-Jones

In November and December 2013, during one of my bi-annual visits to Australia, I spent two weeks in Sydney with my mother, now 93, who has very clear memories of escaping, pregnant with me, from Singapore in January 1942 on the *Narkunda* and *Orion*. She wondered how many other mothers from those times are still alive today.

On my way back to London, I stopped off in Perth W.A. to stay with a lifelong friend whose mother also escaped from Singapore while pregnant with her and on the same ship as my mother.

Some years ago, I suggested that the MVG should present memorials to the Australian people to commemorate the Australian members of the Malayan Volunteer Forces and to thank the people of Australia for helping the women and children refugees fleeing from the Japanese from Singapore, Hong Kong and elsewhere. Despite the combined efforts of myself and the MVG writing to various military departments in Duntroon; the then Prime Minister of Australia, Kevin Rudd; the Minister for Veterans' Affairs in Canberra; and with the help of former Australian Secretary, John Pollock, we were turned down.

The decision was then made to write to Kings' Park in Perth W.A. and I was given help by the RSL representative there, Martyn Thompson, who took me to Kings' Park to see the memorials. The MVG also wrote, but despite sending in a formal application seeking permission to place a memorial in the Park, this was also turned down. However, with the help of Bill (President of the MBVA WA Inc.) and Elizabeth Adamson (MVG Secretary in Australia) the City of Stirling authorities agreed that 2 memorial plaques could be placed in their Memorial Gardens. These plaques were unveiled in February 2012, and are very similar to the ones around the Changi Chapel at Duntroon which is pleasing.

On 3rd December 2013, during my visit to Perth, Bill and Elizabeth together with Hyacinth Hess'e took me to see the 2 plaques, and at long last the Australian Volunteers have a memorial, and the people of Australia have been thanked for all they did for our refugee families. Before we went to the Memorial Gardens, 10 of us had lunch at a restaurant in Fremantle and I was able to meet some of the other MVG members who live in Perth. It was a very interesting day and great fun and I felt I should have proposed a Toast to all our wonderful mothers. While we were having lunch, we were each asked to tell a short story about our wartime experiences. Mine was this:-

'My father, George Booker, was born in British India in August 1915. His father worked for BI Shipping. His first cousin was Donald Donaldson, also born in India eight months earlier, in January 1915. His father was in the jute industry in Calcutta

The two little boys were known as 'the budmashes' (the rascals). Eventually Don's father took his family to settle in Melbourne

In 1940, Don joined the Royal Australian Air Force. George visited him in Australia in 1941 while on leave from Malaya, where he was a rubber planter. Don eventually came to England and flew with Bomber Command. Initially he commanded a Flight of No.460 Squadron, Royal Air Force, and later commanded No. 463 Australian Squadron flying Lancaster Bombers. He was shot down over Northern France in 1944 and escaped across France to Spain, and then back to England.

In 1944, he was appointed as Captain of the personal Flight for HRH The Duke of Gloucester when he became Governor-General of Australia. Don flew the Avro York 'Endeavor' out from England to Australia.

In September 1945, the prisoners of the Japanese were freed in Singapore. Don asked the Duke if he could take 'the plane and fly to Singapore to find and save' his cousin. He loaded up the plane with food and clothes and landed at Kallang aerodrome. But my father, George, had just left on board the 'Orange'. So, Don delivered the stores and brought back home about 25 or more Australian ex-POWs. Don and his family came to live in England. He died at Guildford in 1994, almost exactly one year after my father George's death at Guildford in 1993.'



Fremantle Lunch 2013



The 2 'Budmashes'

A VISIT OF DISCOVERY TO SUMATRA – FEBRUARY 2014

The visit to Sumatra by a group of 7 women, MVG members, **Liz Moggie, Yvonne Wurtzburg, Imogen Holmes and Rosemary Fell** and friends, **Azlina Yunus, Edda da Silva and Susan Jalaluddin**, in February, was planned as a follow-up to the boat trip through the Riau and Lingga Archipelagos, made in 2012 to follow the route of the escaping ships from Singapore just before the Fall.

From Kuala Lumpur, we flew to Bengkulu (formerly Bencoolen) via Jakarta (formerly Batavia) in Java, where we met up with our guide extraordinaire **Frans Duiniveld** and **Darwin Arriega**, son-in-law of **Liz Moggie**, who together with **Liz** had organised the route of our journey and booked the hotels.

Arriving at the Santika Hotel in Bengkulu in the late afternoon, we were delighted with the lovely accommodation and food. Our first full day was spent looking round Bengkulu, now a busy and vibrant town. We saw the old British 17th century Marlborough Fort with its wonderful views over the coastline, and eventually found the English Church with its well kept graveyard – recently upgraded by BACSA. As we looked round, we saw the names of several young children on family graves, who, sadly, had died from malaria and other diseases prevalent in those days. In the afternoon we visited the house, now a small museum, where **Soekarno**, Sumatra's first President, was placed under house arrest by the Japanese during their occupation in WW2, and shopped for batik in the main shopping area!

Next day, we travelled over 230 miles in our smart red, comfortable mini-bus, from Bengkulu to Painan. It was not an easy journey, and took us over 15 hours of painstaking driving along the east coast, over roads with huge potholes and sometimes roads which were practically non-existent. Our driver, **Pak Rizal**, was marvellous, and despite the fact that it seems to be the custom in Sumatra to overtake on blind bends and in the face of oncoming traffic, we didn't have a moment's concern about our safety! Our 15 hour journey was interspersed with plenty of stops, for '**kopi-susu**' during the morning, for '**Nasi Padang**' at lunchtime, and several comfort stops at **Pertamina** Petrol Stations in the afternoon, but we were glad to arrive at our Hotel Anordio that night for a quick bite to eat and some sleep.

We had an interesting little detour the next day from the coastal road north en route to Padang, driving up into the hills to see the **Jambatan Akar** over one of the numerous small rivers in the region. This bridge is famous because it is made from the intertwined roots of two banyan trees growing opposite each other. Perfectly safe to cross, apart from being a bit wobbly, we all managed to get over to the other side. Some decided to play it safe, and returned via a constructed bridge, but others retraced their steps across this unique structure. Then it was on to Padang for lunch at a **nelayan** restaurant before driving to Padang Panjang. The road took us up into the hills and lower mountain region and for much of the way it followed the still existing railway line which ends at Sawahlunto. Some of the bridges carrying the line looked very precarious and in some places, where the gradient was very steep, the railway employed a rack and pinion system as it climbed from sea level and up into the hills. This railway line was in existence during WW2, and used to transport the escaping military men and civilians, who had managed to get away from Singapore before or at the Fall, down to Padang from where they were picked up by ships from the port of Emmerhaven (now Teluk Bayur).

Our hotel Flaminggo (as written) was quite near the railway station in Padang Panjang, and the plan was to take the train, which only ran on a Sunday, from here to Sawahlunto. However, we discovered it no longer started at Padang Panjang, and we would have to catch it further along the line at a place called Batu Tabal.

We spent part of the next morning beside Lake Singkarak while we waited for the train. Our driver then took us to the station where we boarded the waiting train, but it was another half an hour or so after it arrived before we left for the 2 ½ hour journey to Sawahlunto. Fully air-conditioned (with all the windows open!) it was a fascinating journey, with lovely views as we followed the whole length of the west side of the lake. We caught glimpses of our red minibus as the road crossed and re-crossed the railway line, and waved to our driver as he followed the train. There was only one stop, at a place called Solok, before we reached Sawahlunto, and our waiting minibus took us to the Hotel Ombilin for the night.

The next day, we spent a good hour at the excellent Station Museum before visiting a former coal mine, which was rather claustrophobic and the guide only spoke in very fast Malay which made it difficult to translate. The region was noted for coal. Later that morning we left for Padang and the excellent Hotel Mercure. Wartime descriptions of Padang leave one with quite a different perspective of the town, which is now large and thriving. We visited the old part of town near the river and found a wonderful spice shop still run by the same Indian family which had settled in Sumatra generations ago. We saw the Dutch Churches where the escaping men had stayed; the picturesque ponies and traps which are still acting as taxis; the prison where the thousands of captured women and children, both Dutch and British, were interned by the Japanese before they were sent to Bankinang camp; and the sandy sea-front area near our hotel.

The last 3 days of our trip were spent in following, as closely as we could, the route of the railway built by the POWs across the mountains of Sumatra from Pekanbaru. The route of this railway has been very thoroughly researched by a Dutch journalist called **Henk Hovinga** and recorded in his book, "The Sumatra Railroad: Final Destination Pakan Baroe 1943-9145." We started in Muaro Sijunjung near the Ombilin River where the old WW2 station building still stands. A couple of old WW2 railway wagons can still be seen on their tracks – now being used as garages or stores – and other bits of track are visible in people's gardens. The river looks grey and lifeless and is full of boats which are panning for gold in the river bed. Further along we drove along the route of the railway as it followed the curve of the river, where the rock face had been dynamited away from the river edge. We found the old engine and frieze which **Imogen** had seen in 2012, and saw and spoke to an old **Romusha** who had been taken from Java by the Japanese to work on the railway.

On our last full day, we met New Zealander **Jamie Farrell** who has also investigated the route of the railway. He showed us small embankments; cuttings; the railway bund through an oil palm plantation; a place where a massacre of **Romushas** had take place and another old engine on tracks in a compound in the countryside. We drove on to Pekanbaru, crossing the Equator on the way, and saw a third engine with a frieze telling the story of the building of the railway. It had been a very tiring but rewarding trip. It is difficult to imagine the conditions in those wartime days, building a railway through virgin jungle and across rivers. It's extraordinary that anyone lived and survived to tell the tale. The POWs who worked on this railway were very brave men, and deserve full recognition for their ordeal. [N.B. A full report in July's A.K.]

A 'MERONDA' TO SOME OF THE BATTLEFIELD SITES IN SOUTHERN JOHORE

By Rosemary Fell

In January 2011, following a visit made by **Liz Moggie**, my husband **Donald**, and me to Malaysia's north east coast, a 'meronda' to the battlefield sites in southern Johore was planned for some convenient date in the future. This visit came to fruition in February this year, when **Liz** and I spent 6 days following the route of the retreating Allies down the west coast of southern Johore, and then retracing the battle sites up the east coast and across the peninsula - with a 3-day gap in the middle visiting Singapore for the presentation of the Sumatra Plaque at the Changi Museum.

Our trip began on Monday 17th February, two days after returning from a fascinating, informative and very rewarding 10 day visit to Sumatra following the route of the Sumatra Railway. It proved to be a worthy finale to that visit and a new voyage of discovery. We left **Liz's** house in Kuala Lumpur in her car, and travelled south along the North/South Highway to the **Tangkak** toll plaza, where we left the motorway and drove to the small seaside town of **Muar**. Now a prosperous looking town on the Muar River, it became the scene of heavy fighting in January 1942 between the Australian 2/19th Battalion, brought across from **Jamaluang** in eastern Johore by Australian Commander **Maj-Gen. Gordon Bennett** to join the Australian 2/29th Battalion who were deployed in the town of **Bakri** a short distance away, and the Japanese **Iwaguro Infantry Regiment** backed by the **Gotanda Medium Tank Company**. Despite heavy casualties, the Australians repelled the attack, and gunners of the 4th anti-tank artillery wiped out all 10 of the Japanese tanks. It became known as 'The Muar Front.' At **Bakri**, the staff at the Indian 45th Brigade HQ was wiped out by a direct hit from an air strike and **Lt. Col. Charles Anderson** of the Australian 2/19th Battalion assumed overall command. The **Bakri** force was told to hold out for 4 or 5 days to allow the beleaguered Westforce to retreat. Today, **Bakri** has a long, wide main street which curves uphill as it leaves town. It is situated in lovely open countryside with views down to the sea. Just on the 7th milestone outside the town, we came across a derelict house with the date 1934 embossed in the plaster. It must have been a beautiful house in its time, with a large open terrace upstairs and views down to the coast. The stonework was decorated with interesting carvings.

On we drove to **Parit Sulong**, the site of one of the infamous massacres by the Japanese of Australian wounded soldiers beside the bridge over the river. **Col. Anderson** moved his forces out of **Bakri** early on the morning of 20th January 1942, hoping to be in **Parit Sulong** by nightfall, in the belief that the **Yong Peng** road was still open. However, he encountered a series of Japanese roadblocks and, after several hand-to-hand clashes with the enemy, the Australians faced the Japanese on the bridge with a tank attack at the rear of the column, plus aircraft and artillery bombardment, inflicting heavy casualties. **Anderson** attempted to negotiate with the Japanese to allow the wounded to be evacuated, but they refused unless the Australian-British-Indian forces capitulated unconditionally. **Anderson** rejected this, and on 22nd January, after British aircraft dropped emergency supplies of food, medicines and ammunition and the Australians had made a last attempt to dislodge the Japanese from the bridge, an escape route to **Yong Peng** was traced through the jungle for able-bodied men, and the wounded were left in the care of volunteer medical orderlies. Only 550 Australians and 400 Indians out of 4,000 men made it through to **Yong Peng**. For his leadership and bravery **Lt. Col. Anderson** was awarded the VC. Of the 110 Australian and 35 Indian wounded men who were left behind in a barracks building near to the bridge over the river where the desperate fight had taken place, all, except 3 who managed to escape, were taken out and shot by the Japanese.

The remains of the barracks building can still be seen beside the road near the river. It is now in a very dilapidated state - the roof tiles have been removed and the roof beams are collapsing into the building. We did find the Memorial which the Australians have placed in a children's playground on the opposite side of the road beside the river. It tells the story of the battle at the bridge in **Parit Sulong**.

We drove on to **Yong Peng** and sampled some delicious **Hock Chew** cuisine for which the area is known, before making our way to **Ayer Hitam**, and, on a lighter note, visited the well known **Aw Pottery**. We wandered round looking at the various pots before choosing a few modest pieces which we could get into the car! It was the ladies' loo which was a must to visit - all decked out with pieces of broken pottery of all shapes, sizes and colours. Then it was on to **Batu Pahat** for the night.

The next day, Tuesday 18th February, we had a look at some of the lovely old shophouses, built in the 20s and 30s, which are still to be found in the old part of the town, before leaving for **Kampung Minyak Beku** via **Bukit Banang**, which is slowly being taken down lorry load by lorry load for its sand and gravel. We wanted to visit **Kampung Minyak Beku** to see the fresh water well in the rocks by the river's edge. The story goes that in the 15th century the Siamese, who had invaded Malacca, were fleeing from the pursuing soldiers of **Bendahara Tun Perak** when they reached the **Batu Pahat** area. In desperate need of clean water, they "chiselled" into rocks at the river's edge where they found water and made a well which is still there to this day. The Siamese escaped by boat and returned to Siam via the South China Sea. **Batu Pahat**, of course, means 'chiselled stone' and takes its name from this delightful fable, which may have some truth in it.

We retraced our steps, and found a route through several small kampongs, stopping at one for 'kopi-susu' before joining Highway 5 just north of **Senggarang**. It was here that the **British Batu Pahat Garrison**, consisting of 2 battalions of the **Indian 6/15th Brigade**, a company of the **Malay Regiment**, 4 field guns and an anti-aircraft battery under the command of **Brigadier B.S. Challen**, was ordered to retreat on 26th January to join the **53rd Brigade** at **Rengit**. However, **Challen's** men ran into Japanese road blocks south of **Senggarang**. Their heavy equipment impeded their escape, and **Challen** ordered it to be destroyed, and the men to make their way to **Benut** on foot. The wounded were left behind with **Padre Capt. Noel Duckworth** and some medical orderlies. These men, including the Padre, were captured and taken as prisoners to **Pudu Gaol** in **Kuala Lumpur**. 1,000 men made their way through jungle, plantation lands and swamp and reached **Benut**, exhausted, the following night. 2,000 others led by **Challen** walked along the coast until impeded by a deep river. **Challen** was captured, but a message was relayed to the British Command by a couple of **MVAF** pilots flying **Moth Aircraft** on a dawn mission on 27th January. As a result of this report, and over the course of three nights from 28th January, the gunboats **HMS**

Dragonfly and **HMS Scorpion** rescued the men by taking them off the beaches in small boats and back to Singapore. It was a dramatic and extraordinary rescue.

The drive through **Rengit** to **Benut** was through pleasant countryside, with oil plantations on each side of the road. We stopped in **Benut** to ask about an historic mosque which we planned to visit. According to our information, it was unusual because the dome was decorated with coloured flowers, but no-one we asked (not even the police) knew of its whereabouts. We drove on through **Pontian**, where there were more old shophouses, to **Kukup**, hoping to have lunch in a seafood restaurant for which **Kukup** is noted. The road took us into an area of newly built, but as yet unoccupied, shophouses about 50 yards from the port, from where there are daily ferry crossings to Sumatra. The port was almost a closed area and the restaurants were obviously only open at night. We found a small '*kedai kopi*' where we dined off curry puffs and banana fritters instead of lovely fresh seafood!

Continuing south along the west coast road through pleasant countryside, but looking decidedly brown and parched due to the lack of any appreciable rain for almost a month, we reached **Tanjong Piai**, the most southerly point of Malaysia and the mainland Asian Continent. There, at the end of a short jetty, was a holiday resort built on stilts in the sea. The place seemed to be deserted, and after having a look across to the island of Singapore and the second bridge, we walked back along the jetty to the car and made our way to **Johore Bahru**. Our hotel was near the Larkin Bus Terminal, the area named after an English officer from the colonial era, and situated just off a very busy road junction.

Wednesday was spent looking round the Chinatown area of J.B. We found an interesting Chinese Heritage Museum which told the story of where the Chinese community came from, and how they started trading in that area of Malaya. Sadly the **Abu Baker Palace**, which has been converted into a Museum, was closed for renovations, but we drove round the area of the Sultan's Palace on **Bukit Serene** and saw the tower from which **Gen. Yamashita** observed the battle for **Singapore** once his troops had landed on the island. We also visited **Jaro**, a Heritage Craft shop where the handicraft on sale is made by people with disabilities. The batik and basket ware in the shop were interesting and unusual.

Our journey to **Singapore** on Thursday, 20th February was quite an adventure – and we decided that another time, best tackled without luggage. Having settled ourselves comfortably on the bus, we then had to get off to go through the Malaysian emigration channels. This involved a trip up and down escalators (literally as I fell off the escalator over my case!) and back to catch the same bus – or so we thought! But we had to wait for about 20 minutes for a different bus. On board again we drove over the Causeway, and once on the **Singapore** side, had a repeat performance of going up and down escalators with our luggage, filling in forms, and then going through the immigration passport control before catching yet another bus. At last we arrived at the Queen Street bus station, and took a taxi to the YWCA in Fort Canning Road. Our stay in **Singapore** was primarily to attend the unveiling of the Sumatra Plaque to the Changi Museum, but while we were there we took the opportunity to visit the Peranakan Museum and Select Bookshop in Armenian Street (the latter is soon to move to a new location). Friday was spent at the Changi Museum going through the procedure for the unveiling ceremony, and in the evening meeting the family members, who had initiated the plaque, as their guests at a wonderful party at the Tanglin Club. The event on Saturday was a very successful and happy occasion for everyone. [See Ps. 2-4 for the report on the ceremony] We took the Express bus for our return journey to **Johore Bahru** on Sunday, 23rd February – much quicker and more comfortable, but we still had to trail up and down escalators with our cases as we exited **Singapore** and re-entered **Malaysia**. The next day, we resumed our tour of southern Johore – first stop being **Kota Tinggi** to look for the **Royal Mausoleum** where past Sultans and their wives are buried. This proved to be elusive, but we did find an unusual painted pillbox beside the **Johore River** which could only have been a relic of WW2. We drove on further towards the coast to visit the **Johore Lama Museum** – built of wood in the traditional Malay style and on stilts on the site of an old fort. It told the history of this part of the country, and the layout of the fortifications could be clearly seen.

We retraced the road down to the south east coast of Johore, and made our way through small kampongs towards the Fort at **Penggerang**. There is now a Malaysian Naval Base in the area and right at the end of the road, a compound for Immigration controls with a jetty and moorings for naval vessels. Just outside the compound, we found the first remains of the once important and strategically built **Penggerang Fort**, with 2 pillboxes and several concrete blocks used as tank traps. Driving into the compound, we found the entrance into the Fort, now completely overgrown with a huge fig tree obscuring the opening. This was all we could see of the former WW2 heavily defended fort, which had been built on a hill at the most south easterly point of mainland **Malaya** overlooking the **Straits of Johore** and opposite **Changi Point**, the most easterly part of **Singapore Island**. In 1942, there was a battery of 9.7" guns at the top of the hill, with 4.6" Howitzers at sea level which were trained to defend **Singapore** from a sea attack from the south. At that time the **Penggerang Base** consisted of a hutted camp laid out below the hill where the men's quarters and mess rooms were situated. The unit's Headquarters and Administrative Offices were situated at the top of the hill and communication between the 2 was by field telephone. [N.B. Information from the late John Hedley's Diary John was JVE but attached to the 1st Mysore Infantry at Penggarang.] Today, the entrance to the Fort is behind an 8 foot wire fence, so we couldn't investigate any further. On our return we picked up 2 people who had sailed across from **Singapore** and were looking for lunch while waiting to fill in their immigration papers. As the nearest kampong was some distance away, they decided to return to their yacht, but we continued on to find a local '*kedai kopi*' for something to eat.

The road continued along the coast to **Desaru**, now a tourist area with a lovely sandy beach and several holiday hotels. Ours had lovely gardens and an open air restaurant right on the beach where they made pizzas. That evening, while waiting for ours, we witnessed (from a distance) an interesting, but rather horrifying fight, between 2 hornbills. It ended eventually with one killing the other.

Tuesday, 25th February was an interesting trip north along the east coast road, following **Jason's Bay** (now called **Telok Mahkota**). On either side of the road were oil palm estates and some secondary jungle which went right down to the sea – as

related by E.J.H. Corner in his book, "The Freshwater Swamp Forests of Singapore and Johore" where reports of his pre-war botanising trips to the **Sedili River** were recorded. We found the area of the river where the wooden jetty still remains, and saw the huge fig tree, *Ficus microcarpus*, named **Corner's fig** after him. A little further along the path beside the river, we came across the pill box photographed by **David Wingate** and shown in the January 2014 edition of A.K. Continuing north along the coast road, we came across a long straight stretch between **Kota Tinggi** and **Mersing** where several machine-gun emplacements (pillboxes) were strategically placed at intervals. They were in a poor state of repair and one was puzzled as to their former ability to slow the enemy advance. We saw roadside signs saying '**Beware of the Elephant**' [or **Tapir or Wild Boar**] and we actually saw a wild boar in an oil palm plantation and a *biawak* (Monitor Lizard) crossing the road. There were areca nut and acacia wood plantations before we arrived in **Jamaluang** ready for a long overdue coffee and a couple of *rempeyak* biscuits. Fully sustained, we journeyed on towards **Mersing** through the former **Nithsdale** and **Joo Lye Estates** where, on 26th January 1942, the Australia 2/18th Battalion, under the command of **Varley**, ambushed the advancing Japanese forces which had landed at **Endau** that morning. Although over 300 Japanese were killed, the Australians also lost over 100 men in hand-to-hand fighting, and the ambush was not as successful as at **Gemas**, because the planned artillery fire from the 2/10th Australian Battalion did not materialise. Prior to this ambush, the Japanese had been held up at **Mersing** where they arrived at dawn from **Endau**. The bridge across the river at **Mersing** was left intact as 'bait' for the advancing Japanese forces, and once they started to cross a 45 metre span in the middle was blown by the Australians. Sadly, the success of this action received little credit for holding up the Jap advance – neither did the **Nithsdale** Ambush. The bridge across the river at **Mersing** to-day is the same bridge which was blown in 1942.

On to **Endau** where the wide river mouth was full of fishing boats unable to put to sea due to the rough seas of the north east monsoon. In 1942, the Japanese took advantage of these sea conditions hoping to land troops without warning, but they were spotted by a reconnaissance plane. Unfortunately, the pilot could not report his findings until he returned to **Singapore** due to a radio malfunction. By the time the Allies mounted an air attack against the Japanese transports, most of the troops had landed ashore. The ancient *Vildebeestes*, *Hudsons* and *Buffaloes* were no match for the Japanese Zero fighters, although they did manage to score hits on the transports, barges bringing troops ashore and one of the cruiser escorts. Two old destroyers **HMAS Vampire** and **HMS Thanet** sailed into battle against the overwhelming naval power of the Japanese supporting the landings. **Thanet** was sunk, and **Vampire** limped back to **Singapore** badly in need of repair. It was here at **Endau** where the Japanese sent Chinese families from **Singapore** into exile. This happened quite early on in their occupation of Malaya – a fact not widely known. It was a comparatively successful settlement in that the families didn't starve, unlike the Singapore Eurasian families who were later sent to **Bahau** where the ground was mostly unsuitable for growing food, and many died from disease and starvation.

Our travels then took us back to **Mersing**, **Kahang** and **Kluang** through interesting countryside. We came across a roadside stall run by 2 Orang Asli men from the **Jakun** tribe. The stall sold wooden chopping boards, of all shapes and sizes, made from tembusu wood – a very dense, heavy local wood. We both bought boards which seemed very reasonably priced. From **Kluang** we drove on to **Labis** retracing the route of the central thrust south of fresh Japanese forces, which had been landed in **Singora** from **Vietnam** on 23rd January. The soldiers were transferred into military trucks (many captured from the British) for their journey south. The convoy reached **Kluang** on 28th January fresh and ready for their final push to **Singapore**, unopposed by any air strikes from the Allies.

We stayed that night in a small hotel called The Station Inn at **Segamat**. It gave us a good start for our last day on the road, which followed the railway line towards **Gemas**. Here, a new station has been built beside the newly twinned track, which bypasses the now derelict traditional station with its old wooden buildings which look very sad beside the shiny new glass and metal ones – a reminder of a more leisurely bygone age. From **Gemas**, we followed the road north and found the well cared-for memorial near **Gemencheh** where the Australians ambushed the advancing Japanese forces as they crossed an old wooden bridge over the **Sungei Kalamah** and along a defile. It was a very successful action. The original wooden bridge stumps can still be seen in the water beside the modern bridge across the small river.

The newly twinned railway lines have also been re-routed at a small village called **Tebong**. They now go over the road via a couple of new bridges and an embankment, instead of the single track which ran across the road – but there's no station now. It took some time to find the old abandoned wooden station building down a small road, covered in vegetation and in a compound where the old concrete sleepers from the original line have been stored. The abandoned station master's house stands opposite and the signalman's house beside the road. We could still see, quite clearly, the route of the old track where the granite stone ballast ran along a small embankment and across the road where the signalman's house lies abandoned.

It was at **Tebong** where yet another war-time massacre possibly took place, although there seem to be different versions about what actually happened. It is possible that a train, carrying men away from the Slim River battle, was bombed and strafed by the Japanese outside **Tebong** station, and between 20 & 30 men were killed and buried there – and their remains only recovered after the war. It is also possible that some Argylls were nearly ambushed at the station by the Japanese.

Returning to the main road, we drove through the town of **Bahau**, where the Singapore Eurasians were exiled by the Japanese. There was no sign of the poor swampy ground where so many died of disease and starvation, and it is hard to visualize the desolation of the place during those wartime days in this now thriving, busy town. We stopped for lunch at **Kuala Pilah** – another town full of interesting shops – and then drove on to **Seremban** before reaching **Kuala Lumpur** at about 5.30 p.m.

Finally, I would like to say a very big 'thank you' to **Liz Moggie** for making this visit to Johore possible. I am enormously grateful to her for organizing the whole trip, planning the route we would take, booking the accommodation and, not least, for doing all the driving in her own car. It was a thoroughly enjoyable visit to a part of Malaysia which I have always wanted to see. **Liz** arranged a fascinating itinerary of interesting things to see and do, both from an historical point of view and from a cultural aspect. She intertwined visits to the battlefield sites with visits to other places of interest along the way, so that we saw as much as possible during our journey. I hope she enjoyed it as much as I did.

AN HISTORICAL VISIT TO SINGAPORE – PART 2

By HENRY LANGLEY

To research my family's evacuation from Singapore in 1941 and visit battlefield sites and other places of interest.

Visit in April 2013

In April 2013, I had another opportunity to visit my friends in Singapore, and this time I was able to spend two weeks there, combining sightseeing with visiting some of the other museums & military sites that I had not had time to see during my first visit. However, my visit started with a disappointment. I had planned to visit the Battle Box in Fort Canning Park, which covers the events leading up to the British surrender to the Japanese on 15th February 1942. I was very disappointed when I arrived at the entrance to the museum to find it had been closed since February 2013 for essential maintenance.

But after that initial disappointment, the rest of the holiday was much more productive. In 1989 during the stopover my mother and I had visited the island of Sentosa and we had been to the Sentosa Wax Museum where we had seen the displays depicting the surrender of the British to the Japanese in 1942 and the surrender at the end of the War by the Japanese. These are now included in the display at Fort Siloso, which also includes displays concerning the defence of Singapore and the Japanese invasion, and you can see various guns and tunnels. Sentosa has been extensively developed and has many very popular tourist attractions, such as the Aquarium, but when I was there Fort Siloso was an oasis of calm and I would certainly recommend it as a place to visit.

My next stop was a meeting with two people who had given me a lot of invaluable help by e-mail: Geraldene Lowe and Margie Hall, both of whom are tour guides in Singapore. We made arrangements for future meetings, including one for the following day which was to be the highlight of my visit.

On that day, I set off to meet Margie Hall at her house in Sembawang. She had helped me to identify the house where my parents had lived in January 1942 when the house had been bombed. Briefly, my parents and my sisters had been in the house that evening in late January 1942. The house in Fiji Road (now Auckland Road West) had been right next to the Naval Base, so perhaps it is not surprising that they were in the line of fire. Fortunately though, two bombs that fell landed in the garden. Nevertheless, all my family sustained mostly minor injuries, and my mother and two of my sisters had to go to the Singapore General Hospital. By this time, arrangements were being made for the evacuation of the Naval Base and my father arranged for my mother and sisters to be released from the hospital, and they, along with others, were taken by *HMS Electra* to Keppel Harbour where they boarded the *USS West Point* on 30th January shortly before its departure from Singapore.

Bearing in mind all the development that has occurred in Singapore, I was amazed that the house still existed and I was very pleased to be able to see the outside of the house and to take some photographs of the house and the surrounding garden. Margie also showed me the extensive grass mound opposite the house where there was a large air raid shelter at the time, and there is still evidence of this with the ventilation shafts. With the air raid shelter so close, the obvious question is why my family were not there when the bombs fell, but I understand that there was no warning that evening of the attack by the Japanese planes. At her house Margie had shown me some of her photographic collection, including photographs of the Naval Base, and she also wondered whether my father might have been transferred from Hong Kong to Singapore in October 1941 in connection with the forthcoming arrival in Singapore of Force Z.

The following day, I went on one of Geraldene Lowe's tours, that of "black and white houses", the old style houses that remain in Singapore. By chance, one of the houses visited – 20, Malcolm Road – was where the family of another MVG member, Lynda Thompson, had lived in 1942. This is now mainly an antiques' shop. But, perhaps the most impressive house visited was in Goodwood Hill, a very desirable property although in the background was a huge tower block!

A couple of days later, I went on another of Geraldene's tours, her "Battlefield Tour." Among the places we visited was the Kranji Memorial. My mother and I had also visited Kranji on the brief stopover in 1989 and my sister recalls my mother wanting to see whether there was a mention there of one of her friends who had died in the fall of Singapore, but there had been no time on the guided tour then to check this out. However, I suspect that the person for whom she was looking was her former employer Cicely Jordan – she had worked for the Jordan family as governess looking after their children in Singapore and Malaya in the early 1930s – and as a civilian her name would not have been on the Memorial anyway. I later discovered that Cicely Jordan – whose husband was A.B. Jordan, Protector of Chinese in Singapore and later Secretary for Chinese Affairs – had tragically died when trying to leave Singapore on the *Giang Bee* which had been sunk by the Japanese in February 1942.

On this visit to Kranji, I had more time to be able to appreciate the Memorial and to have a look round the gravestones and the walls on which are carved the names of soldiers killed in battle. I found this a very moving experience and the site is a haven of peace amongst all the bustle of Singapore. I walked round with Geraldene's husband, Ismail, who told me that his father had been a Volunteer at the start of the war – he thinks his father might have been imprisoned and sent to the Burma Railway, but unfortunately there is no record as to what happened to him.

After Kranji, the coach took us past various sites, including the museum that I had visited the previous day, "Memories at Old Ford Factory" (where the British surrendered to the Japanese in February 1942, and which is now a museum telling the story of the surrender and of the years of Japanese occupation), on our way to another museum "Reflections at Bukit Chandu." In my opinion, both are well worth a visit. My main memory of "Reflections at Bukit Chandu" is seeing a couple of films on the Japanese invasion, including a description by one of the members of the Malay Regiment which was very vivid in its depiction of the events.

I will mention a couple of other things that I did during my holiday that might be of interest. First, I also managed to see the

house where my father had stayed on returning to Singapore in October 1945. I should, perhaps, say that on returning to England in 1942, my father had gone back to working at Chatham Dockyard, becoming an Acting Foreman of the Yard in November 1942 and then he went to Colombo in mid-1945 in a similar role (later becoming Acting Senior Foreman) while being appointed Lt. Cdr. in the RNVR Special Branch. From Colombo he went on secondment to Flag Officer Malaya to help with the rehabilitation of the Singapore Harbour. He had initially stayed at the Adelphi Hotel, but conditions were not good – and indeed in a letter of complaint he implied that they were worse than those for the captured Japanese prisoners of war! So he subsequently moved to share a bungalow in Astrid Park (now Queen Astrid Park) and this too is still standing, so I was pleased to be able to take some pictures and compare them with a couple that my father had sent to my mother in mid-1946.

Secondly, I picked up a couple of books in Singapore to which I had been alerted. The first is produced by the Singapore Archives: “**Reflections and Memories of War Vol 1 Battle for Singapore: Fall of the Impregnable Fortress.**” The second was issued in connection with the seventieth anniversary of the fall of Singapore and is by Justin and Robin Corfield: “**The Fall of Singapore – 90 Days: November 1941 to February 1942.**”

Conclusion.

All in all, I had an extremely enjoyable and very interesting visit to Singapore in April 2012. I got some further insight into what my parents and sisters must have gone through during the period they were in Singapore in 1941/42 before being evacuated. But I am no nearer to finding out definite answers to the key questions as to why my father went to Singapore in October 1942 and why my mother and sisters went from Melbourne to Singapore in November/December 1941. Perhaps the plan was for them to return to England. My father had already been in Hong Kong for four years, so was probably due to return home. However, this may not have been the case as evidenced by the large amount of overtime that he put in while working at the Singapore Naval Base. Probably I will never know.

LI-WO'S LAST FIGHT -- the most highly decorated small ship in British Naval History

Information taken from an article by **Robert Guttman** in the Military History Magazine, January 2014.

HMS Li-Wo was built to carry passengers on the upper Yangtze River, but in 1940 she was commandeered by the Royal Navy and sent to Singapore as a patrol vessel. She was a small vessel about 160 feet long, with steam engines only capable of generating barely 300 horsepower. For her wartime role, she was equipped with an old 4” gun on her foredeck and a couple of Lewis machine guns. After the fall of Malaya, and with Singapore about to capitulate, the **Li-Wo** was ordered to leave port on 13th February 1942, and sail to Batavia in Java, with a mixed crew of 84 - 19 Royal Navy men; 5 soldiers; 2 Royal Air Force men; 10 Malays; 6 Chinese and 42 assorted Europeans including her Captain **Thomas Wilkinson** who had been **Li-Wo's** master when she was a merchant vessel. With few other regular navy officers available, **Wilkinson** remained as Captain and was given the rank of temporary lieutenant in the Royal Navy Reserve.

Over the next 24 hours after leaving **Singapore**, the **Li-Wo** was attacked 4 times by enemy war planes – one attack reportedly by 52 air craft. Most of the ammunition was used up, but the ship remained seaworthy despite some damage. During the afternoon of 14th February, as the **Li-Wo** was passing north of the Banka Strait, smoke was seen on the horizon. It came from the Japanese invasion convoy heading towards Sumatra, escorted by the 5,660-ton light cruiser **Yura** and two 2,000-ton destroyers, **Fabuki** and **Asagiri**. **Wilkinson** was faced with a difficult decision – rationally he could decide to surrender or make a run for it. Instead, he decided to attack – addressing his crew with the words, “**A Jap convoy is ahead. I am going to attack it. We will take as many of those Jap bastards as possible with us.**” The Captain asked how much ammunition was left. It amounted to 6 semi-armour piercing shells, 4 graze-fuze shells, 3 anti-aircraft shells and 3 practice rounds, plus the 2 Lewis guns. With this information, **Temporary Lieutenant Thomas Wilkinson** went into battle. It was possibly the most one-sided battle since 1591 when **Sir Richard Grenville** in **HMS Revenge** single-handedly attacked a Spanish armada of more than 50 ships.

With her battle ensign flying and her single deck gun blazing, **HMS Li-Wo** made straight for the nearest transport. The Japanese, taken by surprise, were slow to return fire, and **Li-Wo's** gun crew (survivors from the **Prince of Wales** and the **Repulse**) made every shot count. The Japanese transport caught fire and the Japs abandoned ship. **Li-Wo** rammed the transport and as both ships were sinking under heavy enemy fire, **Wilkinson** gave his men the order to abandon ship. He remained on the bridge and went down with his ship.

The **Li-Wo's** crew were machine-gunned in the water by the Japanese, and one of the ships in the convoy was said to have sailed through the wreckage of the **Li-Wo** at high speed. Only 7 men survived and were taken prisoner – fewer still lived through the 3 ½ years in Japanese prison camps. The story of **Li-Wo's** last fight only came to light when the few survivors of her crew were repatriated.

In 1946, the British Government officially recognized the crew's valour. The list was headed by **Temporary Lieutenant Thomas Wilkinson of the Royal Naval Reserve** who was awarded the **Victoria Cross**. His citation reads:

“in recognition of the heroism and self-sacrifice displayed not only by himself but by all who fought and died with him.”

THE WARTIME ESCAPE OF COLONEL JOHN NICHOLSON O.B.E. FROM SINGAPORE – PART 5

By kind permission of his son Michael Nicholson

Meanwhile as all the expert Malay interpreters were busy, I went ashore to get a hollow bamboo. I found a native hut but had considerable difficulty in getting myself understood as the Malays all talked Nias and very little Malay. They were incredibly poor but all except the older women looked healthy. They pitched a long story that fish were scarce, the yams had failed, there was no money to buy rice. Their house would not have passed an Inspector for overcrowding, there seemed to be three old women, two young women, one old man, four men of varying ages, and unknown quantities of children living in two huts 12'x 12'.

As the wind was favourable, we decided to leave **Pulau Teloe** so we left our anchorage and after a little trouble due to a sudden shift in the wind just as we were tacking which nearly put us on a mud bank, we sailed into the strait north of the **Batoe Islands**, saw the **Amir's** catamaran sailing for home and waved him farewell.

The wind fell during the night and we were swept back by the currents to just off **Pulau Teloe**. All the next day we tacked about between **Nias** and the **Batoe Isles**. At one time we thought we might succeed in beating out west of **Nias** but then the mainsail tore and after that we made too much leeway and with the strong current running in from the sea, by evening we were becalmed off the entrance to **Pulau Teloe** once again. But next day, we got a wind from the north, and by evening we were about 6 miles west of **Semoek** (the most westerly of the **Batoe Isles**). As the sun sank, the wind died but even as we cursed a breeze came from the S.S.W. and blew us for the next two days past **Nias** and out to sea. We last saw land, the mountains of **Nias**, on the evening of the 28th.

The visit to **Pulau Teloe** had proved most satisfactory except for the waste of time. We now had the original mainsail, mizzensail and staysail, which we were using as a jib; two triangular sails, which had been made from the bolt of canvas when we were at **Pulau Pini**; the mainsail of a catamaran, which would do to replace the mizzensail; and jib and mainsail from the ship's boat. These last were of much tougher canvas than any other sails we had, and we planned to use the jib to make a sea-anchor and the mainsail as a storm-sail if necessary. The water tins in the hold had been covered with planks which made it much more comfortable. A holder had been built for the water tin in use. The entrance hatches had been strengthened in preparation for rough weather. The food store had been replenished, a new stock of eggs laid in, more bananas and pineapples bought and the empty water-jars filled. The first lot of eggs, which we had had hard-boiled, all went bad after two days, so this lot we left raw and we ate the last eight days later.

Pat looked after all the stores and did the difficult cooking on a primus, while the rice and water were boiling on the outside galley by one of the watch. We had a lot of difficulty in keeping the fire going at first, but after a time we learnt the knack and also the art of cooking rice. We fed extremely well. We intended to have only two meals a day, but as we always cooked too much rice for our evening meal, we used to have rice and bananas or jam at midday. There were masses of bananas on board but they got ripe quicker than we could eat them, in spite of the fact that we seemed to be eating them all day! I felt as if I never wanted to see a banana again (6 months later I was counting them as one of the few treats that we got).

Uncle did the navigating. We had a ship's compass and a school atlas of which I have already mentioned the inadequacies. We improvised a logline to measure speed. **Uncle** had his ship's tables with him and he plotted our general course to **Trincomalee**. The helmsman normally sailed on this bearing or to the south of it as we wanted to get away from Sumatra as quickly as possible. But with a S.W. wind he had to sail to the north of the best bearing.

During the day our course was a continual zig-zag and every hour we threw the log, estimated the average speed and average course. Each morning and evening **Uncle** would take these recordings, disappear into his tables for half an hour and emerge with a position and a new course.

We used to check **Uncle's** navigation by estimates of the altitude of the North Star above the horizon and also by the setting of the sun. After leaving the islands the sun set every day in a clear sky. We would watch it until the rim touched the horizon and note the time. As we were on the equator, we assumed that one hour in the setting of the sun equalled 1,000 miles, so that one second equals about 2½ miles and there was plenty of room for error if our watches were wrong. The Colonel swore his was always right, so after the first few days, we used his as the standard and it did tie up remarkably accurately with **Uncle's** calculations, who was never told the answer until he had produced his.

Unfortunately, after we left **Nias** behind, two things turned against us, the weather and our health. The weather became very calm by day and on an average we were stationary about half the day and only moving at about one knot the rest of it. After the third night, there were strong cyclonic squalls moving from N.E – S.W. These squalls used to blow us along at a good rate. We tried to get on to the front edge of the squall and use it until it passed us, when we waited for the next. On several nights they were practically continuous. I had one slightly terrifying experience when the boat overtook the squall in front of the one we were using. There was a moment of complete calm, then the wind came strongly from the opposite direction,

everything flapped wildly and then settled down and I found myself sailing E. instead of W! On another occasion I went forward to loosen the jib sheet, it slipped off the bollard and I found myself struggling in the scuppers and trying to keep myself from being hauled overboard. Fortunately **Fat** suddenly appeared and helped me up and we got the jib-sheet fastened down again.

The mainsail had been torn again when we were off **Nias**. Only the top had ripped so we cut off a piece and then hoisted it again. But the piece cut off was the wrong shape and as a result the sail never set properly again, and we seemed to spend our whole time repairing it and re-hoisting it and generally fidgeting with it, but when it was set, the speed of the boat increased most noticeably in even the slightest breeze. We had always vowed to take the sail down at night as it was so cumbersome to handle, but on the third night we decided to leave it up as we were so disappointed with our progress during the day. That night I was woken by a shout of "all hands on deck" and rushed up to find the boat moving at a fair speed through the water, the mainsail set and the noise of a strong squall coming up from behind. We started to take the mainsail in but unfortunately the rope which held the boom of the mainsail to the mast had been doubled to strengthen it and in doubling it, it had become entangled with the sheet of the fore-sail. I was still struggling to disentangle this when the squall hit us. The boat accelerated like a shot from a gun; the jib-sheet parted with a crack and then a moment later the rain came and the mainsail ripped from top to bottom. As the staysail couldn't be loosed, the boat wouldn't come head to wind and by the time I had the tangle sorted out, the end of the boom had caught in the coping where the mast entered the roof of the hold, and the mainsail was in ribbons. But we got the jib furled before it blew to bits in spite of someone having to manoeuvre out along the bowsprit to do so. That was our first experience of night squalls, and after that we treated them with respect. We had no further adventures. Most days the boat rolled placidly along in a heavy S.E. swell and the sails slapped back and forth against the rigging and only filled when we were on the crest, and then only to a very feeble S.S.W. wind. Our progress was so slow during the day that we used to paddle out in the kolek and photograph the boat. A shoal of small fish swam permanently beneath us, and were occasionally joined by a young shark. There were a lot of porpoises, and at night the phosphorescent trails they left in the water, as they played round the bow, were most attractive.

Almost immediately after leaving **Samoek** some of us started going sick. At first we thought it was sunstroke, but when finally all except the **Colonel**, **Uncle** and myself were affected, it was obviously more serious and it turned out to be malaria but in a fairly mild form. Unfortunately we had no quinine and could do nothing to cure it. **Rosie** was worst, being continually sick though this was probably due to his appendix which he had out later. **Uncle** developed a poisoned hand. Altogether we were a pretty sorry ship's company. But normally 5 or 6 were available for watches.

We had expected that the Japanese would be maintaining an air and possibly a sea patrol about 200-300 miles off Sumatra and that after passing that we would be safe from their activities. When we were about 250 miles off the islands, an aeroplane passed about 5 miles ahead of us. Unfortunately, we made very little progress that day, and next morning at the same time another 'plane came up behind us, circled round us and then flew on to the south. We saw no further signs of Japanese activity until about 8.30 a.m. on 4th April when we saw three Japanese tankers.

The two previous days we had been moving very much faster. We appeared to have got out of the area of calms and estimated that we had travelled 80 and 120 miles on the two respectively. The night of the 3rd/4th April the sea had been quite choppy and covered in white horses, and although we had taken the mainsail down and hoisted only our square mizzensail on the main mast we had travelled fast and had had the most exhilarating night.

The mainsail had been repaired after being torn to pieces by the squall but was now less than half its original size. However, it was still much the largest sail we had, and we had just hoisted it and were rejoicing in the additional speed it gave the boat and making optimistic estimates of our arrival date in Ceylon when, out of a squall ahead which covered the horizon ahead in a sheet of rain, these three tankers appeared. As we could see the whole of their upperworks there was no hope that they could not see us; it was impossible for us to alter course or take down our sails without raising suspicions. They were steering S.W to N.E and were unescorted. They disappeared over the N. Horizon and we were sitting down discussing their presence and had decided that there must be a fleet ahead of us (actually the Japanese had a fleet out doing a sweep of the Bay of Bengal, and bombing Colombo, Madras etc.) when we saw that one of them was coming back straight towards us. They closed to within 300 yards and then put a shot across our bows, whereupon we downed sails with unexpected celerity. We then had one or two nasty moments when it looked as if they were about to run us down, but eventually they ordered us alongside which was difficult as they were placed between us and the wind. We got alongside and went aboard. At first they were rather unpleasant, but when they found that **Pat** was wounded and several of the others had difficulty in getting up the rope ladders, they gave us rice sacks to sit on and let us sit in the shade, and gave us water to drink. Meanwhile the **Colonel** was seeing their captain who announced he would take us prisoners-of-war and we were allowed to get our

kit and two sacks of food out of our boat. The *Setia Berganti* was then turned adrift and the tanker rejoined the other two which were waiting for her. An aeroplane had appeared and was circling round us, and the Captain told us that we were lucky to have been picked up as it would have bombed and sunk us! I have my doubts as visibility was bad owing to the squalls.

About an hour later we were transferred to another tanker where we were treated extremely well. They put us under the bridge where there was a wooden sleeping platform – and gave us small mattresses to sleep on. They gave us hot tea and lemonade (!) and asked if we wanted any food to be given us or if we had enough. They gave us old American papers to read. In fact they were extremely kind.

We were questioned by the captain but he didn't press us and only smiled when we refused to answer questions. We had great difficulty making him believe we were sailing to **Trincomalee**, but after he had plotted our course from our log, he seemed contented and told us that we were 15 miles from our estimated position! Not bad going on the part of the navigators.

There were two armed sentries mounted over us and they escorted us wherever we went, to the latrine in the fo'castle, to the galley to draw our rice etc. When we came aboard, they had asked what we wanted to eat, but gave us their rations which were rice and barley mixed with vegetables three times a day, and meat and fish once a day. We were allowed to walk on the deck on the starboard side in front of the bridge. We were objects of great interest to the crew. Whenever they had a spare moment they crowded round us and looked at our rings, watches and the Yank papers we had been given. They were perfectly polite, but just incurably inquisitive. They were all Navy or Merchant Service men and all of them, from the Captain downwards, were of an infinitely better type than the Army equivalents that I was to meet later.

We reached Singapore on the evening of the 6th April. The town looked very deserted, but there were few visible signs of damage. There was a little native shipping and the harbour off Clifford's Pier was entirely deserted. There was a lot of Japanese shipping between **Bukom** and the mainland but most of it looked old and dirty. Next morning, after a farewell speech of good wishes from the Captain, the crew cheered us and we were taken ashore. Later in the day, we were sent out to Changi where the other prisoners were interned.

[Ed: We are very grateful to Michael Nicholson for allowing us to publish his father's diary. The capture of the *Setia Berganti* is also recorded in "Singapore's Dunkirk" by Geoffrey Brooke.]

THE SINGAPORE AND PENANG HARBOUR BOARDS EVACUATION OF STAFF FROM SINGAPORE FEBRUARY 1942 A report by H.K. Rodgers - the Chairman, Harbour Boards, Straits Settlements

These notes are prepared for the private information of the Staff and Families of the Singapore and Penang Harbour Boards, in response to the many enquiries I have received for news in regard to the evacuation of Staff.

On the 25th January information reached me which indicated that it would be advisable to take precautionary measures to enable the Boards' Staff to leave Singapore should the need arise and orders were given for the Penang Harbour Board ferry steamer "*Bagan*" to be fitted out for a journey of a 1,000 miles carrying up to 200 "Troops". With this craft so equipped I felt that the interest of the Staff would be safe-guarded without causing any uneasiness or pessimism.

The greatest secrecy was necessary as the official view in Singapore was that Singapore "Must not, shall not fall" and only heads of Departments could be taken into my confidence and these were sworn to secrecy. I mention this because it serves to explain the difficulties which were met with in organising this evacuation and why it was necessary for me, at various times during the last few days of their stay at Singapore, to ensure officers that all was well even when most depressing news was being received from the front.

The Japanese landed on the North-West coast of Singapore Island on the night of Sunday, 8th February. I saw the General at 11 a.m. on the Monday in regard to another matter, and at that interview formed the impression that the "*Bagan*" might be required at very short notice.

On Tuesday, 10th February, I interviewed the Rear Admiral Malaya, and the Air Officer Commanding at Sime Road Headquarters. Their attitude and the plans they were making for the evacuation of the Naval Base Staff compelled me to put into motion arrangements for fuelling and storing the "*Bagan*." That evening, the whole of the Staff were ordered to be at six hours notice, ready to leave Singapore. The Staff at Tanjong Rhu were ordered to come to Keppel House for the night and the Penang Harbour Staff, through **Mr. Wilson**, were given instructions to hold themselves in readiness also.

On Wednesday, 11th February, the battle front had reached Pasir Panjang, and Troops, in great disorder, were seen retreating through Keppel Harbour village from dawn onwards. Military lorries were being sabotaged on Keppel Road and there was a fear that the Japanese would be in Keppel Harbour before the day was over. I spent over two hours trying to communicate with the Governor, but the telephone system was disrupted and, due to his presence at meetings, I failed to make contact. At 11.30 a.m. I decided to assemble all Staff at Keppel Harbour and to put them on board the "*Bagan*" as soon as possible. A clearance for this craft had been obtained from the Master Attendant on the previous afternoon and as this clearance was only valid until 6 p.m. on the 11th February, and as **Capt. R.P. Eddy** was anxious to leave as quickly as possible, to enable the ship to make the passage through Bulan Strait in daylight, rapid embarkation had to be insisted upon.

By 1 p.m. all were on board and ready to leave when I made a final attempt to speak to the Governor. I reached him at 1.30 p.m. and to my surprise he not only knew nothing of the situation at Pasir Panjang, but informed me that the General was

also unaware of the position there. After considerable discussion and a reference to the Director General of Civil Defence, he gave his assent to the whole of the Staff leaving but purely as a precautionary measure, provided that someone stayed behind to look after the Asiatic Staff. I agreed to accept this duty and informed the Staff on board the "*Bagan*" that I was remaining in Singapore. As soon as this was known the following officers volunteered to remain with me and came ashore with their baggage:-

Mr. J.R. Wiggs; Mr. C.R. Grixoni; Mr. J.W. Jackson; Mr. J.F. Jones; Mr. W.P. Douglas; Mr. Stanners; Mr. R.E. Earle; Mr. V.B. Pybus and Mr. Cruickshank.

The "*Bagan*" left at 2.30 p.m. and those who were remaining proceeded to Keppel House with me for a discussion.

The following additional members of the Staff did not leave in the "*Bagan*":-

Mr. Lawrence (Civil Engineer's Dept.) refused to leave Singapore; **Mr. Choppin** (Dockyard) decided to remain with Mr. Lawrence; **Mr. Harper** (Electrical) too late in arriving at Keppel Harbour; **Mr. Rushton** (Wharf) late arriving at Keppel Harbour; **Captain D. Sutherland** (Wharf) domestic reasons. It has, however, since transpired that **Capt. Sutherland** and **Mr. Rushton** escaped in a boat of some kind and landed in Sumatra. So far I have no confirmation of this, but they have certainly been seen in Sumatra by other evacuees.

There were continuous Air Raids on Wednesday afternoon after the "*Bagan*" left and shelling commenced in the Alexandra Rd. district and later at Keppel Harbour. It was therefore decided to vacate Keppel House and to assemble at the Head Office. By this time the whole of Keppel Harbour and the Wharf Area were completely deserted, all the inhabitants having left for other parts of Singapore.

On reaching the Head Office I was informed that instructions has been received from the Naval Office for the whole party to be at Union Building at 5 p.m. with baggage. I tried to communicate with the Governor by telephone to confirm that these instructions were in accordance with his wishes, but failed. On arrival at Union Building we were joined by **Mr. F.G. Ritchie** and **Mr. S.A. Anderson** and the whole party was sent to the "*Laburnum*" with orders to board the "*Mata Hari*." We had hardly boarded one of the Hammer and Company's water boats, which was being used as a tender, when **Capt. Atkinson R.N.** arrived to inform us that the departure of all evacuee ships had been postponed. We decided, however, to go on board the "*Mata Hari*", there being no other place for any of us to go for the night.

The following day, **Mr. Wiggs** and I went ashore to ascertain the position and found that the orders given us by the Naval Authorities had been without the knowledge and consent of the Civil Government. We therefore had a signal sent to the ship to land our baggage and proceeded to the Head Office and commenced to pay off such of the Asiatic Staff as presented themselves at the Office. We worked at this without pause until 5.30 p.m. and then returned to the "*Laburnum*" to endeavour to trace our baggage.

This baggage was eventually found at the Naval Office and with it a note from **Mr. Grixoni** stating that the Harbour Board Staff on board the "*Mata Hari*" were prepared to leave the ship and to remain with **Mr. Wiggs** and me if I would send orders to board accordingly. The issue had, however, been taken out of my hands as the "*Mata Hari*" had sailed two hours previously. **Mr. Wiggs** and I then had a discussion with **Rear Admiral Spooner**, who expressed great concern at the delay in ordering the departure of "Evacuee Ships." He entirely agreed with my action in getting the "*Bagan*" away the previous day, and informed us, frankly, that the position was rapidly deteriorating, that capitulation was inevitable and advised us to leave. **Mr. Wiggs** and I informed him that we were now unable to leave as we had commenced to pay off the Asiatics and this work would take a least another day to complete and could not be left unfinished. The following day we continued the paying-off of Asiatics and by 5.20 p.m. the work was completed so far as it was possible to do so.

Important developments took place in the town of Singapore during that Friday. I cannot vouch for all of this but it is believed that **Brig. I. Simpson**, the Director General of Civil Defence, obtained the sanction of the Governor to attempt the evacuation of about 70 leading Singapore residents, e.g. Members of the Legislative Council, heads of business firms and the like. Printed permits to leave Singapore Island on the 13th February were delivered by an Army Officer to **Mr. Wiggs** and me at 3 p.m. with instructions to leave for the "*Laburnum*" immediately, but owing to the payment of the Asiatics we could not avail ourselves of this offer.

At 6 p.m. however, **Mr. Wiggs** and I went to the "*Laburnum*" to see the position. The Telok Ayer Railway Godowns had been bombed and were ablaze. The road in the vicinity of Godown No.4 was impassable, owing to the large number of cars on fire, and we arrived in time to see the last tender leaving the Wharf with civilian evacuees for the "*Kuala*."

While we were discussing matters with the Naval Officials a heavy raid in Telok Ayer took place. **Mr. Wiggs** and I had a very narrow escape and were badly shaken by blast. In our judgment the end of Singapore was close at hand and we decided to accept an offer made by the Naval Officers on the spot, to leave with them on board the "*Tengarroh*." This ship was built by the Harbour Board in 1929 as a Yacht for the Sultan of Johore. She had a range of less than 300 miles and clearly could not make the journey to Batavia without refueling, but we decided to accept the risk involved rather than fall into Japanese hands. No sooner had we got settled on board than the Japanese started to shell the Telok Ayer Area. Arrangements had been made for all the remaining small Naval Craft to come alongside the Telok Ayer Wharf at dusk to embark the troops selected for evacuation, but the shelling which took place not only caused large numbers of casualties but disorganised the embarkation arrangements. The ships, however, came alongside in perfect order and left to a timetable, carrying a considerable number of troops.

The "*Tengarroh*" left at about 1.30 a.m. and returned a few minutes later to pick up a few troops who had run the gauntlet of the barrage. **Mr. Wiggs** and I were, of course, the only civilians on board and the story of our travels and experiences before we reached Fremantle is narrated in Part 3.

Summarising, it will be seen that the bulk of the Harbour Board European Officers were evacuated on the "*Bagan*" on Wednesday, the 11th February, and a brief story of their journey is given in Part 2. [To be continued.]

THE WAR DIARY OF GERALD W. SCOTT

By kind permission of his widow Anne Scott

MALAYA 1941 – 1942 – Saturday 6th Dec 1941

Today I heard a rumour that the long-expected Japanese invasion fleet had been sighted off the coast of Indo-China. It was said that its presence in the Gulf of Siam would herald an invasion of Thailand from the Indo-Chinese border. As a result of any such aggression the Thais would resist and would call upon the British in Malaya to come to their assistance in repelling the invader. This is the sort of thing the M. of I. have been thrusting down our throats for weeks. **Oppenheim** (who has lived in Bangkok for 3 years) tells me it is ludicrous to imagine the Thais would resist a Japanese invasion. We have had many arguments about it and it won't be long now before we shall know the answer. If O is correct Malaya will soon be plunged into war.

7.12.41

To-day I was on duty at the Broadcasting Station from 9 till 2. The mid-day news did not breathe a word about the rumour I heard yesterday – but at 1.58, just before O was going to close down the Station a "flash" came through and I had to run over-time in order to put it out. It stated that reconnaissance aircraft of the R.A.F. and R.A.A.F. had sighted a Japanese fleet off the coast of Cambodia steaming in a north-westerly direction. So it was true? And then I thought of a placard hanging in the Chartered bank. It said ".....the defences of Malaya have been tested and not found wanting" and it was signed by the Commander-in-Chief, **Sir Robert Brooke-Popham**. The air force would obviously deal with the invaders and even if any soldiers should manage to land they would not be able to get anywhere. There are no roads on the East Coast north of Mersing (80 miles from Singapore) and the jungle is impenetrable – except to monkeys. I had a curry tiffin with Anne at Tanglin. The place was packed with officers of the various services but as the afternoon wore on they gradually disappeared - recalled to their units. We went to the Cathay in the evening but it seemed cold – not a uniform to be seen!

Monday 8.12.41

To-day we are at war with Japan! In spite of everything it is a great shock. Apart from Malaya we have heard that Honolulu and Hong Kong have also been attacked. And if the Tokio (sic) radio can be believed then I don't think we can count on assistance from the American Pacific Fleet.

I was awakened at 4.15 this morning by the sinister wail of the air-raid sirens, immediately I realized with horror that this at last was a real air-raid. I dashed over to O's room and shook him violently. "The Japs are here – get your trousers on quickly and come downstairs," I said – I was shivering with excitement. But all he did was to switch on the light! I swore at him and returned to my own room to put some clothes on and then the first bomb dropped – in the next road facing my window. The sound of the bombers filled my ears. When we got downstairs the raiders had passed and we joined an excited group of people who were being assured by a **Wearne's** pilot that the whole thing was merely an A.R.P practice- and he pointed out that all the street lights were on. Slowly we returned to bed and I wondered whether my heart would ever stop pounding so violently – at 7 the sirens started again – I cannot imagine a more terrifying sound.

When I arrived at the office I found glass littered on and around my desk having been blasted over 50 feet from the back windows. When **G.B.** arrived he suggested we should go and investigate the damage. Raffles Place (the main shopping district of Singapore) presented a somewhat battered appearance in the glorious sunshine of our first day at war. There was not a whole pane of glass to be seen. The front of Robinson's new shop had been completely destroyed and Guthrie's, in Battery Road, had suffered a direct hit. The bomb craters were small, approximately six-foot in diameter, and were apparently made by small bombs of the anti-personnel type. The newspapers were now selling on the streets and informed us that "damage was negligible" – they also carried news of the attacks on Hong Kong and Pearl Harbour.

Work practically came to a standstill so I went round to the Malaya Broadcasting Corporation's offices to assure them that I would work for them any and every night that they should require me – except when I should be fire-watching.

I was on duty from 6 till 11 this evening and I must admit that working at the station during the alerts is a bit nerve-wracking. The programme was completely upset as news and official announcements had to be put out every hour and in between I made up programmes with gramophone records. Mr. Reid told me, however, that they hoped to return to normal – as much as possible – so I shall prepare the next 4 Puzzle Corner programmes.

9.12.41

More 'alerts' today, and still my heart jumps into my mouth. But I am getting used to the feeling. Anne is so calm and collected and really doesn't seem to worry at all. Nobody seems panicky and there is no doubt that everybody will perform their allotted jobs. The Indians, Chinese and Malays have shown no signs of panic – in spite of the fact that there are no air-raid shelters to go to. The official communiqué today states that the Japs have made a landing in Kelantan but that mopping-up operations are in progress. It all sounds very hopeful and we have recovered from the first shock.

10.12.41

The Military Authorities evidently do not believe in giving away information because mopping-up operations are still in progress. Yesterday Penang aerodrome was bombed – apparently no resistance was offered. I was on duty again from 6-11. Driving back home under the perfect serenity of a tropical moon has taken on a new character. At every moment I expect to see the bombers swarming over. I am getting very tired and tonight shall not get up unless I hear the noise of the bombers.

It is a strange thing but the day's news about Malaya comes over from London at 6.30. This is due to the official communiqué being released at 5 p.m. This evening's news was a severe shock. The "Prince of Wales" and "Repulse" have been reported sunk 300 miles up the East Coast. Britain's finest and unsinkable battleship sunk! It doesn't seem possible. **Duff Cooper** will make a statement about it tonight.

I heard more details tonight about the Japanese landing at Kelantan. It appears that, somewhat belatedly the Air Force tried to do its stuff against the invasion vessels – sinking several and machine-gunning the occupants. The Gurkhas bore the brunt of the landing killing the Japs like flies. The beaches were running red with blood but still the Japs came on. The Japs also advanced from Thailand and have now obtained a strong foothold in the country. Our troops are retiring fighting a delaying action. The Japs are largely dressed in native attire, gym shoes etc. and are equipped with automatic weapons.

11.12.41

Today I paid a visit to Fort Canning in connection with requisitioned tractors which the army intend to send up north for filling-in bomb craters on aerodromes. **Major C** was not too cheerful. He said that they had been completely prepared to resist an invasion (but naturally!!), but that the results of enemy air attacks had resulted in such disorganisation that the position up north was, to put it frankly, "chaotic." I am somewhat shaken by this and other remarks – and also by the fact that only now are they considering the advisability of having bulldozers on the aerodromes. Dissatisfaction at the military command seems to be pretty universal and also against the Government – but we have got **Duff Cooper** here – and he should be able to do something, if anybody can. He spoke on the loss of the "Prince of Wales" and "Repulse." It always seemed, he said, that whenever he spoke it was to bring bad news for the British peoples. He was frank, sincere and honest and I thought it was an excellent broadcast. After the broadcast **Kennard** took him to **Cyrano's** for a drink.

The news from Penang is not too good. As the Japs circled over the town the people, out of curiosity, crowded into the streets to get a better view. The Japs then flew over low bombing and machine-gunning. The casualties were heavy. The main question today is where is the Air Force? We apparently had or have now very few planes.

14.12.41

The facts concerning the "P of W" and the "Repulse" are coming forward. The M.B.C. have recorded survivors' stories and **O.D. Gallagher** (Daily Express W. Correspondent) is to broadcast his eye-witness account. These ships headed out of the Naval Base to proceed into the Gulf of Thailand to deal with the Japanese invasion fleet. They were spotted

by a reconnaissance 'plane but **Admiral Phillips** made the decision to go on. The following morning further reconnaissance planes were sighted and the ships were accordingly ordered back to their base. But it was too late. The Japs came over and gave an amazing display of precision bombing. When it was all over a Jap 'plane signalled the position of the survivors and approximately 3,000 were picked up. The news that so many lives were saved is the only redeeming feature in the fiasco – and the loss of the ships in comparison is really not so important. Those two ships could not alone have been the deciding factor in holding or losing Malaya – and we have been promised reinforcements.

On Friday I broadcast my Puzzle Corner programme and have now decided to adopt "Just like a Melody" as its signature tune. Several listeners (8!) rang up to inform me that **General Smuts** is a Field-Marshal and not a General! But aren't field marshals referred to as generals? I rather think so. However, I corrected myself and apologized during the answers.

The news from the north cannot be described as encouraging – but nobody seems to worry about it very much. Penang has been bombed for the last 3 days and the women and children are being evacuated. It is clear that there is something dangerously wrong with the Govt. and army activities there, but now that the Japs are allowing us to sleep at nights the predominant feeling seems to be cheerful. The M. of I. is dishing out the usual tripe which always presages disaster. I understand the army will make a stand on the open ground around Ipoh.

21.12.41

This last week has almost been back at 'normality.' The Japs are not paying much attention to Singapore and I get the impression that people are lulled into a sense of false security. The beginning of the week saw the arrival of the Penang evacuees. It was a tragic sight to see all these women and children after what must have been the worst experience of their lives. They were put aboard a ship and got out as rapidly as possible – which is the best thing: get all the women and children away quickly while the going's good. The "Tribune" still runs its vile and bourgeois gossip page and V.E. wrote that the Governor had been at the station to greet the evacuees and had worked as hard as anyone helping in handing round tea and food – or words to that effect. It made my blood boil to think that here we are faced with sadness, sorrow and toil and then V.E. covers it as per a social function.

23.12.41

Last night produced the worst raids to date – 4 in all. The first came just as we were going to have dinner (8.30) but was over in half an hour. The next was about 10 p.m. and they successfully bombed the petrol dump which had only been completed, after days of working, at midday. The Japs must have a really excellent intelligence because they are, on the whole, too accurate for it to be coincidence. The next two raids were heavy ones and I thought it better to go down to the newly dug and therefore mosquito infested trench in the garden. I put on my army overalls but the girls were in their night-dresses and dressing-gowns and complained somewhat bitterly about the mosquitoes! The searchlights are the best thing about the defences of S'pore. They catch and hold the tightly packed bomber formations so that we can see them clearly as they come overhead – but the anti-aircraft guns are pathetic. They always fire behind the 'planes. Why can't they give a greater lead on their sights? Although the official communiqués claim that so many 'planes are brought down every day, I, myself, have not seen a single 'plane break formation yet. In all truth it cannot be said that our anti-aircraft defences are either adequate or efficient.

Christmas Day.

Took nearly 3 hours off today – in common with most people – to have a Christmas lunch in Tanglin. A. turned up at 12.30 and we settled down to the inevitable pre-prandial drinking. The club was overflowing with everybody in town and as the morning raids were over we were all set for a good time. **Duff Cooper** + his lady wife complete with garden-party hat arrived and joined in the general merry-making. It was all very gay but afterwards it was difficult to do much work in the boiling sun! Kuala Lumpur had its first big raid today but casualties were light – and Gemas – the railway junction – was bombed yesterday. S'pore is slowly filling with up-country refugees but food is plentiful.

New Year's Eve 1941.

All this week work has gone on 'as usual', and I have been broadcasting from 6-11 almost every night. Programmes are back to normal and are greatly improved. **Marie Ney** is producing plays and is extremely efficient in her work. Tomorrow I am moving out of town to Queen Astrid Park where I can forget the air-raids at night.

New Year's Day 1942.

The six-foot air-raid shelters I am building are progressing very slowly. The main difficulty lies in getting materials. Last night I went to a most delightful New Year's Party given by the **Mrs. Davies, Ruth, Elizabeth and Peggy**. Practically all the staff of the M.B.C. managed to turn up, together with some English and American War Correspondents. A review of the past year's activities was being broadcast when the Japs came over and everybody (so it seemed) went out to have a look at them. Why do they do these things? Shrapnel drops from the sky and somebody is going to get hurt unnecessarily

Suddenly, the broadcast ceased and nothing would make the set utter another sound. People immediately thought the station had been hit – but it soon transpired that it was the radio set itself that had failed! **Barracough** drove his S.S.100 onto the lawn and we had a lot of difficulty getting him off again.

Being New Year's Eve everybody was determined to have a good time and I think they succeeded. **Ruth** wanted to go to the Tanglin to swim but I couldn't help remembering that there was work to do early in the morning. I drove **Ruth** back to the Cathay – trying to be sober, a difficult procedure in the blackout and then decided to get back to the new house at Queen Astrid Park. Later the Japs returned but I was too tired to bother – feeling secure on the outskirts of the town. I am now conditioned to the air-raids and accept them as part of our normal existence in these hectic days. It strikes me that if one uses a certain amount of common-sense and self-control one can accept bombing as a normal hazard of war-time life without being upset by it. The procedure now in the day-time is to have a roof-spotter who blows his whistle when he either sees or hears the bombers – there being no mistaking the out-of-phase drone of the engines. When the whistle blows we proceed to the shelters until the raiders have passed.

At night the raids are more annoying but the searchlights give the position of the 'planes which is comforting. Damage to S'pore to date has been very slight and the casualties lie with the Asiatics. Morale is excellent and everybody says they think S'pore will stand. At home we are honest and blow off steam but outside we express optimistic hopes. After all it wouldn't do to be classified as 'defeatists!'

[Ed: Part of a page is, unfortunately, missing at this point – but the diary continues -] in shooting oil company engineers because there will be a lot of demolition of oil supplies if the worst should happen.

It is now clear that the Japs do not intend to destroy oil installations and power stations so long as they are winning. The main job at present is, however, to bring out aviation gasoline and oil from the island installations to dumps being erected all over S'pore Island. An available Staff is working on this gigantic operation and thousands upon thousands of gallons of gasoline has safely been brought over and stacked in dumps situated in the most unlikely places.

[To be continued in July].

2015 RESEARCHING FEPOW HISTORY CONFERENCE

THIS IS AN IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT FROM MEG PARKES – CHAIRMAN OF THE RFH GROUP

The researching FEPOW History group (RFH) is organizing a conference to mark the 70th anniversary of the ending of WW2 and the repatriation of Far East captives. It will take place in Liverpool from 5-7 June 2015. Full details and the registration form will be on the RFH website (www.researchingfepowhistory.org.uk) from early June. The newsletters will also carry full details in the July editions. The cut-off date for registration is 30th September 2014. If RFH do not have sufficient interest by that time regrettably the conference will be cancelled (as happened in 2012). Please register your interest as soon as possible in June/July to be assured of a place.

Please note that in 2012 several MVG members who wished to attend that conference did not register their names in time. This meant that there were not sufficient bookings by the cut-off date. The line-up of speakers for 2015 will reflect this important milestone in recording and remembering FEPOW History. Please put this date in your diaries now. There will be a final reminder in July.

OBITUARIES

RONALD AUSTIN ['RON'] MITCHELL – born 17th February 1924 , died 29th December 2013.
Private 13827 Intelligence Section 1st Battalion, Straits Settlements Volunteer Corps

Ron was a well loved and respected Honorary Life Member of the MVG who regularly attended our lunches and gatherings at the NMA.

His funeral service was held on 17th January 2014 at Bridgnorth Town Cemetery chapel.

On his coffin, together with his medals, a Singapore Volunteer Corps wreath.

Ron was educated at Raffles Institution, a contemporary of later prominent figures in Singapore's PAP Lee Kuan Yew and Eddie Barker.

Shortly after starting work with Fraser & Neave he enlisted in the 1st Battalion SSVF with his brothers Ian and Malcolm. Soon caught up in the Japanese attack on Singapore, all three entered captivity and marched to Changi POW camp on Ron's 18th birthday, 17th February 1942.

Ron and his brother Ian were in a working party sent to Havelock Road Camp in May 1942, and from there they left for Thailand as part of 'D' Battalion on 12th October 1942. Malcolm remained at Changi and was later sent to Kuching, Borneo, dying in Labuan in late 1944.

Ron was a POW at Ban Pong then Wampo before experiencing the horrific cholera camps at Tonchan, Kanu and Kinsaiyok. He was later at Tarsao, Tamuang and on the Tavoy Road before ending the war at Takli Camp in central Thailand. During these years of degradation and suffering Ron encountered men like Lt. Colonel Harold Lilley, Charles Letts, Major Jack Marsh and Captain Pitt RAMC. In his memoirs, "Baba Nonnie Goes to War" [2004] Ron wrote:

'One of my gains was that I had the good fortune to meet many exceptional people. It was not rank or social status that made them so. Life in the camps taught me that exceptional and kind people come from all ranks and social classes, as do those who may be properly termed a waste of space.'

The horrifying experiences of captivity afflicted Ron even in his final days when he battled against multiple illnesses.

However, he was not a man to bear grudges. He recognized that not all his captors were bad men. In later years he encouraged his grandchildren to visit Japan as part of a Pacific Venture Group.

After the war, Ron worked for the Allied Control Commission in Germany. Here he met his wife Beatrice who was also serving in Germany. Later Ron worked for EMI then in the Paymaster General's Office before a long career in what became the DHSS. During these years Ron lived life to the full. He had many adventures in his cabin cruiser 'The King Fergus', enjoyed water sports including water polo, gliding, wood chopping and, most of all, gardening.

Our condolences go to Ron's widow Bea, sons Brian and Colin, his sister Jean and all the family members.

Compiled by Jonathan Moffatt.

Personal tribute by Rosemary Fell

It was a very sad day when the news of Ron's death was sent to us by his son Brian. For over a year we knew that Ron had been battling with deteriorating health and yet he always seemed to overcome his many health problems. As a founder member of the MVG and since 2010 an Honorary Life member, Ron was one of our most supportive members. Together with Bea, he attended every V-J Day Service we held until last year – sometimes laying the wreath or taking part in a reading. His knee operation a few years ago did not deter him from insisting on walking down to the Memorial Garden with the aid of an arm crutch. If possible he always came to the annual reunions and lunches – at first in Soho at a Chinese restaurant, and latterly at the RAF Club where he thoroughly enjoyed looking at the many plaques covering the walls.

My father taught at Raffles Institution during the 1930s and Ron would have been there during this time. It is possible that their paths crossed in Singapore and again in Thailand where Ron and Ian were in some of the same camps. It was this connection which made Ron a very special person to me. He was one of our last stalwart veteran Volunteers, and I will greatly miss his wonderfully cheerful presence at future MVG functions.

THOMAS HEATH EVANS – born 25th June 1916, died 14th February 2014
Gunner 12841, Singapore Royal Artillery Volunteer Battery

Tom was born at Batu Gajah Maternity Hospital on 25th June 1916. His father T.L. 'Tommy' Evans was an engineer with United Engineers. When Tom was 4 years old the family moved to Bangkok. Tom remembered an idyllic early childhood, surrounded by the warmth of his Thai nannies and the sociable gatherings of his parents and their friends around a makeshift swimming pool. In reality, this was a hole in the ground filled in with water and inhabited by water snakes. These, Tom decided, were as likely to be friends as foes and declared that they never bothered him; an early optimistic faith that always stood him in good stead, for despite the later and harder episodes of his life, he never lost that underlying optimism – that belief, that despite all the difficulties and evil and suffering in the world, there was also kindness and friendship, shared interests and shared laughter and love.

22.



Ron in SSVF uniform



This outlook was what saw him through the shock of prep school from the age of 8 in distant England, a country that seemed to him then both cold and bleak; with tasteless food and not a lot of kindness. On arrival at prep school he found himself bullied by staff and pupils for being a 'colonial boy.' When he spoke of going down to the river in Bangkok to watch the King of Siam's ceremonial elephants being washed, he was called a liar. However, in time, **Tom** made friends and strove to adapt and learn about his new surroundings, with a combination of determination and curiosity that was always part and parcel of his outlook throughout life.

Tom completed his school education at Wellington College including an exchange academic year in 1933/1934 at Kent College, Connecticut. He longed to go to university but this was not possible for financial reasons. Instead, he started in an administrative post with the Anglo-Thai Corporation; working first in London and then from 1937 in Singapore. Always diligent and gregarious, he made many friends. **Tom's** father, having become Managing Director of United Engineers, Singapore, had already retired to the U.K. in 1931, but his uncle, **Horace**, later interned in Changi Gaol, still worked as an engineer at Seremban.

Tom enlisted as a Gunner in the Singapore Royal Artillery Volunteer Battery in July 1937 and took part in their exercises and parades and the final days of fighting in February 1942. He made many friends in the battery including **Ted Chaplin** and **Lincoln Page**. Another friend was **Tony Mills** of the SSVF. With the Fall of Singapore, **Tom** entered captivity in Changi POW camp and was later moved to the Turf Club then Sime Road Camp. He was sent to Thailand with **Major Marsh's 'Y' Party** in March 1943. His camps in Thailand included the notorious Kanyu camps, Chungkai, Tamuang, the Bangkok godowns and finally Nakon Nyok.

As a POW in Thailand he kept an Anglo-Thai Corporation cheque book and wrote cheques that could be used with promissory notes, which he called 'V-chits', to obtain food and medical supplies which would be exchanged after the war. In fact all the cheques he wrote were duly honoured after the war.

Tom was repatriated from Rangoon to Southampton on the 'Ormonde' in September-October 1945. On the journey home he wrote a moving and detailed account of his experiences in captivity – this diary is now held by the Imperial War Museum.

Returning to the family home at Franklands Park Hotel, Burgess Heath, Sussex, he decided not to return to Singapore.

Taking the advice of a FEPOW friend, New Zealander **Eugene 'Mog' Morgan [1/SSVF]** who had been in the Colonial Legal Service, **Tom** used his savings to train as a solicitor, working and studying intensively in the evenings. In June 1948 **Tom** married **Kathleen McCarter** of Burgess Hill. A family of four daughters quickly followed. In 1959, **Tom** and **Kath** took their family to Australia for 7 years. On returning to England, **Tom** again adapted with the same spirit – at times struggling with the bleaker years of **Kath's** illness, but always trying to do whatever he could to help her – right up to her death in 1974. **Tom** went on to marry **Betty** in 1985. They enjoyed a long period together in which their joint families of nine children provided a succession of visits to children, grandchildren and great grandchildren – including long trips to Australia and New Zealand.

Tom had many interests that he followed – including history and politics; bridge and learning anew with **Betty** at the University of the Third Age. This, together with **Betty's** musical gatherings meant a busy social life right into their eighties and nineties. Their home in Bath was often the hub of comings and goings – not only of family members, but of their many friends. In later life the going did get tougher for **Tom**, especially the loss of his sight and the limitations of his health. But with determination he did his best to keep up with his interests and to keep contact with the outside world from the setting of his nursing home. And still urging his guests to share in a brandy and soda with him – poured with his usual generous portions. When **Betty** died in 2012 **Tom** missed her intensely. Right up to his final days, **Tom** loved the company of others and radiated warmth and good will to others – still asking after people, reminiscing fondly and taking an interest in the outside world.

Our condolences go to **Tom's** daughters **Sue Evans, Joanna and Lorraine** and other members of the family.

Compiled by **Jonathan Moffatt**, with contributions from **Sue Evans, Sandy Lincoln and Hugh Chaplin**.

Personal tribute by Rosemary Fell.

Tom joined the MVG in its very early days and became an Honorary Life member in 2010. I first 'met' him on the telephone. He would ring up about the MVG – what it was doing and for news about its members. His questions were long and searching ones, and there were long silences while he pondered over my answers or lack of them! Our conversations sometimes lasted for well over half an hour. It was only when he and **Betty** invited us for lunch at their home in Bath that I realised he was a solicitor by training and he was wanting to know all about the MVG's activities and members. Gradually the 'phone calls became less frequent as his health deteriorated. Although he was unable to attend any MVG functions, he remained interested in our achievements through his family. It was a sad day for us all when we lost one of our last wonderful Veteran Volunteers.

JOHN BAX

We are sad to announce the death of another former member of the MVG. **John**, who lived in Canada, was an ex-captain on the Blue Funnel Line and Glen Line. He also worked for the Straits Steamship Co. Singapore, the Ho Hong Steamship Line Singapore and the Sarawak Steamship Co. Singapore. He was the stepson of **H.J.C.K Toms SRA [V]** who was Chairman of the Straits Steamship Co. Singapore, and a FEPOW during WW2. **John** wrote several articles for *Apa Khabar* about the Blue Funnel ships, including "The Ulysses Story" in A.K. 14 and "The Gorgon and the Charon" in A.K. 15.

He corresponded with the editor for several years until his membership lapsed due to ill-health. He would send photos of his Husky dog in their garden. We send our condolences to his wife **Carole** and his family.

We also pay tribute to **Leonora Schmidt-Salomonson** who died in October 2013, just before her 100th birthday. Born in Java in 1914, and becoming their only female accountant, she helped to organize the War Crimes Trial in Singapore. It is

reported that without her organisational skills, the British Trials may have descended into chaos. From December 1945, **Lenka** (as she was known), took charge of the clerical side of the huge investigation. She devised a system whereby she managed to process 709,000 surrendered enemy personnel in South-East Asia. By the autumn of 1946, she was head of the Central War Crimes Registry at the British War Crimes HQ in Singapore, co-ordinating a very able network of some 660 British military personnel forming the various War Crimes teams throughout the whole of South East Asia from Shanghai to Hong Kong to Japan itself. She was a woman of great charm and beauty, and in pre-war days she modelled for **Vladimir Tretchikoff** and his painting of her still hangs in the Goodwood Park Hotel in Singapore.

The death was also announced of **Major Bill Towill** a pacifist who enlisted in the RAMC as a medical orderly in 1939, and after witnessing the horrors of Dunkirk transferred to a Gurkha regiment and fought with the Chindits in Burma. In January 1944, his battalion (3rd Bn. 9th Gurkha Rifles) was transferred to the 77th Indian Infantry Brigade commanded by **Brigadier Michael 'Mad Mike' Calvert** joining the Special Forces being assembled by **Brigadier Orde Wingate** for long-range penetration behind enemy lines – the Chindit operations. **Towill** commanded the brigade defence platoon. In 1944 he flew with the advance party on the second Chindit operation, to the jungle airstrip codenamed "Broadway" where carnage of another kind ensued with the crashing of many of the gliders bringing men, animals and supplies to the area. The Japanese attacked relentlessly and the area was evacuated, involving a 4-day march with 70lb packs to another fortified base codenamed "Blackpool." This too had to be abandoned under relentless enemy attacks, and in retreat they were ambushed with the resulting carnage. The survivors had to trek over the mountains often without food to reach Mokso Sakan. **Towill** was one of only 118 men out of 2,200 to be pronounced fit but had to spend 5 weeks in hospital in India.

After the war he was sent to what was then the Dutch East Indies to arrange for the repatriation of Allied POWs, and was faced with the nationalist uprising there, losing 80 men killed or wounded. He returned to Malaya in March 1946 and was demobbed. His wartime experiences remained with him, and he suffered nightmares for the rest of his life.

We also report the death of **John Baird Tyson** whose fascinating life was recorded in the Telegraph, which ran the headline: **"John Tyson was an explorer who mapped Kanjiroba Himal, won an MC in Malaya and ran a school in Nepal."**

It was during his National Service as a 2nd Lt. in the Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders from 1947-1949, mostly on attachment to the Seaforth Highlanders, when he won his MC in 1949 for his courage and leadership during patrols in the Segamat district. This was a rare accolade for a National Service Officer. During the early months of the Emergency his platoon proved the most effective of that period in ambushing communist guerrillas, and in 7 months his platoon accounted for 13 rebels – 9 killed and 4 wounded.

BOOKS

"DOWN TO BEDROCK. The Diary and Secret Notes of a FEPOW Chaplain 1942 – 45." By Eric Cordingly. Published by Art Angels Publishing Ltd. ISBN 978 0 9926954 0 8

The recently discovered papers of **Eric Cordingly** tell the story of his experiences as a POW of the Japanese from 1942-45, first in Changi and then on the River Kwai. As a young priest, he suddenly found himself with 50,000 fellow captives and he set about his pastoral duties under the most harrowing conditions. His diary and secret notes give an eye witness account of his 3 ½ years captivity together with the many original illustrations by fellow POWs which he kept. He said of his flock, **"Within the camp were men of all sorts ... the strange thing was that seemingly ordinary men, of no particular calibre stood out head and shoulders above their fellows. Under the strain of prison life only one thing prevailed and that was strength of character. ... Only real goodness made any impact."**

During WW2 he was an Army Chaplain, first in France (evacuated from Dunkirk), and later in the Far East. He received an MBE for his services as a POW.

After the war he was appointed Rector of Stevenage, then Chaplain to the Queen. In 1962 he became Archdeacon of Norfolk & Residentiary Canon at Norwich Cathedral, and later was consecrated Bishop of Thetford.

"SURVIVOR ON THE RIVER KWAI. The Incredible Story of Life on the Burma Railway." By Reg Twigg. Published by Penguin. ISBN 978 0 670 92278 9

Called up in 1940, **Reg** expected to be fighting the Germans. Instead he found himself caught up in the Far East war, building the infamous Burma railway for the all-conquering Japanese Imperial Army. Some prisoners coped with the endless brutality of the Bushido code by turning to God; others clung to whatever was left of the regimental structure. **Reg** made the deadly jungle work for him. With an astonishing ingenuity, he trapped and ate lizards, harvested pumpkins from the canteen rubbish heap and with his homemade razor became the camp barber. He was a risk taker whose survival strategies sometimes bordered on genius. His courage, determination and will to beat the alien brutality of camp guards enabled him to survive. His story is unique.

"THE SUMATRA RAILROAD: Final Destination Pakan Baroe 1943 – 1945." By Henk Hovinga. Published by KITLV Press, Leiden, The Netherlands. ISBN 9 7890 6718 3406

The story of the other railway built by POW slave labour in central Sumatra in 1944-45 is not as well known or documented as the horrors of the Burma Railway. However, the atrocities were the equal or even worse than those imposed on their captives by the Japanese on the Burma-Siam Railway. After the fall of the Dutch East Indies in March 1942, thousands of Dutch, British and Australian servicemen and civilians were taken prisoner. In June 1944, the construction of the railway began using some 5,000 POWs plus over 100,000 'romushas' brought from Java. The latter cleared the virgin jungle ready for the POWs to lay the sleepers and rail lines. This book tells the harrowing story of its start from Pakan Baroe to Muaro.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Please note, the annual subscription is now £20 sterling

As warned in October 2013 [A.K. 36 P.26] and reminded in January 2014 [A.K. 37 P.24], due to the increase in the cost of postage and printing, we have had no alternative but to increase the annual subscription to **£20.00 sterling**. It is the first increase since April 2008. We are sorry about this increase. The subscription is **per household** regardless of how many members wish to share their membership at one address. **Jonathan** will e-mail copies of the newsletter to those wishing to receive it electronically. **Rosemary** will send out the printed copies. Please let **Rosemary** know how you wish to receive the newsletter. **Australian** members will receive their printed copies from **Elizabeth Adamson**, and will be notified of their subscription charges in Australian Dollars.

Malaysian members will be notified of their subscription charges by **Andrew Hwang**, payable in Malaysian Ringgit.

For U.K. and other worldwide members, payment may be made in sterling or in your own currency by cheque/standing order/bank draft/BAC transfer – made payable to:

Mrs. R. Fell Malayan Volunteers Group.

Please return the tear-off section of the enclosed subscription letter with your payment. If you wish to resign from the MVG, please let **Rosemary** know, so that your name can be deleted from the list of members which is renewed in July. The membership of those who have not paid their dues by July will be deemed to have lapsed, and their names deleted from the new list of members.

Thank you very much to everyone who has already paid their subscription.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

TUESDAY – 6TH MAY 2014. Spring gardening meeting at the NMA.

Please let **Rosemary** or **Jonathan** know if you would like to come. I need to inform the NMA about our gardening plans, and the number of people coming. We plan to meet in the Visitor Centre for coffee at about 10.30a.m. Please bring gardening equipment and a picnic lunch – weather permitting. We look forward to seeing you there.

SUNDAY – 18TH MAY 2014. Service in the FEPOW Memorial Church at Wymondham, Norfolk.

If you would like to attend this very popular service, please book with the Administrator as soon as possible. Email to:

administrator@wymondham-rc-church.org.uk

or write to: The FEPOW Secretary, 1, Norwich Road, Wymondham, Norfolk NR18 0QE

Since January we have received new information about this year's service from the Administrator. Please note that the Service will take place **at 12.30 p.m. (NOT 2 p.m. as stated in January.)** The light buffet lunch will be available **after** the service at **1.30 p.m.** in the parish hall. Seating is limited in the church and the seats are unreserved unless you are laying a wreath (which must be taken with you and the Administrator notified), or are taking a surviving FEPOW as their carer. Please note also that there is no car parking at the Church, but a public car park is close by. There is a Morning Service in the church at 11.30 a.m. and guests are requested not to arrive for the FEPOW Memorial Service before 11.30 a.m.

FRIDAY – 15TH AUGUST 2014. V-J Day Service at noon in the Memorial Garden at the NMA.

We hope you see as many of you as possible at this year's service. The service is at **NOON** in the MVG's own Memorial Garden. Please make a note of this date in your diaries, and let **Rosemary** know if you are coming. The NMA has to be informed of our service and the numbers attending. The event is put on their calendar, so that members of the public can attend if they wish. We also need to know how many service sheets to have printed. As usual, we plan to have a picnic lunch after the service in the NMA grounds – and after 2 years of rain, let's hope it will be fine this year! In the case of inclement weather, the service will be held in the FEPOW Memorial Building.

IN AUSTRALIA

SUNDAY – 31ST AUGUST 2014. Merdeka Day Service in King's Park, Perth W.A.

Details will be announced later to all Australian Members by **Bill** and **Elizabeth Adamson**.

SATURDAY – 11TH OCTOBER 2014. Annual Reunion and Luncheon at the RAF Club, Piccadilly, London, noon- 4 p.m.

It has been agreed that for ease of communication, **Merilyn Hywel-Jones** will help with running the luncheon at the London end, but please **book with Rosemary and pay in the usual way**. It would be helpful to have your booking, with the names of your guests, by mid September, and please send your payment to **Rosemary** by **30th September 2014**. The luncheon will take place in the Ballroom as usual. This is on the first floor and can be accessed by stairs or by lift. The hire of the Ballroom is free, and a bar is also provided for the purchase of pre-luncheon drinks and wine with the meal if desired. The chosen 3-course menu for this year is a starter of pea & mint soup, followed by steak, kidney and mushroom pie, roast potatoes and a selection of vegetables, with sherry trifle for dessert, and coffee or tea and petit fours to end the meal. This year's prices have not yet been set by the RAF Club, but the lunch is expected to be in the region of **£36.50 p.p.** The cost will be confirmed in

July. If anyone wishes to have the vegetarian option please let me know when you book, together with any other dietary requirements. We are delighted that **Becca Kenneison** has agreed to give an illustrated talk this year on "The Malayan Volunteers in SOE." There will be the usual raffle, and we would be grateful for the donation of prizes, and help with selling the raffle tickets. We look forward to seeing you in October.

THURSDAY – 6TH NOVEMBER 2014. Cross Planting Ceremony and Service at Westminster Abbey.

Please contact **Merilyn Hywel-Jones** if you would like tickets for this ceremony. Only a limited number of tickets is available, and it is advisable to book early. Tel: 020 7736 6324 or write to: 37, Gowan Avenue, Fulham, London SW6 6RH. **Merilyn** will be planting the MVG's large 8" cross in the FEPOW Plot. Each plot is numbered, and a list of the plots and plan of their position is displayed on a large board near the entrance into the garden at the side of Westminster Abbey.

SUNDAY – 9TH NOVEMBER 2014. Service and March Past on Remembrance Sunday at the Cenotaph, Whitehall.

It will be a special Service this year as we remember the centenary of the beginning of the First World War as well as those who fell in WW2 and in the many other conflicts since then. We are allocated only 12 tickets for the Service. If you wish to have one, please let **Rosemary** know in good time. The tickets and details about the Service and March Past will not be available from the Royal British Legion which organises the ceremony until late September or early October.

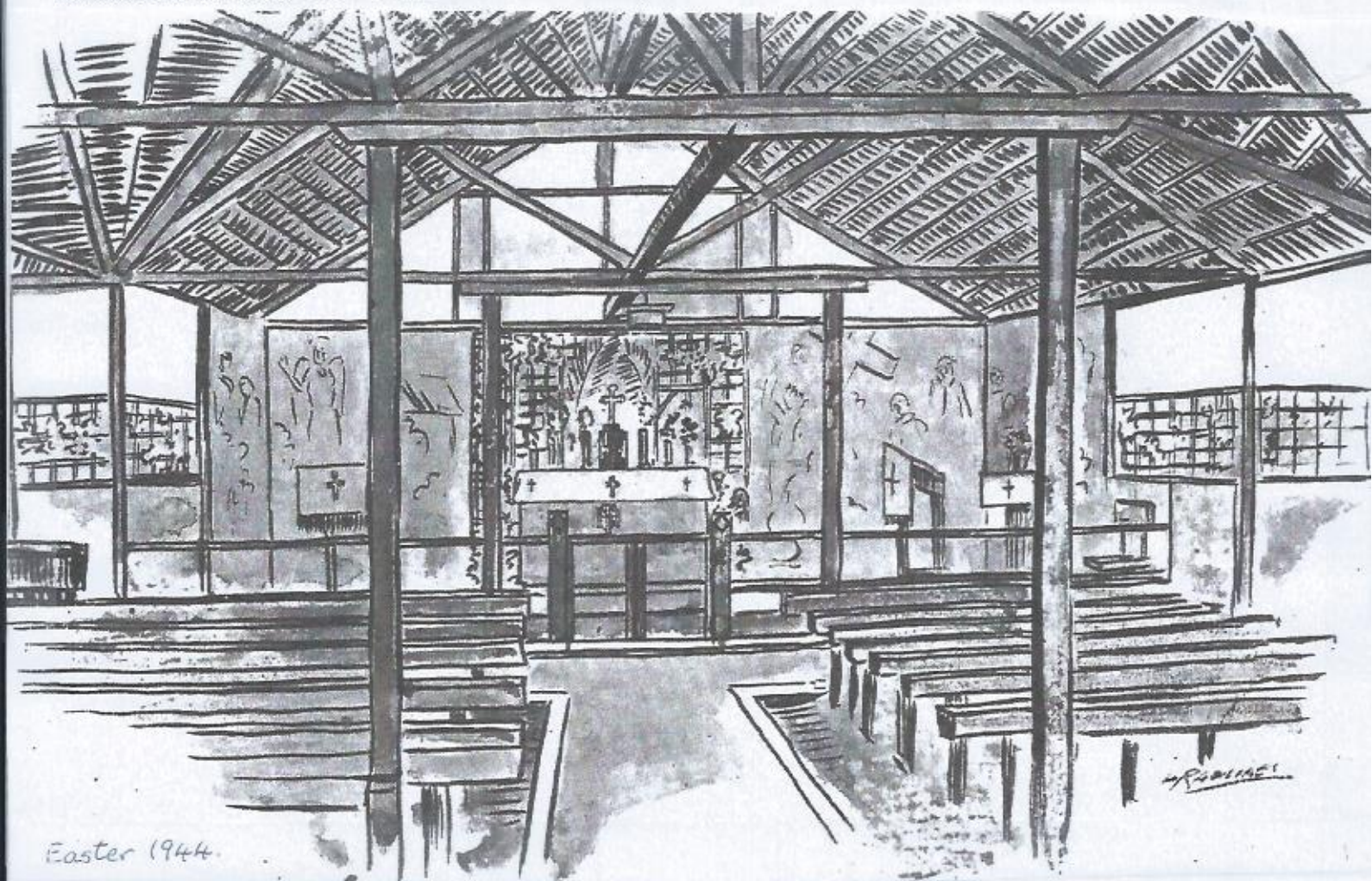
FRIDAY to SUNDAY – 5TH - 7TH JUNE 2015. RFH Conference in Liverpool. [See P. 21].

SINGAPORE - SEPTEMBER 12TH 2015 – 70TH Anniversary of the signing of the Japanese surrender in Singapore.

If you are thinking of going out to Singapore for this occasion, we have been advised that if you wish to attend other events which are being planned around this date, you should allow at least 3 days on either side of 12th September for your stay in Singapore. We are in touch with **Jeya** at the Changi Museum and the Singapore Heritage Consultants who are working with the Singapore Government in planning the various ceremonies. Bearing in mind that 2015 is also the 50th anniversary of Singapore's Independence it will be a very busy time for hotels and airlines. It is advisable to book flights and accommodation early. In July, we hope to have some MVG plans to announce.

ST. DAVID'S CHURCH, SIME ROAD, SINGAPORE

Erected by SSVF and SMFVF forces under the command of **Col. Newy**, on their return from Thailand. The panels on either side of the altar are the work of **Bdr. Warren R.A.** who painted the panels in St. Luke's Church in the Dysentery Wing at Roberts Barracks. The Church was used by all denominations (except R.Cs) and later by Civilian Internees when they were transferred from Changi Gaol. Chaplain: Rev. L.V. Headley C.F.



AN EXTRAORDINARY FIND
THE CHEQUE CASHED BY BOON PONG FOR CHARLES KINAHAN SRE [V] IN WARTIME
AND PRESENTED AFTER THE WAR FOR PAYMENT



BY KIND PERMISSION OF JOHN KINAHAN
CHARLES KINAHAN'S SON

We are very grateful to **David Wingate** for obtaining permission from **John Kinahan** to print a copy of this cheque. It is proof that the promise of post-war payments to **Boon Pong** and other Thai merchants, who risked their lives during WW 2 to smuggle food and medicines into the POW Camps on the River Kwai, was honoured and all promissory notes were redeemed in full. In **Charles Kinahan's** memoirs he says:

"One of our principal tasks in Kanchanaburi was to go to the store of a Siamese ration contractor named **Boon Pong** who also ran a canteen in Chungkai camp where small items such as bananas, peanuts, tobacco and duck eggs could be purchased with the pittance which we earned for working. I struck up a relationship with **Boon Pong** who acted as an important underground channel between us and the British civilians who were interned in Bangkok and has access to money and much needed drugs which were passed to our camp via **Boon Pong** and our party. This was an immensely valuable contact. Because of it **Col. Outram** kept me on the party for over 2 years so that I was never put on any of the parties which were sent up country – sometimes to their deaths.

The **Boon Pong** contact involved risks. Thanks to the indolence of the Korean guards in charge of our party we got away with "murder." **Boon Pong** even cashed a £50 cheque for me and others. It was duly presented after the war and I still have it as a family memento."

PASSWORD FOR ACCESSING THE NEWSLETTERS ONLINE

The current password is "LAYANG." This will be replaced in August & the new password announced in the July newsletter.

OVERSEAS CONTACTS

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