

APA KHABAR

Patron: Her Grace The Duchess of Norfolk

www.malayanvolunteersgroup.org.uk



44TH EDITION



**SINGAPORE – SEPTEMBER 2015
MVG MEMBERS OUTSIDE THE CHANGI MUSEUM
AT THE UNVEILING OF THE SIME ROAD PLAQUE**

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OCTOBER 2015



THE MVG HONOURS AND REMEMBERS ALL FEPOWs and CIVILIAN INTERNEES IN CEREMONIES TO MARK THE 70TH ANNIVERSARY OF V-J DAY IN ENGLAND, SINGAPORE, SUMATRA and MUNTOK

August and September saw members of the Malayan Volunteers Group taking part in various ceremonies to celebrate and commemorate the 70th anniversary of V-J Day, both in the United Kingdom, in Singapore and in Muntok on Bangka Island, Sumatra. All the events were very well supported by members and friends, and can be considered as highly successful in achieving the objective of marking this special year with dignity and a sense of fulfillment.

Over 85 members and friends attended the V-J Day Service at the National Memorial Arboretum on the 15th August. We are delighted that Our Patron, **Her Grace The Duchess of Norfolk**, was able to join us for the day. **Canon Christopher Samuels** kindly officiated at the Service again, and we are very grateful to him for making the long journey from north Wales to be with us. The day dawned fine and warm in contrast to the wet and windy weather which preceded it. Members were able to meet over a cup of coffee in the marquee pod before the service, and this gave everyone an opportunity to meet up with old family friends and become acquainted with new members before the service. After a 2-part service, starting in the Chapel and concluding in the Memorial Garden for wreath laying and the 2 minutes' silence, we returned to the Pod for lunch. A short YouTube film of the procession down Gifford Avenue and into the Memorial Garden led by **Piper Duncan Thomson** was made by a member of the public who happened to be at the Arboretum that day. It was a memorable day from start to finish. A full report on the day is enclosed with the newsletter.

Despite the events in London being the main focus of the media attention, nevertheless our celebrations of V-J Day, on a more personal level were, perhaps, more meaningful to our members who attended & took part in the service, than the events in London. Certainly from the messages of appreciation received, the NMA was an appropriate place for our remembrance. The celebrations of the 70th anniversary of V-J Day, and the signing of the Japanese surrender in September in Singapore was attended by 51 MVG members and friends. Members came from the U.K. Australia, Malaysia and Singapore, and it was good to see the rapport between members who had not met before, but whose common aim was to remember their Volunteer relatives and celebrate the anniversary of the end of WW2. Most people stayed at the YWCA – Fort Canning Lodge – and this gave an excellent meeting place where coaches could pick members up and drop them off after the various events. The first event was the excellent Historical Tour of the north-west battlefields which **Jane Nielsen** and **Merilyn Hywel-Jones** had arranged for us. Our guide and tour leader, **Helena**, who had led the tour in 2012, was again in charge. Her command of the facts as well as her masterful command of the English language, and delightful way of putting the information across, made it a wonderful start to the 4 events attended by MVG members. Having now seen the terrain in person where the Japanese landed, and heard how they infiltrated between the defending Australian forces, one cannot blame these soldiers for failing to defend the Island of Singapore where the defences were practically non-existent. As **Helena** explained, the sheer brilliance of Yamashita's military strategy, with his battle-hardened troops, made the invasion in this area inevitable, and the Australian troops became the scapegoats for the military failings of the Allied High Command. The tour ended with a visit to The Battlebox. Friday, 11th September was the day on which the Sime Road Plaque was finally unveiled at the Changi Museum. The idea of presenting this plaque to the Changi Museum, to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the end of WW2, was first mooted in February 2014, the day on which the Sumatra Plaque was unveiled by **Mrs. Rosa Daniel**. After several attempts at producing a suitable design with a stylized plan of the Camp Site and wording giving the background to the uses of the camp, the final format was agreed at a meeting with **Mr. Jeyathurai Ayadurai**, Director of the Changi Museum, in February this year. The unveiling of our plaque was to be combined with other unveilings, by the Indian Army and Sikh Community, plus an Old Etonian Plaque. However, in a very prestigious ceremony attended by well over 80 people, the MVG's large shiny plaque in marine quality brass took pride of place in the Changi Chapel where it was unveiled by our two wonderful veteran ladies who had been interned as children in the camp, **Vilma Howe** and **Olga Henderson**. The Plaque has now been mounted on the outside wall of the Museum next to the Plaque showing the Changi area during the wartime occupation. A group visit to Sime Road took place on the 14th Sept. under the guidance of **Jon Cooper** assisted by **Jane Nielsen** & our 2 veteran ladies. The Service in Kranji Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery on Saturday 12th September, arranged by the Changi Museum, Singapore History Consultants and Fort Canning War Rooms (The Battlebox), was very well attended by representatives from 10 countries, including the Japanese Ambassador to Singapore, **Mr. Haruhisa Takeuchi** and about 20 members of the Japanese community. Some may have wondered at their inclusion in this ceremony to mark the true ending of WW2, but the service reflected the spirit of peace whilst remembering those who died in the cause of peace. But to quote the words of our good friend and supporter, **Mr. Jeya Ayadurai**, "*It takes courage to go to war. Likewise, it takes courage to make peace.*"

LEST WE FORGET

Two other commemorative events took place in September on the Island of Sumatra. One group of 21, mainly Australians, under the guidance of **Dr. Judy Balcombe**, left Singapore on Monday 14th September to travel to Muntok and Palembang in memory of their relatives who had been imprisoned as civilian internees by the Japanese. They were to attend the opening of the "**Museum of Peace**" in Muntok on Banka Island, and present a plaque bearing the names of all the civilians, both men and women who had died in the camps. Money raised under the name of the MVG both in Australia and in the U.K. has been sent to The Muntok Cares Committee to fund the building of this museum and a small garden in front of it. A separate report about this visit is enclosed with the newsletter.

A second group left Singapore on Wednesday, 16th September for Medan on the north-east coast of Sumatra. The purpose of this visit was to follow the route of the Aceh Road, built by the POW's Aceh Party, down through the central mountains of northern Sumatra, and to visit the Bankinang Camp for civilian women and children, and nearby POW camp for the men. This was not strictly speaking an MVG trip but the group of 13 included MVG members. A full report on this can be read on P.12.

To conclude – this has been a busy year for the MVG. A growing membership indicates that our work is not yet done, and that there are still people who require help with researching their Volunteer connections and relatives who fought in the Malayan Campaign and became prisoners of the Japanese. The 70th anniversary of V-J Day has stirred people into researching their relatives' wartime service before it is too late, and this is reflected in their enquiries.

Michael Pether, assisted by **Becca Kenneison**, has done sterling work on investigating the names on those on the chaotic last minute passenger lists of the small ships which left Singapore in the dying days before capitulation, and which were sunk by the Japanese. **Michael** has now updated the Passenger Lists on the following ships, and his research into what happened to these ships can now be viewed on the MVG website, under the "Evacuees Section."

- S.S. Roseboom
- S.S. Ban Ho Guan
- S.S. Giang Bee
- S.S. Redang
- S.S. Kuala
- S.S. Tandjong Pinang

We thank **Michael and Becca** very much for their invaluable work in this field.

THE SINKING OF THE VYNER BROOKE

A report from the Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

Built in 1928, the **S.S. Vyner Brooke** was a British-registered cargo vessel of 1,670 tons. She was named after the Third Rajah of Sarawak – **Sir Charles Vyner Brooke**. Up until the outbreak of war with the Japanese, **Vyner Brooke** plied the waters between Singapore and Kuching, under the flag of the Sarawak Steamship Company. She was then requisitioned by Britain's Royal Navy as an armed trader.

On the evening of 12th February 1942, **Vyner Brooke** was one of the last ships carrying evacuees to leave Singapore. Although she usually only carried 12 passengers, in addition to her 47 crew, **Vyner Brooke** sailed south with 181 passengers embarked, most of them women and children. Among the passengers were the last 65 Australian nurses in Singapore. Throughout the daylight hours of 13th February, **Vyner Brooke** laid up in the lee of a small jungle-covered island, but she was attacked late in the afternoon by a Japanese aircraft, fortunately with no serious casualties. At sunset, she made a run for the Banka Strait, heading for Palembang in Sumatra. Prowling Japanese warships, however, impeded her progress and daylight the next day found her dangerously exposed on a flat sea just inside the Strait. Not long after 2 p.m. **Vyner Brooke** was attacked by several Japanese aircraft. Despite evasive action, she was crippled by several bombs and within half an hour rolled over and sunk bow first. Approximately 150 survivors eventually made it ashore at Banka Island, after periods of between 8 and 65 hours in the water. The island had already been occupied by the Japanese and most of the survivors were taken captive.

However, an awful fate awaited many of those who landed on Radji Beach. There, the survivors from the **Vyner Brooke** joined up with another party of civilians and up to 60 Commonwealth servicemen and merchant sailors, who had made it ashore after their own vessels were sunk. After an unsuccessful effort to gain food and assistance from local villagers, a deputation was sent to contact the Japanese, with the aim of having the group taken prisoner. Anticipating this, all but one of the civilian women followed behind. A party of Japanese troops arrived at Radji Beach a few hours later. They shot and bayoneted the males and then forced the 22 Australian nurses and the one British civilian woman who had remained behind to wade into the sea, then shot them from behind. There were only 2 survivors – **Sister Vivian Bullwinkel** and **Private Cecil Kinsley**, a British soldier. After hiding in the jungle for several days the pair eventually gave themselves up to the Japanese. **Kinsley** died a few days later from his wounds, and **Bullwinkel** spent the rest of the war as an internee.

Of the 65 Australian nurses embarked upon the **Vyner Brooke**, 12 were killed during the air attack or drowned following the sinking, 21 were murdered on Radji Beach, and 32 became internees, 8 of whom subsequently died before the end of the war.

SINGAPORE VISIT - SEPTEMBER 2015

HISTORICAL TOUR OF THE NORTHWEST BATTLEFIELD SITES

A customized tour arranged for the MVG by JANE NIELSEN

Thursday the 10th September

Northwest Singapore turned out to be the initial battleground between the Allied Army and the Japanese in the fight for Singapore, and this is where some 35 MVG members found themselves heading at 8.30 a.m. on this Thursday morning. The tour had been arranged for us by **Journeys Pte. Ltd.** a company which organizes Heritage Tours in Singapore and is part of the Changi Museum Group of companies. Accompanying us was their excellent guide, **Helena**, whose knowledge and way of describing the events which unfolded in those dark February days as Singapore fought for its life, are masterful as well as being very entertaining.

After the loss of Malaya to the Japanese, the retreating Allied Army units were deployed along the entire coastline of Singapore. **Lieutenant-General Percival** was convinced that the Japanese would invade the island from the north east (and indeed **Lt-Gen. Yamashita** made a great show of pretending that this was his objective) and therefore allocated a big concentration of troops to this area, leaving the north western coastline sparsely defended by the Australian 8th Division comprising only the 22nd and 27th Brigades. In fact, this is where **Yamashita** had planned for the invasion to take place, and this is where it did take place on the 8th/9th February 1942. We wondered as we set off, what this area would look like, where so many young Australians had lost their lives.

Only months before, in 1941, these young men had arrived in Singapore fresh from Australia. They had been introduced briefly to life in the tropics before being sent to fight in the jungles of Malaya. **Captain Donald Morrison** of the Australian Imperial Forces [AIF] had written in his diary the 'dos' and 'dons' which had been drilled into all ranks at that time. Some make for amusing reading – for example:

"DON'T walk around in bare feet for fear of hookworm. DON'T drink native spirits or wine as they are sudden death. DON'T dally with the fairer sex." "DO inspect your net and underneath your bed for scorpions etc. before turning in. DO treat everything that is unfamiliar as something to keep away from including the fairer sex!"

Our first stop was at **Tengah Airfield** on the very straight **Lim Chu Kang Road**, which **Helena** pointed out could now also be used as a runway, and the road had been designed so that it could be changed into a runway in 48 hours. **Lt-Gen. Yamashita's** first main objective in the invasion of Singapore was to capture this airfield within the first 12 hours of landing, but this was delayed by the dogged resistance of the Australian 22nd Brigade. However, a lack of numbers, inefficiencies and the poor strategies of the Allies' High Command prevented the defenders from regrouping effectively once the Japanese had broken through the thinly held coastal lines, and **Tengah** was eventually captured on the afternoon of the 9th February. Thereafter the Japanese were able to move their main forces, including their tanks from Johore, down the **Lim Chu Kang Road**. **Yamashita** then directed the rest of the invasion from his new HQ at **Tengah Airfield**.

We then drove on past the site of the former headquarters of the 22nd Australian Brigade, and down a narrow road through a landscape which even today was becoming more and more jungle-like, to the site of the **Sarimbun Beach Landing**. Our guide, **Helena**, had to ring forward to the gate keeper to let us in to what seemed to be a restricted area. We drove right down to the coast road next to a big Ministry of Education Centre, which, **Helena** told us, was where Singaporean children come on school courses to learn how to live in the jungle! We were able to walk right down to the small, rather stony beach and there before us were the shallow waters of the Straits of Johore. We could just make out the mainland of Malaysia across the waters due to the haze which covered Singapore that day, but we could see that it was not far. This is where the huge Japanese Army had gathered in February 1942 for the invasion of Singapore. It was planned that the Japanese 5th Division was to land on the **Sarimbun Beach** area, where we were standing, and along that part of the coast, while the 18th Division was to attack south of the **Island of Sarimbun** which we could see to our left. On Singapore itself, the 22nd Australian Brigade's three battalions (2/18th; 2/19th and 2/20th) were hidden thinly along the coastline in the mangroves which go right down to the shore of the Straits. We could see what a terrible terrain this was, and one wonders how anyone could have defended the island lying in mud and water amongst the tangled roots of mangroves in the pitch blackness of a tropical night.

Helena explained the strategy of the Japanese 5th Division as they launched their invasion of Singapore's northwest coastline on the night of the 8th February. Using assault boats and barges, they crossed the Straits under cover of darkness, but were twice repelled by the Australian troops' artillery fire. In the dark they were able to gauge the Australians' positions, and on the third wave of attack, they broke through their defences, and landed on Singapore Island through the dark corridors of the jungle where there had been no signs of firing. The massive numerical superiority of the Japanese soon overwhelmed the Australians, and within two hours of the first attack the Australian forces were either wiped out on the beaches, or were retreating to new defence lines.

We then drove on to the **Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve** which today is a wonderful nature reserve full of reptiles, fish, insects and birds of every variety and hue. We were lucky to see several large Monitor lizards; some Hornbills which gave us a close up display; a mudskipper fish and various butterflies during our visit. As we walked out over the mangrove swamps on clean wooden walkways, we were reminded again by **Helena** that the Australian troops had been fighting in this very type of terrain in the pitch dark, and how impossible it must have been for them to try to fight off an unseen enemy in the mud and tangled roots of the mangrove swamp. We also saw the river where crocodiles have now started to live again. Further on we looked across the Johore Straits towards the town of Johore Bahru in Malaysia, which should have been visible but the haze prevented us from seeing it clearly.

Helena described how it was from Johore Bahru along these northern shores that the Japanese Imperial Guards Division had attempted to invade the 4 kilometre stretch of land between the Causeway and Sungei Kranji on the night of the 9th February. This time they had encountered stiff resistance from the 27th Australian Brigade comprising 3 Battalions (2/26th; 2/29th and 2/30th) whose task it had been to defend this area. However, unfortunately through a series of misunderstandings, the Australian forces began to withdraw, allowing the Japanese to gain a foothold and advance inland. With the defence of the Causeway abandoned, the Japanese managed to repair the breach where part of it was blown up on 31st January 1942 and they were able to move troops and equipment across into Singapore at will. By the close of the 10th February 1942 the Japanese had captured the northwestern part of Singapore and were heading down the Bukit Timah Road into Singapore itself.

By this time we were in need of some refreshments! The bus duly took us to the **Gardenasia Restaurant** not far from the **Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve** for a delicious set lunch with several choices which had been previously booked at the beginning of the tour. It was a welcome break!

Refreshed we made our way back into Singapore City. On our way back, we passed the small road which leads into Kranji Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery where so many of the young Australian soldiers who lost their lives fighting in the northwest corner of Singapore Island lie buried. The final stop of the tour was a brief private viewing of the **Battlebox Museum** on Fort Canning Hill. This underground series of bunkers used by **Percival** and his senior staff in the closing stages of the fight for Singapore, is closed at present for renovations. As a privilege to the MVG, we were allowed into the Museum through a small back entrance for a private viewing to see the Command Centre, which showed an enactment of the final meeting held by the Allies on the 15th February 1942. The newly restored wax figures of **Lt-Gen. Percival** and his senior staff and aides looked very life like as they sat round the huge table filled with maps and plans and made their fateful decision to surrender the Island of Singapore. **The Battlebox** is due to be opened in time for the 75th anniversary of the Fall of Singapore in February 2017 and it will be renamed **The Fort Canning War Rooms**.

After a final brief talk by **Helena**, we made our way back into the daylight and the life and bustle of modern Singapore!

Report by **Jane Booker Nielsen**

12th October 2015



Sarimbun Beach Memorial



Above: Wetland area
Below: Lunch at Gardenasia



SINGAPORE VISIT
UNVEILING OF THE SIME ROAD PLAQUE AT THE CHANGI MUSEUM
11th SEPTEMBER 2015

After the Historical Tour on Thursday 10th September, the following day saw another early start in order to get to the Changi Museum for 9.30 a.m. preparatory to the unveiling ceremonies that were due to start at 10 a.m. Around 40 MVG members were in attendance, and those who arrived early were able to look around the Museum. From a previous visit to the Museum, I remembered the graphic depiction of the events that took place during the Japanese occupation and it is indeed harrowing to see some of the pictures displayed.

In the booklet produced for the unveiling ceremony, the Changi Museum noted three objectives:

1. To honour all men and women who fought in Singapore during the Second World War. It is this objective that underlines the nature of the ceremony taking place.
2. To educate the public – locals and foreigners, children and adults – about the history of WW2 in Singapore.
3. Finally, the Museum wished to encourage the reconciliation of all countries which had fought in the war.

“To foster remembrance, the Museum allows those who were involved in WW2, regardless of nationality, race or religion, to put up relevant plaques on the Plaque Wall within the Museum. In this way, all war sacrifices are represented and commemorated.”

As well as the MVG, plaques were unveiled by representatives of the Indian Army, the Central Sikh Gurdwara Board and the Old Etonian Association.

Ceremonies

Those attending took their seats in the Changi Chapel and at 10 a.m. the proceedings began with an introduction by the Master of Ceremony, **Razeen Chan**, Director for Research, Training and Consultancy at Singapore History Consultants Pte. Ltd. **Rosemary Fell** then gave a speech on behalf of the MVG. She said that the MVG decided that it should commemorate the 70th anniversary of the true ending of all hostilities in the Second World War in some permanent way. It was agreed that the presentation of a Plaque to the Changi Museum, in memory of all those who had been imprisoned in the Sime Road Camp, would be a good way to remember them, and the 70th anniversary of V-J Day.

Rosemary outlined the history of Sime Road, which “was named after a Scotsman called **John Sime**, who came to Malaya in 1900 and founded Sime, Darby and Company in 1910. In 1915, he was transferred to Singapore and joined the Singapore Golf Club. He supervised the laying out of the Bukit Timah Golf Course, and the road leading to it was therefore named after him. He retired in 1937 before the outbreak of WW2.

“The camp was built on an area of land measuring 470 acres beside Sime Road. Between 1941 and 1942, the Sime Road Camp, as it was called, was the headquarters of the Royal Air Force, until December 1941. However, after the Japanese invasion of northern Malaya, it became the combined Operational Headquarters of the British Army and the RAF in Singapore. During this time, **Lieutenant-General Arthur Percival**, Commanding Officer for the Malayan Campaign and the Battle of Singapore, ran military operations from this camp. However, on 8th/9th February 1942, the Imperial Japanese Forces landed on the Island of Singapore, and by 11th February they were within 1 mile of the Sime Road Camp. **Percival** and his military staff decided to retreat to Fort Canning to continue running operations from a series of underground bunkers, now called ‘The Battlebox.’

“After the capitulation of Singapore on the 15th February 1942, Sime Road was converted into an internment camp for Allied Prisoners of War in addition to the other military barracks in the Changi area. The former British combined operational headquarters, known as the Green House, was taken over by the Japanese and used as their headquarters and administrative centre for the Camp.

“Initially the prisoners of war were put to work building a Shrine next to the MacRitchie Reservoir for the Japanese war dead..... But during October 1942, 3,000 prisoners were sent from Sime Road to Thailand to work on the infamous Burma-Siam Railway Work on the railway took a terrible toll on the men, thousands died, and when it was completed in October 1943, many of the sick and wounded were returned to Singapore. In November and December, the survivors of ‘H’ Force who had endured some of the most extreme conditions while building the Railway were sent back to the Sime Road Camp, including **Ronald Searle**, who became one of the most famous of the artists on the Kwai, and whose works depict a variety of images showing what life on the Railway was like.

“In May 1944, things in Sime Road Camp were to change completely. The Prisoners of War were sent to Changi Gaol in exchange for some 3,000 mostly British, European and Australian civilian internees – men, women and children – who had been interned in the Gaol since Capitulation. Thus Sime Road finally became a civilian internment camp, and remained as such for the rest of the war. Between May and October 1944, survivors of the Double Tenth, and the bodies of 15 men who

had died under interrogation, were returned to the Sime Road Civilian Camp from the Kempeitai Headquarters at the YMCA and Outram Road Gaol. In March 1945, the camp's numbers swelled by about 1,500 as the Eurasian and Jewish communities from Singapore, Penang and mainland Malaya were also interned in Sime Road.

"As in Changi Gaol, the men and women were separated in Sime Road. They had separate compounds within the camp – even families were split up. Life in the camp was highly organized, but food and medical supplies were in very short supply and many lives were probably saved by the regular deliveries of fresh vegetables by the Swiss International Red Cross Representative, **Hans Schwietzer**. As time went on, large vegetable gardens were created by the internees and the produce grown also helped to supplement their diets. Nevertheless the death toll continued to rise until the end of the war due to vitamin deficiency diseases such as beriberi, and other prevalent tropical diseases such as malaria, dysentery and typhus. "The internees were allowed other activities as well as gardening. There were workshops for carpentry, shoe repairing, tailoring and other necessities for the maintenance of the camp. There was a library and the internees were allowed to attend religious services in the two churches in the camp, built by the military POWs – St. David's Anglican Church and a Roman Catholic Church. St. David's was used throughout the war years, and its walls had been decorated with murals and lists of casualties by the former POW inmates. The children had to attend school, run by the indomitable **Miss Anne Griffith-Jones**, and in early 1945, some of her pupils even sat their School Certificate exams organized by **Harold Cheeseman**, Deputy Director of Education in the Straits Settlements.

"For many of the Sime Road inmates, the war ended more with a whimper than a bang. They were not released from the camp instantly, but urged to stay in camp until food and medicines could be distributed to them. And they were also advised in a leaflet, which was dropped by plane on about the 30th August telling them of the unconditional surrender of the Japanese, not to eat large quantities of solid food, fruit or vegetables at first, but to eat small amounts at a time. However, it was nearly a month later before the last inmates left the camp, and it was closed.

"After the war, the RAF did consider rebuilding its headquarters on the site of the camp which had been Air Ministry ground, but this did not happen and in 1946 the camp was closed down altogether."

Rosemary then described how the MVG had become interested in the Sime Road Camp as it had become clear, from the numerous diaries and books to have recently emerged, that relations of many MVG members had been interned in the camp, both as military POWs and as civilian internees, a number of whom were children. Although the National Heritage Board in Singapore had designated the site of the Sime Road Camp an historic site in 2003, with redevelopment of the area, it had become apparent that a map of how it looked in wartime would be of interest to historians and relatives of those who were in the camp. Several plans of the camp area had been made by former internees, including a detailed map drawn in June 1945 by **Harold MacKenzie**, who had trained as an architect but worked as a rubber planter in Malaya. Two other maps by an unknown person, drawn in pencil, had been found by MVG member **Jane Nielsen** in the **Ivor Salmond** papers in the Changi Museum, while she was researching the Sime Road Camp site, prior to making a detailed map of the Camp showing how the huts had been arranged during the war. These maps had shown a slightly different arrangement of the huts from the **MacKenzie** map, and a different way of numbering them. Another drawing done in December 1944 by **Prichard Davis** showed the **MacKenzie** layout of the camp, but a different numbering of the huts. It is thought that the **MacKenzie** map used the British Army system of numbering, while the other maps, drawn by civilian internees showed the numbering used by the civilian internees. Using the information from each plan, **Jane**, in conjunction with **Jon Cooper** of the Adam Park Project, produced a definitive and detailed plan of the camp as close to its original wartime arrangement as possible.

Rosemary concluded her speech by saying "we are very grateful to **Mr. Jeya Ayadurai** and the Changi Museum for giving us the opportunity to make this presentation." She then invited two veteran members of the MVG – **Olga Henderson** and **Vilma Howe** to unveil the plaque, which they duly did. **Olga** and **Vilma** had been chosen as both had been child internees in the camp and now they had been selected to witness the presentation of the plaque in memory of those POWs and civilian internees who had been imprisoned there. The two also had a major role to perform the following day in the ceremony at the Kranji War Cemetery, while both were on the tour of the Sime Road Camp on the following Monday during which they recalled the conditions that they had experienced all of 70 years ago.

In the sunshine the plaque, made of marine quality brass by Anwick Forge in Lincolnshire, looked stunning. MVG members **Jane Nielsen** and **Jonathan Moffatt** had been responsible for the design of the map and text respectively, with a little input by **Jon Cooper** with the text. After the event, the plaque was attached to the outside wall of the Museum next to the plaque showing the Changi area as it was during the war.

After the unveiling, which had taken place outside in the Changi Chapel, everyone moved into the Museum itself, to St. Luke's Chapel where the replicas of the Changi Murals can be seen painted on the walls. Two speeches were given here: by **Captain Sachin Sequeira**, Defence Adviser of the High Commission of India, and by **Gurcharan Singh**, President of the Central Sikh Gurdwara Board.

After these speeches, everyone then moved into the area of the Museum known as the Kokonut Grove which contains the

Changi Plaque Wall. First, **Captain Sequeira** unveiled six plaques, one for each of the Indian Army regiments that were active in Southeast Asia during WW2: the Dogra Regiment, Garhwal Rifles, Gorkha Regiment, Jat Regiment, Madras Regiment and Punjab Regiment. During WW2 millions of Indian troops fought in different areas of the world and by the end of the war, the Indian Army had grown to become the largest voluntary force in the world, with a strength of 2.5 million. They also suffered over 35,000 casualties. The Museum noted that these plaques are an important addition to the Museum's collection, as they are the first plaques to be presented to represent the participation of Indian troops in WW2. **Mr. Singh** then unveiled the Central Sikh Gurdwara Board's plaque – the Board manages and operates the Central Sikh Gurdwara (Sikh Temple) in Singapore and also the Silat Road Gurdwara. The Board had commissioned the plaque to commemorate the participation and sacrifice of Sikh soldiers during WW2.

The final ceremony involved the unveiling of a plaque on behalf of the Old Etonian Association, founded in 1897 to keep Old Etonians in touch with each other and with Eton College, and which has more than 16,000 members worldwide. A speech was given by **Michael Mackenzie** representing the Association, and this was followed by five readings, including the Founder's Prayer and the Far East Prisoners of War Prayer. The plaque, in remembrance of all Old Etonians, military and civilian, who had been imprisoned in Changi, was then unveiled by **Cdr. Andy Lamb**, British Defence Adviser.

The proceedings concluded with a speech by the Director of the Changi Museum, **Jeya Ayadurai**, who welcomed all the new plaques that had been unveiled that day, while pointing out that there was now only space for just a few more on the Plaque Wall.

After the conclusion of events by Master of Ceremony, **Razeen Chan**, everyone adjourned to have a finger buffet in the Bark Café and to talk over the day's events. The sun, which had come out during the ceremony, continued to shine – in fact this was just about the only day during my time in Singapore when there was a reasonable amount of sunshine, as for much of the rest of the time Singapore was adversely affected by the haze that had blown over from Sumatra, and this was to be even more of a problem for those who travelled on to Sumatra.

During the buffet, while I was chatting with **Rosemary**, we were joined by **Jeya** and his wife **Jenny** just before they went off to vote in the General Election that was taking place that day. Among the interesting points that came out of the discussion, he referred to the refurbishment of the Battlebox (which we had seen the previous day) and said that it should be reopened in time for the 75th anniversary of the Fall of Singapore in February 2017 when there would be further commemorative events taking place. It is due to be renamed the Fort Canning War Rooms.

Report by **Henry Langley**
12th October 2015.

Sime Road Plaque unveiled by Olga Henderson and Vilma Howe



**REMEMBRANCE CEREMONY AT KRANJI COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES CEMETERY
MARKING THE 70TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE END OF WORLD WAR TWO
12TH SEPTEMBER 2015**

Wreath laying at Kranji



Wreath laying watched by VIP Guests



L to R: **Old Etonian, Rosemary Fell & Bill Adamson.** L to R: **Olga Henderson & Vilma Howe**

The Malayan Volunteers Group was honoured to have been included in the Service of Remembrance held at the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery at Kranji on the 12th September 2015. The ceremony was to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, and was held jointly by the Changi Museum, the Singapore History Consultants and the Fort Canning War Rooms.

Seventy years ago at 3.41a.m. GMT on that date, **Admiral The Lord Louis Mountbatten**, Supreme Allied Commander of South East Asia Command [SEAC] accepted the unconditional surrender of all Japanese military forces in the occupied countries of Southeast Asia, in the Municipal Building (later renamed City Hall) in Singapore. The signing signalled the end of the Pacific War and terminated Japan's military occupation of Southeast Asia, bringing peace to millions of people throughout this region of the world.

Kranji was the site of an ammunition depot before the Japanese invasion, but after the fall of Singapore it was turned into a prisoner-of-war camp by the Japanese, and later a POW military hospital. A small cemetery was started for those who died there and after the war this was developed into the permanent war cemetery which is here today. There are about 4,500 Allied military graves of those who died in Singapore and Malaya during the 70 day conflict, but on the walls of the Memorial are the names of over 24,000 war dead whose remains have never been found. Graves from other cemeteries in Singapore such as Changi were also relocated to Kranji after the war.

Members and friends collected at 3p.m. at the YWCA prior to the departure of the coach at 3.15p.m. We arrived at Kranji shortly before 4p.m. giving everyone plenty of time to walk up from the coach car park to find the seats reserved for MVG members at the side of the VIP seating area. MVG members who were laying wreaths were allocated seats with the VIPs – our two veteran former child internees, **Olga Henderson** and **Vilma Howe**, who laid wreaths on behalf of the civilian internees; **Bill Adamson**, accompanied by his wife **Elizabeth**, who laid a wreath on behalf of the Malaya/Borneo Veterans Association; and **Rosemary Fell**, accompanied by her husband **Donald**, who laid a wreath on behalf of the Malayan Volunteers and civilian internees. We were seated long before the official guests and wreath layers arrived at 4.20p.m. and finally the Guest of Honour, **Professor Walter Woon** a Professor of Law from the National University of Singapore. After the introduction and welcome to the service given by **Razeen Chan** of the Singapore History Consultants, **Professor Woon** gave a most profound and scholarly address, ending with the words, "To ignore the grim lessons of history is to dishonour the memory of the thousands of men and women who lie here all around us." He said he hoped for reconciliation between the leaders of Japan, China and Korea, although China and South Korea had criticized Japan's Prime Minister for his continued failure to apologize properly for Tokyo's past aggression.

Jeya called the event a "world-first" in terms of reconciling former enemies, with the presence of about 20 members of the Japanese community at the service including their Ambassador to Singapore, **Mr. Haruhisa Takeuchi**. There followed silent prayers by the leaders of the different religious bodies, and two readings – "Pericles' Eulogy" and "A Tribute to Heroes" by **Lt.-Col. Andy Tan** from Singapore's Staff College. The wreath laying followed, lead by **Professor Walter Woon**, with Japanese Ambassador, **Haruhisa Takeuchi**, and **Colonel Joseph Tan Boon Kiat**. Representatives of diplomatic missions, veterans'

associations and other organizations laid their wreaths as their names were called out. **Rosemary Fell** and **Bill Adamson** were joined by an old Etonian who had been present at the plaque unveiling ceremony on the 11th September in Changi Museum, and whose grandfather had been involved in the Malayan Campaign. Our two lady veterans were helped to lay their wreaths and also one former POW, **Leonard Grosse**, aged 93 was assisted as he laid his wreath. The final act of remembrance came with the laying of 1500 **Tsurus** at one side of the War Memorial by members of the Japanese community. These are strings of multi-coloured paper cranes symbolizing peace which had been made by Japanese school children in Singapore, and they made a colourful contrast to the red poppy wreaths laid at the foot of the War Memorial. After the reading of 2 verses of **Laurence Binyon's** poem, "For the Fallen" we stood for a rendering of the Last Post and the 2 minutes' silence. Then came the Rouse and the reading of two poems, "In Flanders Fields" by **John McCrae** and "For whom the Bell Tolls," by **John Donne**. The Remembrance Bell was rung 7 times to mark each of the 7 years of war - 1939 - 1945. With words in Malay and English, we all stood to sing the Singapore National Anthem, "*Majulah Singapura*," to end the ceremony.

After the service, refreshments were served at the entrance into the cemetery, and we were able to meet and chat to other people who had attended the service. We thank all those who had been involved with the organization which was superb, particularly the staff of the Changi Museum, who were on hand to help us find our seats and assist us in any way they could. The service itself was very moving, and a fitting tribute to those who had died in the defence of Malaya and Singapore and whose sacrifice has resulted in peace in the region for the last 70 years.

The Malayan Volunteers Group and the Old Etonian Group were the only groups present at the Service representing the children and relatives of former Malayan Volunteers and soldiers of the British Army who had fought in the Malayan Campaign in World War Two.

VIPs standing at the start of the service to mark the 70th anniversary of the end of WW2



VISIT TO SIME ROAD CAMP – 14TH SEPTEMBER 2015

On the following Monday, around 20 MVG members took a minibus from the YWCA for a visit to the site of the Sime Road Camp – numbers were fewer than at earlier events as several members had started on their trip to Sumatra and a number of others had returned home. Arriving at Adam Drive, near to where the second entrance to the Camp was located (the main entrance being in Sime Road), members were joined by Battlefield Archaeologist **Jon Cooper**, who had conducted extensive research at nearby Adam Park where one of the final battles in Singapore had been fought. **Jon** started by describing the significance of the site in the context of the early fighting.

On Friday, **Rosemary Fell** had described the MVG's interest in Sime Road, and how **Jane Nielsen** had made a detailed map of the site as it had been during wartime. This map has now been updated and those on the visit were handed out the latest version (June 2015) of the map with its very detailed description of the area. **Jon** had brought along a large folder containing a number of pictures, drawings and other material which he handed out, explaining what we were going to see. The minibus then moved on a little way down Adam Drive to stop within what was the camp area in wartime and everyone got off the bus. **Jon** then pointed out a number of signs of where the camp had been, for example, some of the areas where the concrete platforms on which the huts had been built are still visible. On the left hand side of Adam Drive was the Rambutan Grove and Orchard area, where classes had been held for the children, and vegetables grown – it was noted that there were still tapioca plants growing there. **Jon** also indicated some of the other neighbouring locations. These included the Piccadilly Concert area, where outdoor concerts were held by the men's theatre groups for the women and children. We were shown the site of the POW Barn Theatre, where productions were put on by **Captain Ronald Horner** and **Ronald Searle**, who did all the stage and costume design. **Ronald Searle** also drew caricatures on the walls of his nearby hut, which was called the Flying Dutchman Hut and later became the Women's Dispensary. Into these life sized murals, he inscribed messages such as "Cheer up girls. Won't be long now." These drawings, and his poster and costume design can be seen in the archives at the Imperial War Museum.

We then moved up Adam Drive to a roundabout at the top of a small hill where the site of the Women's Hospital had been. Pictures of the Hospital showed a stone wall outside the building, and the remains of this and the concrete platform on which the hut was built could still be seen under the trees and vegetation now covering most of the camp area. **Jon** also showed us a selection of other drawings and prints of the wartime camp site in this area from his folder.

What this report has not reflected so far is the contribution from the two former child internees who had actually experienced the conditions of the Sime Road Camp; **Olga Henderson** and **Vilma Howe**. Recalling events of 70 years ago with extraordinary detail and some very vivid memories, they brought to life some of the very difficult times through which they lived. For example, **Olga** said that she had had two spells in the Hospital, and she recalled taking food which her mother had had to cook, up to the Japanese Guards at a very early hour of the morning. She also said that her hut had been designed for 34 people, but in fact it had been the home for 118 – including **Vilma** at the other end. But they hadn't known each other in the camp. **Vilma** mentioned the background to how her family had been interned: they had originally escaped from Singapore on the *Mata Hari* but had been captured and interned by the Japanese in Sumatra. However, as her father was a doctor, they were taken back to Singapore and spent a couple of months free while her father helped to treat patients. But when his services were no longer required, they were again interned, this time in Singapore. During this second period of internment her younger brother was born in the Camp. She also mentioned how her mother had nearly fallen foul of the Japanese by failing to bow correctly to one of the soldiers. She referred to the arrangements for the education of the children in the Camp and said that she had received a Badge of Merit for her work and this is now in the Imperial War Museum in London. Both **Olga** and **Vilma** described what used to happen when men brought up the food each day to the women's area – there was strict segregation between the men's and women's areas and interaction was not permitted. Furthermore, **Olga** and **Vilma** were able to comment on the locations of some of the buildings shown on **Jane's** meticulously researched map. Perhaps it is not surprising after so many years that there was not always agreement about exact locations, for example, the Flying Dutchman Hut. But, as **Vilma** pointed out, the site now looked very different from how it did then. At that time, everywhere was flat and there was relatively little vegetation. But the current state of the area is now completely different and overgrown. The Sime Road/Adam Drive area now includes a number of houses, built on the original concrete platforms of the wartime huts, while part of the area (including some of the men's camp) is now a government establishment and so was "off limits" to us on the visit. Elsewhere, the jungle had encroached and had covered up traces of what used to be there.

However, I can only describe walking around and hearing the comments from **Olga** and **Vilma** as absolutely fascinating and bringing home to the rest of us what a terrible experience it must have been to have undergone the conditions in the Camp, and how lucky for those who did manage to escape imprisonment by the Japanese.

After this we walked down to No. 7 Adam Drive, to recover from our exertions and to partake of some welcome refreshments that had been very kindly provided by the owner of the house, **Karien van Ditzhuijzen**.

Suitably refreshed, most of the party then carried on down to the site of the former St. David's Church. [Ed: A drawing of this Church was shown on P.26 of the April 2014 edition of **Apa Khabar No: 38.**] The Church is no longer there, but in its place is a nondescript building that is apparently an electricity substation, **Jon** pointed out the 4 pillar-like structures in front of the substation that, by chance, look remarkably similar to those in front of the wartime Church.

We boarded the minibus again, and went into Sime Road where we stopped outside the building which in wartime was known as the Green House. Built around 1938 and originally painted green – hence its name – it was the former British combined operational headquarters until **Percival** and his staff retreated to the Battlebox in Fort Canning. After Capitulation, it was taken over by the Japanese and became the Japanese Headquarters and Administrative Centre for the Sime Road Camp.

Finally **Jon** explained what had occurred on the opposite side of Sime Road where the Golf Course was – and still is – located, and the battle which took place there as the Japanese forces advanced into Singapore. His detailed knowledge of the fighting in this area can be recorded in a separate article at another time.

We then returned to No: 7, Adam Drive to collect the remainder of the party. **Jon** offered members the opportunity to go off with him to find the entrance to one of the tunnels which had been discovered nearby (others are shown around the Camp on **Jane's** map), but he warned us that this involved going into the "jungle." Just one of the party – **Ian Richardson** – was intrepid enough to take up this offer. Whether they found the entrance and indeed whether they made it out of the jungle will be revealed in the next newsletter!

Report by Henry Langley.

12th October 2015.



**Above: Jon Cooper showing plans of a hut
Below: Olga points out some details**



**Above: Vilma looking at her hut drawing
Below: Refreshments at No: 7 Adam Drive**



A THIRD VISIT OF DISCOVERY TO SUMATRA – SEPTEMBER 2015

It was with an air of anticipation that **Liz Moggie**, **Imogen Holmes**, **Susan Jalaluddin** and **Rosemary Fell**, met at the Tanglin Club in Singapore prior to flying off to Medan for a two week follow-up to the previous trips which had been made to Sumatra in 2012 and 2014. A fifth member of the group, **Sonja Easterbrook Smith** flew in from New Zealand to join the group at Changi Airport. The rest of the intrepid travellers flew into Medan from Kuala Lumpur for what transpired to be a fairly gruelling but very rewarding trip – some already known from previous trips, **Edda da Silva** and **Noor Azlina Yunus**; our 2 guides extraordinaire **Frans Duiniveld** and **Darwin Arriega**; plus newcomers husband and wife team **Pim & Hee Sook Lemstra**.

The visit started with a touch of luxury by staying for 2 nights at the international **Aston Hotel** in central Medan. The first full day was spent in visiting the site of the Glugor One [Gloegoer] Camp on the outskirts of Medan. A former Dutch Army barracks, the POWs were housed there for several months at the beginning of their 3½ years of captivity, and from where they were put to work by the Japanese. Glugor Two Camp, further up the road, was a former lunatic asylum and the civilian women internees were housed here – it is now a thriving community living around the huge water tower.

Our taxis then took us on to visit the **Tjong A Fie Mansion** in Medan. An immigrant from mainland China, **Tjong A Fie** rose to become one of Medan's most prominent citizens and businessmen during the latter part of the 18th and first part of the 19th centuries. The fine furniture and size of his house are an indication of his immense wealth, and he was awarded the "Order of Orange-Nassau" by a grateful Dutch Government for his contribution to the wellbeing of the area.

After lunch at the famous **Tip Top** restaurant which was started in Dutch colonial times, we spent the rest of the afternoon looking at Dutch heritage buildings in Medan including the post office across the street from our hotel, and a colonial Dutch Club. Dinner was at a well known seafood restaurant.

The next day, on our way to the airport for an afternoon flight to Banda Aceh, we made a detour via Belawan, the port of Medan where the POWs had also been put to work loading and unloading ships. It was a pretty grim looking place full of swirling dust and lorries taking bags of cement and other cargo to the docks. The traffic jam was quite lengthy and we were glad to get out of the extra dust which was adding to the already poor air quality caused by the smoke haze from the burning fires in the Riau Province. We had a leisurely lunch at the Airport while waiting for our flight to Banda Aceh.

From the air, one was able to see how low lying the whole area is and why the tsunami was so devastating. Most of the buildings have been replaced and the town has largely recovered from the tragedy which struck on Boxing Day 2008. On arrival at the airport we were met by our comfortable minibus which would be our travelling "home" for the next 2 weeks, together with our 2 young drivers "**Iil**" and "**Man**." They quickly became a part of the "group" and drove with great care and safety despite the custom in Indonesia to overtake in the face of oncoming traffic!

Our **Hotel Sulthan** was a bit rundown in contrast to Medan's luxury hotel, but next morning, after a good breakfast, we visited the outside area of the beautifully decorated Mosque on our way to see the now famous ship which had been carried inland by the tsunami wave. It has been made into a tourist sight with a park and raised platform round it. We learned that the ship was flat bottomed and had, in fact, been anchored in the harbour to generate electricity for the town – and it still is. We also visited the old Dutch military cemetery, which was very well kept, but didn't have time to go into the impressive Tsunami Museum built next to the cemetery. As we left Banda Aceh we passed a Tsunami Park where the hundreds of unknown victims had been buried in mass graves.

The drive to Takengon was long and arduous, but the scenery was magnificent as we climbed up into the mountains and down the other side, across several mountain ranges, the vegetation constantly changing with the elevation. We were surprised to see pine trees high up – later we saw that they were being tapped for their resin. We had our usual morning stop for '**kopi-susu**' and '**nasi padang**' for lunch at a place called Sigli. At times the roads were fairly good and at other times they were practically non-existent, but we did pass through areas where huge improvements were being made to the roads, the hillsides were being sprayed with cement to stop erosion and huge storm drains were being dug each side of the road. It was late and dark by the time we arrived at our destination, after a nine hour journey, and we couldn't see our surroundings. Next morning, we discovered that our **Hotel Renggali** had a lovely view across Lake Tawar and was situated high up on the side of the lake, with an attractive garden in front of it and paths leading down to the water's edge.

Unfortunately the continuing haze made it difficult to see across to the other side of the lake, and blotted out the sun. Takengon is **Darwin's** home town and where his family still lives. He spent some of his childhood here, and took us to see the former Governor's residence sited high up with a commanding view over the lake. We then drove up into the hills behind the town to visit his family's coffee plantation in the village of Ratawali. We were taken into the plantation and were permitted to pick some of the berries or 'cherries' as the fruit is called, and then **Darwin** told us how they are treated to produce the coffee beans we all know. First the outer covering, which has a sweet glutinous lining, is shredded off in a machine to reveal the 2 beans inside, which are then packed into sacks and allowed to ferment for 26 to 36 hours. This process helps to break down the inner skin round each bean, and they are finally left outside on mats to dry until only about 30% moisture remains. Finally the beans are taken to be roasted ready for sale. Only Arabica – the best type of coffee - is grown on the farm and sold under the trade name of Degayo Coffee.

After a delicious noodle lunch, cooked for us in a huge wok, we visited a fruit market, local handicraft shops and saw the site of a coffee museum/warehouse which is being built by **Darwin** for the Degayo coffee business before having dinner with his family at their home. The next morning, Monday the 21st September, we were also invited for breakfast with his family at 5.30a.m. before embarking on a very long day's travel via Blankejeren to Ketambe in the Leuser National Park. Again the road wound up into the mountains and down through lush valleys. We stopped for a picnic lunch in a little village and sat beside a small fast flowing river in the sunshine! We made the most of the fresher air and lack of haze. On we went, up and down the mountain ranges, round hairpin bends and through valleys, until we reached an area where it was thought that the Aceh Party of POWs had worked on building the Aceh Road. As we viewed the incredibly beautiful scenery, we heard the

wailing sounds of gibbons calling from the distant jungle areas, and wondered how the POWs had survived in this isolated area with its lack of water and food supplies. The modern road, although rough in places, was quite different from the one built by the POWs, and we found no traces of camp sites or where the original road had been built.

Late in the afternoon, we eventually arrived at our Guest House called "**Friendship**" at Ketambe in the Leuser National Park. It was a delightful place with a series of small bungalow-type rooms with small verandas outside dotted around in the attractive gardens – the accommodation, with its somewhat primitive bathroom facilities and huge double bed, was more suited to young backpackers than to our older generation! Nevertheless, we enjoyed the atmosphere and home cooked food, despite the long wait for it to arrive that evening!

The excitement of Tuesday, the 22nd September was due to the fact that we were to take our jungle walk into the National Park in search of Orang Utans. Before embarking on this adventure, we had to prepare by donning anti-leech socks. These looked like green Christmas stockings and had to be put on over socks and trousers and tied just below the knee – then shoes over the stockings. We all looked a bit like moon-walkers. The walk was gentle at first, but gradually became harder as we got further into the jungle, but after walking for an hour or so, we were rewarded by the sight of 2 hornbills in the trees, then some monkeys and finally the thrill of seeing a female Orang Utan swinging through the trees with her baby clinging to her. After walking for a couple of hours, we arrived at a clearing beside a small river where the porters were already cooking our lunch on a wood fire. We drank cups of hot sweet tea from a huge container to quench our thirst, and sat by the river until the food was ready – delicious noodles. Some swam in the river, while the rest of us watched or made running repairs to ripped clothing caused by falling down the steep jungle path! No names or details of the extent of the rips!

Alas, our stay in Ketambe was all too short, and we were on the road at 6 a.m the next day for the long drive to Brastagi. This area in central Sumatra is quite cool and inhabited by the Batak people who are Christians. There were numerous churches – all in a state of some disrepair, but the surrounding countryside was full of produce ranging from sweet corn to citrus fruit. There were plenty of oranges being sold along the roadside. We saw other crops growing such as onions, carrots and several different types of flowers.

We arrived in Brastagi quite early in the afternoon, and had time to wander into the town to look at the market. The town was full of pony traps and riding ponies for tourists, and much of the clothing for sale was also geared to them – Brastagi t-shirts and rather garish trousers and skirts. However, if one dug deeper into the piles of goods on show, there were better quality items for sale. Our **Hotel Sibayak**, where we stayed, was a very pleasant, slightly faded colonial-type building with bungalow bedrooms each with its own balcony, set among beautifully maintained gardens. We had dinner that evening in a Chinese restaurant which served Ginger Tea – a speciality of the region which, we were told, took 1½ hours to prepare. The next morning we drove into the hills to view Mount Sinabung which had started erupting the week before, and which was quietly spewing out smoke and a small amount of lava. Again, the area was quite touristy, with lots of pony traps for hire and stalls selling the inevitable selection of t-shirts. We left the hill and drove out of town to the area which was thought to have been the site of the pre-war Planters' International School. Now it is a fertile area up in the cool, fresh air of the hills with many different crops being grown, but no sign of any former school buildings. The road made a wide detour around Brastagi and eventually brought us back into the town, before we were taken to see the thermal springs at the foot of Mount Sibayak. As we came nearer to the volcano we could see the steam billowing from several vent holes in the ground and saw the huge thermo-electric station which has been built to 'harvest' the energy from the volcano. It was very impressive and one could clearly see that the whole mountain was gently billowing steam from various areas towards the top on one side. As this was **Darwin's** last day with us, we hosted a dinner at the hotel for him, **Frans** and **Liz** to thank them for organising the tour and booking the hotels for us.

Friday, 25th September found us on the road again for the long trip to Tarutung, a small town by a river. Our **Hotel Bali** had been recently refurbished and we had enormous rooms with shower rooms attached. As we were still high up, the temperature was quite cool and we were caught in a tropical downpour as we tried to explore the town. We found 3 huge former colonial Dutch buildings with ornate carvings on the front, but didn't have time to investigate any further.

Early next morning we discovered a huge market selling local produce of all kinds and descriptions, which had been set up round little back streets and between houses. We bought a type of local peanut pancake called "Apambalik" for breakfast, to go with the fruit we had. Then we set off once again in the minibus for our next destination – Padang Sidempuan, noted for its antique shops in the Guide Book. As we drove round in search of these, we had almost given up when a sign was spotted and we spent the next couple of hours looking round some interesting antique pieces, including some good antique glasses, as well as some rather ancient relics. Having found these shops, one member of the group, who had suggested they would be full of junk, had to eat her hat in the form of kway teow that evening! No names of the culprit or who informed on her! The drive to Bukit Tinggi took another long day of travel, but we did cross the equator – in the pouring rain – where we stopped for photos. We saw the statue of Tuanku Rao on his rearing charger in the village of the same name and after various stops for coffee and lunch, we arrived at the **Hotel Grand Rocky**. There were several huge pieces of what looked like polished stone in the foyer – in fact they turned out to be fossilised wood, and these gave the hotel its name.

Our programme had to be changed at this point for the last few days of our tour, due to the haze causing flight delays at Pekanbaru. It was decided to change our exit flight to Padang and spend our last night there. In hindsight this was a fortuitous move as all flights from Pekanbaru were subsequently cancelled.

On Monday morning, 28th September, we went for another jungle walk to see the Rafflesia flower which was in bloom. Sadly it poured with rain, despite an earlier favourable forecast, and we returned to the hotel soaked through and muddy but happy to have seen and photographed the flower. After a hot shower and change of clothes, we explored Bukit Tinggi, visiting the Japanese tunnels (quite spooky in the dark) and the remains of the old Dutch Fort de Kock. Sadly there is a rather tatty zoo in the Fort's grounds housing animals such as elephant and zebra in small, totally unsuitable, bare pens. We walked back to the hotel across the bridge, and found more "antique" shops quite near the hotel.

The visit to Bankinang was changed to Tuesday, and with our numbers slightly depleted due to minor ailments, 7 undertook the long 5 hour journey which saw us crossing the equator once again. This time it was the round world monument where

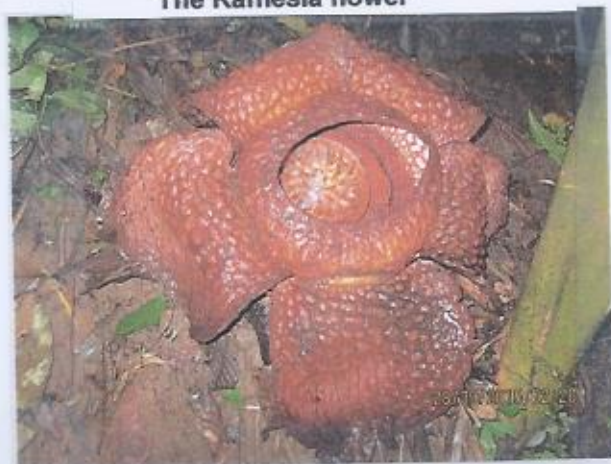
Gideon Jacobs and his men had been photographed after Japan's defeat in WW2. Our journey to Bankinang took us through and across the Harau Canyon, via a series of 5 fantastic bridges built hundreds of feet in the air which circled across the Canyon from one side to the other. The flow of water in the small river which ran down the gorge was regulated by numerous small water wheels which ensured that the water was directed to houses within the gorge. When we arrived in Bankinang, we were met by **Jamie Farrell** outside the former civilian Womens' camp – a former Army camp. The only remains of the wartime camp were the hospital hut (probably not the original) and some broken water conduits which had carried water up to the camp from the river below. There was a stainless steel monument listing the names of those who had died during the war, but nothing more of the old camp. We drove on to the men's POW camp in an old rubber factory, which was still functioning but was temporarily out of action due to mechanical failure, before having lunch at the newly opened KFC restaurant in Bankinang – not quite the appropriate restaurant for this group of discerning travellers! Our return journey was delayed by the rush hour traffic, and it was after dark when we finally arrived back at the hotel, tired but feeling we had achieved something by visiting the wartime internment camps.

Our last day was spent in travelling down to Padang via Lake Singkarak, which we glimpsed in the distance, and through Padang Panjang where we picked up the route of the old railway, and followed it down into Padang itself. We arrived at the **Hotel Mercure**, where we had stayed on the previous trip, early in the afternoon and, having checked into our rooms we went out in the minibus again to see the old Dutch Indonesian Bank. It is still a very fine building but no longer functioning as a bank, and the guards told us that it was due to be turned into a Museum. Our plans to visit the railway station were dashed when we discovered that it was about 15 kilometres out of town. We returned to the hotel for a final gathering at 7p.m. for dinner and an early night before catching the 8.30 a.m. flight from Padang to Kuala Lumpur the next morning. It had been a long trip covering approximately 2,100 kilometres in total, but a journey undertaken in relative comfort in an air conditioned minibus, and with frequent stops for plentiful food and drink. It is hard to imagine that much of the same route was followed by the POWs nearly 70 years ago, packed into open lorries, and being jolted about over rough tracks as they were driven down from the hills where they had built the road, ready to start work on the final devilish project thought out by their cruel Japanese captors – the building of the Sumatra Railway. We salute those brave men, and wonder at the incredible endurance of those who survived their ordeal.

With grateful thanks too, to **Liz Moggie** and **Darwin Arriega** for arranging the trip and booking all the accommodation and transport, and to **Frans Duiniveld** for acting as 'banker-in-chief' and making life easier for us all until the day of reckoning!
Report by Rosemary Fell.



Picking coffee "cherries"
The Rafflesia flower



Ready for our jungle walk
Crossing the equator



HUGH LAWSON'S DIARY (EDITED) FROM 2nd SEPTEMBER, 1944 TO 31st DECEMBER, 1944 - PART 4

By kind permission of Bob Davidson

928 DAYS SEPTEMBER 1944

- SAT 2nd** Killed 4 pigs at Pig Farm. Kunji-veg soup & rice. Pig offal scramble.
SUN 3rd Weekly Spring Cleaning and Bug Hunting. 5th Anniversary of War.
TUES 5th 2 ozs Jam and Honey (one spoonful each). Heavy rain.
THURS 7th Started Fatigue as Food Server carrying and washing up.
FRI 8th Received Doctors Certificate for light labour only. Rainy weather.
SUN 10th Innoculation for Typhus Fever. Weekly Spring Cleaning & Bug Hunting.
MON 11th Free issue 15 Cheroots, 6 Cigarettes, 2/3 Roll Tobacco.
TUES 12th Memorial & Burial Service of **W. Ahearne.**
WED 13th Free issue Tooth Powder & Talcum Powder & 1 spoonful Honey. Heavy rain.
THURS 14th Death of **Mrs. Shelton Palmer.** Memorial & Burial Service. Cutting grass extra for fatigue.
FRID 15th 1 spoonful Salt. Received letter from **Doreen** (Oct. 1943) 1,000 letters delivered.
SAT 16th Visited **Rowswell** reoccurrence of illness still in hospital. Extra duty cutting grass.
MON 18th 6,000 letters arrived in Camp for Censorship. Total letters = 23,000.
TUES 19th Soap issue, ½ Bar Washing Soap.
THURS 21st **Perry** brought into Camp unconscious & died two hours afterwards. Memorial & Burial Service of **Mr. Perry** (Gestapo). [Ed: Kempeitai.]
SAT 23rd Kungi Veg Soup & Rice - Kunji & Bun. Heavy rain storm all night.
MON 25th Death of **Mr. Kerr** (Gestapo). [Ed: Kempeitai.]
TUES 26th Memorial and Burial Service of **Mr. Kerr.**
WED 27th Death, Memorial & Burial Service of **Toby** (dysentery).
SAT 30th Kunji Veg Soup & Rice - Kunji & Bun. Heavy rain all night.

950 DAYS OCTOBER 1944

- SUN 1st** No weekly clean. Bleak wet day.
MON 2nd Death of **Mr. Gilfining** & Burial. Eurasian. Old age.
TUES 3rd Free issue 1½ ozs tea and Gula Malacca. Letter from **Doreen** (Nov 25th 1943).
WED 4th Shortage of water. Meal times only. Fifty first Birthday.
FRID 6th Owing to **Mr. Paterson** return from Hosp. & resuming duty today finished Fatigue as Food Server. **Mr. Long** admitted Hosp. from Gestapo.
SAT 7th Free issue 15 Cheroots, 12 Cigarettes, 1 Roll Tobacco. Water controlled due to shortage.
SUN 8th Death & Burial of **Mr. Keneddy.**
MON 9th Camp Official Weight = 8st 9lbs. Haircut. Shortage of water.
WED 11th Started Fatigue as Food Carrier & Tub Washer.
THUR 12th Sent 5th Post card.
SUN 15th Death & Burial of **Mr. Peters F.M.S.R.**
TUES 17th Free issue Soap (Washing). Death & Burial of **Mr. Suluman.**
WED 18th **Middlebrook** brought into camp from Gestapo internment.
THURS 19th Death & Burial of **Mr. Middlebrook & Parker.**
FRID 20th Received 5 letters. Jan March 1941.
SUN 22nd On construction Fatigue.
MON 23rd Constructing Shelter for Gate Policeman.
TUES 24th Death of **Mr. Osbourne.** Free issue 5½ ozs sugar.
WED 25th Building Servery Shed for Hut 103. Visited **Rowswell (NBG).**
THURS 26th Death of **Mr. R.C. Rendle MCS** in Military Custody. Rainy weather.
FRID 27th Memorial & Burial Service of **Mr. Rendle. Duncan** in Hosp. Bad feet.
SUN 29th Swept out the hut quarters & working at Hut 107 lean to shed. Visited **Duncan & Rowswell.**
MON 30th Awaiting wood lorries for Timber to build shed at Hut 51.
TUES 31st Kunji -Veg Soup & Rice - Kunji & Bun

989 DAYS NOVEMBER 1944

- WED 1st** Building Servery Shed HUT 51. Death & Burial of **Dr. Boyer** recently returned from Gestapo Custody. [Ed: Kempeitai.]
THURS 2nd Pigs littered. Total now 46 piglets. Death of **Mr. Penciller** - recently returned from Gestapo Custody. Funeral today.
SAT 4th Great excitement with air activity A.A. & Machine Guns firing.

- SUN 5th** Withdrawing nails from timber.
- MON 6th** Dismantling woodwork lattice for Post Office Hut. Sisters at Hosp.
- TUES 7th** Total piglets at Farm = 65. Memorial Service & Burial of **Tom Maxwell**. Death yesterday.
- WED 8th** Toilet Soap Issue. 1 Tablet.
- THURS 9th** Finished job at PO Hut.
- FRID 10th** Removing nails from Timber.
- SAT 11th** Memorial Service for Armistice with two minutes silence. **Rowswell** shifted to Convalescent Ward. Servery Shed for Hut 104.
- SUN 12th** **1000 days.** **Duncan** returned from Hosp. Free issue 5½ ozs. sugar.
- MON 13th** Death of **Miss Jackson**. Memorial & Burial Service tomorrow. 2½ ozs. of salt issue.
- WED 15th** Over 10,000 letters waiting release.
- THURS 16th** 4 pigs killed at piggery. Over 10,000 letters released and delivered.
- FRID 17th** Received 6 letters & 1 postcard. Extra rice issued with Pork for garden staff & associated workers.
- SAT 18th** **SENT RADIO 25 WORDS.** Memorial & Burial Service of **Mr. Kitchen** died yesterday.
- SUN 19th** Evening – **Mr. Manning** died.
- MON 20th** Memorial & Burial Service of **Mr. Manning**. Afternoon Mr. Rennie died. 10 more piglets born. Total now 75 out of 9 sows.
- TUES 21st** Memorial & Burial Service of **Mr. Rennie**. 1 spoon of Honey.
- THURS 23rd** 2,000 lbs. dried fish arrived.
- FRID 24th** Death, Memorial Service & Burial of **Mr. Fraser**.
- SAT 25th** Weekly Clean Out & Bug Hunt as well as Construction Fatigue.
- SUN 26th** Death & Burial of **Mr. Hughes AM**. Death of **Mr. Lee PM**.
- MON 27th** Execution of **Mr. Long**. Memorial & Burial Service of **Mr. Lee**. Death & Burial of **Mr. Crawford**.
- TUES 28th** Kunji-Veg Soup & Rice – Beans Rissole & Bun (Rice Soup) Salt issue. 1 spoonful.
- WED 29th** Building brickwork for Kuala in the top kitchen.
- THURS 30th** Death & Burial of **Mr. Moss**. **1018 DAYS.**

DECEMBER 1944

- FRID 1st** **1019 DAYS.** Garden fatigue. Sugar issue 6 ozs. brown sugar. Death of Dr. Lawson PM.
- SAT 2nd** Roll call 9.30a.m. Memorial & Burial Service of **Dr. Lawson**.
- SAT 2nd** Roll Call 9.30a.m. Memorial & Burial Service of **Dr. Lawson**.
- TUES 5th** Alert sounded 5.15 all internees adjourn to slit trench. All clear 5.45.
- WED 6th** ARP Exercises. Alert sounded 7.30 in slit trench until 9a.m. On Fatigue 10a.m. in garden.
- THURS 7th** Anniversary Malaya-Japanese War.
- FRID 8th** Death & Burial of **Mrs. Lindsay**.
- MON 11th** Death & Burial of **Mr. B. Rayner (Miner)**. 2,500 letters delivered on each day over MON & TUES 11th & 12th. Received 3 letters from Doreen dated Feb, March & July 1943.
- THUR 14th** Death of **Mr. Birnie** (stroke). Official notified that **Mr. Long** had been executed, found guilty of Spying.
- MON 18th** Roll calls 8a.m. & 7.30p.m. 7,500 letters & P.Cs delivered. Received 5 letters & 5 P.Cs. Dates of news vary June & July 1944
- WED 20th** **Murray** on Adam Road Fatigue as no mate in garden. Heavy rain all night no Roll call & no work in garden a.m.
- SAT 23rd** Roll call. Rainy weather. Adam Road fatigue.
- SUN 24th** Xmas Carols in the Orchard.
- MON 25th** Xmas Day. Kunji with Waffle & Syrup Sauce, Veg Soup, Rice, Curried Sauce & Sauté Potatoes, Honey Rice Pudding & Gula Sauce, Xmas Cake. Concert.
- TUES 26th** Boxing Day. Half Holiday Garden Fatigue 9.30a.m.-11a.m. Sugar Issue 6 ozs. Roll call 8a.m. Death of **John Young (Geordie)**
- WED 27th** Kunji, Veg Soup & Rice, Bean Sandwich Bun & Spinach. 8a.m. Roll Call. Memorial & Burial Service **J.R. Young**. Evening. Death of **Mr. Mitchell**.
- THUR 28th** Memorial & Burial Service **Mr. Mitchell**.
- FRID 29th** **1047 DAYS.** Received 1 Postcard dated May 25th 1943, from Mother who says she has only had 1 postcard from me since capitulation (2½ years). Called a fatigue party nearby to come in and clap their hands. Either, Broadcasting or Recording Music & Radio Messages at the Japs Camp Office at the Green House from Sime Road Camp.
- SUN 31st** Kunji, Veg & Fish Kedgeree, Kunji & Curry Puff.

[To be continued.]

EXCERPTS FROM THE FISHING DIARIES
of ERIC S. WILLBOURN [FMSVF]
by kind permission of his grandson Roger Willbourn

“.....in Kelantan in 1928, accompanied by **H.E.F. Savage** and **R.W. Barney**, we were walking on the river-bank one evening at Kuala Lebir when we came across a Malay, carrying a shot-gun, a “dacheng” (steelyard) and a very large riverfish. He had shot this and was hawking it at so much a ‘kati.’ He cut a magnificent steak with his ‘parang’, weighed it with the ‘dacheng’ and this was our supper.

A most unusual way of fishing is to be seen off the causeway that links the island of Singapore with the mainland of Johore. There, the Malays and Chinese fly a kite on a line one hundred yards and more in length, using it to carry a suspended bait.....”

The diary goes on.....

I was with the Military Forces in Singapore that capitulated to the Japanese on 15th February 1942, and after long hungry months as a POW at Changi, I was one of a party despatched northwards by rail on 28th October 1942. It was a dreadfully uncomfortable journey and, after four days and nights, we were de-trained and marched to a camp at Ban Pong in Siam.

I bathed and washed my filthy clothes in a flooded ricefield and we had two night’s rest, after which we were driven in lorries to Kanburi, thirty miles away. Two more nights here, packed like sardines and then began a very hard march of three stages to Tarso. During the previous fortnight we had eaten quite a lot of tinned meat, given to us from American Red Cross parcels that the Japanese had issued a week before our party left Singapore, the only substantial meal we ever had. Till then our staple diet had been boiled rice with very little else and all of us were feeling the results of vitamin deficiency. These 2 weeks of comparatively good food gave strength for what followed.

I was carrying a very heavy load, about 80 lbs in weight, and after staggering 16 miles, often deep in mud, I was exhausted. The tropical heat caused a dreadful thirst, but I did not do as, unfortunately, many of the others did – drink from native wells or pools that obviously were full of disease germs. I was most fortunate in carrying a thermos flask full of hot boiled water and “**Os**” **Watson** and I shared this, taking sips at one of our frequent halts until it was all finished.

The Japanese guards did not interfere with us unduly on the march of this first day & it was 6p.m. before we reached the camp alongside a Siamese “Wat” (Temple) on the bank of a clear, deep river.

I went sick with blistered feet and complete exhaustion, and “**Os**” **Watson** did the same, but we joined a bathing parade and were revived by the cold water. We slept in the open, packed like sardines and were awakened by rain in the early morning, before dawn.

The sick (of whom I was one) remained two more nights at this camp until the next party arrived and we marched on with them 13 miles to a jungle-halt. Here there were no sheds. There were a few tents for the Japanese guards and a party of British POWs was bivouacked there to cook rice or thin tapioca flour paste for the various marching parties. Again “**Os**” **Watson** and I went sick and we bivouacked 2 nights here in the open. My heels were septic with blisters from the new boots I had found at Changi. We set off one hour before dawn with the next party and I remember how beastly the Japanese corporal was, who bullied and struck the sick incapable of joining our marching party. There were about 12 left behind one or two of them died, the others were carried in a barge to Tarso.

Os and I reached Tarso alright with all our kit except that **Os** had had his mosquito net stolen and from then on he and I slept under my small net.

H.S. Service spotted me on parade when we arrived, and he gave **Os** and me some hot tea – i.e. hot water infused with a little China tea that made us feel better.

We had a swim in the river – a deep stream with cliffs of limestone – and then lay down to recuperate. We were under cover, lying in mud, but we had groundsheets so things were not too bad. At ten o’clock that night **K. Bancroft (M.C.S.)** staggered in, almost dead, with no baggage at all, and of course drenched with rain. We fitted him up with dry things but the poor fellow obviously was broken completely. He died at Kanu three weeks later. After 3 day’s rest at Tarso, during which my feet got no better and I was still utterly exhausted, I was detailed to take a party of 30 officers and men upriver. I marched them to the riverbank and there the Japanese guards ordered us to embark in two motor launches that proceeded upstream towing two barges in which were crammed 120 POWs, vegetables and 2 pigs in baskets – food destined for the Japanese guards upriver. The 120 POWs had been confined for 28 hours already in these barges, before we luckier 30 made a start.

It took 2 whole days and 2 nights to reach our destination on 5th November 1942. I was bitten on the finger by a centipede and had a very painful arm.

On arrival at Kin-Sayo, after some delay and arguing, I got a British Army R.A.M.C. major to cut my poisoned finger and that gave instant relief. However, I was ill. I was made “Bed-down” and excused some parades. We lay on bamboo slats in a hut and the space allotted to me was 2 feet wide. I had a man on each side of me and we lay head to tail to avoid breathing at each other.

I staggered daily to the cook-house to get my thermos filled with hot water so that I could foment my heels and my finger. **Dr. Macpherson (FMSVF)** held sick parades every day and gave us most unselfish care. He lanced my septic blistered heels. The bone was showing in the right heel. After the lancing the heel began to mend and I lost my lameness after a fortnight or three weeks. About this time I developed bad diarrhoea which kept me on the run day and night. On good days I "went" only 6 or 8 times but more often it was in the 20s. I estimate that I weighed about 8½ stone now. My pre-war weight was 13 stone. Six months later, after I had put on quite a bit of flesh, when I was in Chungkai, I weighed myself on the steelyard in the Q.M. stores - 9½ stone.

I was more fortunate than many in that I did not lose my strength and every day I staggered in slippers along a jungle path to the waterfall bathing place, and every day also I spent most of the remaining daylight at the river bank fishing.

I had bought a hank of thread and one or two hooks from a Siamese barge man. I plaited the thread 3-fold, tied this reinforced line to the end of a bamboo and baited my hook with a ball of kneaded rice, worked to a paste by repeated squeezing and kneading.

I caught 2 little fish in my 9 days at Kinsayo. They were precious indeed. **Os** refused to share them as they were so tiny. On about 3rd Dec 1942 two barge loads of us were sent downstream to Kanu. Here I gave a specimen to the POW bacteriologist to test for dysentery but the result was negative. Actually, I am told that I probably began with Amoebic Dysentery at Kinsayo and it was only 3 years later when I was taken to the Hospital at Bangkok after release that I was given any treatment.

I had courses of "liquid-diet" at Kanu to try to dry up my 'darkest interior' but it was no good, and for the most part, I ate all the rice I could get and I kept up my strength.

At Kanu, I fished regularly every day. My line was too weak and I was broken by big fish several times. Even after **Bill Reading** had given me 10 feet of superior blackline, I still had breaks. At Kanu in 4 months I caught about 8 fish, one of them over 2 lbs in weight. Most of them were carp, quite handsome and quite good eating.

From our first days at Kanu, **Os Watson** and I shared everything. I loved the days in the sun on the marble rocks of the river, though sometimes I was dazed with the heat and glare. At Kinsayo I had broken one lens of my spectacles and so was half blind - the spectacles could no longer be worn. When my hook got caught in a hidden snag I used to swim out and release it by diving under. We were forbidden to swim because of the danger of cholera but I could not afford to lose my hook and line so ran the risk of punishment, and I was never beaten at Kanu.

There were a number of officers and men (*who were*) keen fishermen, some of them being food-hunters pure and simple, while others had been fishing from childhood. Of such was **Capt. Flanagan FMSVF** of whom I saw quite a lot. He used to talk to me about fly fishing and I learnt of the science of "dry fly" fishing. After a month or so at Kanu I was appointed to the Cemetery party under **Os Watson** and became a keen grave-digger. Our cemetery was on the river-bank and we did our best to make it beautiful. It was here we buried poor **Bancroft**.

When March 1943 began, the Japanese started to tighten their hold on us. Officers were forced to work at road building and our liberties were curtailed. We were not allowed to fish - but I did. I risked it when I was not on duty at the cemetery, but the river was low now and I got no more fish.

At the end of the month **Os Watson** and I were in a party of sick and elderly men sent down river as likely to be useless for slave-labour on the railway, and we reached Chungkai on 3rd April 1943.

Although we didn't know it then, this saved our lives. Our friends who stayed behind suffered hell. Many died. Many others were sent down river in barges to die in our camp at Chungkai.

On 5th April 1943, **Os** and I went to the cemetery at Chungkai and saw 70 graves - all there were. In June 1944 when we left for Nakorn Paton there were more than 1,500.

I had no fishing after leaving Kanu.

x x x x x

I sailed from Singapore on 20th October 1945 on H.M.T. Ranchu and among the passengers was **W.**

Birtwistle of whom I had heard as Director of Fisheries SS & FMS. I had made up my mind to take up trout-fishing during my retirement in England and he gave me much encouragement and advice.

Later, he got hold of a secondhand "Farlow" trout-rod for me 10'6" and went with me to the best fishing tackle shops in London, where, from their very scanty supplies, I accumulated a set of fishing gear, including secondhand rubber boots, thigh-high, all of it first-class material thanks to **Birtwistle's** care and advice. I ordered an 8'6" rod from Hardy Bros., Alnwick, but they held out no prospect of an early delivery.

1946

Annan, Dumfriesshire, March 19th-29th

On the 19th March, 1946, I joined **Birtwistle** and his wife at the Firth Hotel, Annan..... It was a homely sort of place, plenty of good food, £5 a week all in, and I liked being there.....

The river was in flood and the wind strong. There was no prospect of catching anything, but I settled down to hours of practice every day with dry fly. An old experienced angler, **Mr. Marjoribanks** from India, used to walk along the bank to see what was doing, and, as was natural, he suggested that.....[old fisherman's tales].

AS I REMEMBER IT

By P.M. DAVIES [S.R.N. & wife of HARLEY BOXALL.]

By kind permission of her daughter Sallie Hammond.

Sallie Scarfe and I shared a very large double room with bathroom attached in the attap-roofed bungalow in a somewhat neglected garden, and adjoining the Resident Medical Officer's bungalow. We took a short cut through this latter compound to the adjoining hospital.

Both our husbands were serving in 62 Squadron as officers and pilots, and were based at the airfield about 12 miles from the town of Alor Star. War news, sparsely distributed, had inferred that the far East was now involved in the struggle for the Pacific. There had been a "flap" on, which precluded our men from leaving camp, and **Sallie** and I had visited them about the 6/7th December, but on the 8th we awoke to a morning strangely un-Malayan. It was overcast and eerily silent, and as we dressed for duty, there were several booming explosions. We remarked on these, and concluded that the authorities were blowing up some Malay houses which perhaps impeded Army transport constantly coming and going.

We went across to the Hospital and passing the first block, which was a small European section housing perhaps three small wards, one of the patients, an Army lad who was sharing a room with 3 others, put his head out of the sliding doors onto the veranda we were passing along, and called out, "Have you heard the news?" He informed us that their small radio had announced that Singapore had been bombed in the early hours, all lit up and unprepared, and that the Japs had turned their attention to the US Naval Base at Pearl harbour, wreaking havoc there. We were inclined to scout it, and continued on our way to our wards. It was only at breakfast time when we returned to the bungalow, that the matron greeted us with similar news, and doubtless issued instructions in case of bombing. We were back on duty when the sirens went. There was the insolent drone of enemy planes and ominous "crumps" in the distance.

I remember walking down my ward, attap-roofed and louvered windows (too hot for glass, thank goodness), and assisting the nurses in moving the patients from beds to the floor beneath, assuring them that it was alright, that the "*Japan punya*" never bombed hospitals! Meantime, my knees were knocking together so obviously that I had a horrid feeling that I was not fooling anybody.

The chaotic day wore on. We heard that they had bombed the airfield, and two officers we knew had been killed. In the afternoon, a telephone message was relayed that a casualty was being admitted. To my surprise, it was '**Pongo**' Scarfe, **Sallie's** husband. '**Pongo**' was accompanied by the RAF doctor, **Dr. Peach**, who sedated him and treated him for shock. He had a bad wound in his shoulder where he had been hit by a Jap fighter, but he managed to bring his plane back and land in a nearby paddy field. His navigator and gunner were not seriously hurt. '**Pongo**' was quite conscious and cheerful when I went over to the bungalow for tea, leaving him in the charge of the Indian dresser on duty, but we were hurriedly summoned back to the hospital when it was discovered '**Pongo**' was suffering a secondary haemorrhage. **Sallie**, Matron and I rushed across and until the doctor could be summoned, we gave him a sub-mammary saline, which in those faraway days, before the inception of Intensive Care was considered efficacious in the cases of collapse and shock. When the doctor arrived, blood had to be typed for transfusion. I offered mine, being a Universal donor, but **Sallie's** blood was found to be more compatible, and was accepted. '**Pongo**' was moved to the theatre for transfusion and repair of wounds under anaesthetic. '**Pongo**' started to slip away, and I hurried to where **Sallie** was resting. We both rushed back to the theatre, but I think '**Pongo**' had already left us.

That evening and night was like a bad dream. The Japs had bombed our reservoirs of water. The Asiatic relatives of patients streamed in to collect their dear ones, and we had to let them go, not without qualms, though supplying them with what medication we could, and I remember being particularly upset about a little girl bedridden with a T.B. spine.

The next morning, **Harley** and **Norman Irving** arrived looking unshaven and exhausted. They had received news that the Japs were only a few miles up the road and insisted that as Service wives, **Sallie** and I both left. This was endorsed by the Matron, a little black-eyed Kentish woman who later nursed the wife of the Governor of Singapore, **Sir Shenton Thomas**. All of them were prisoners of war.

In my stunned condition, I hurriedly packed three pairs of corsets, and two pairs of golf shoes! Later, when I realised what I had left behind, including my passport and Nursing Certificates, I could have wept. **Sallie** and I both left in uniform as we had dressed that morning.

Harley was driving the Ford V8 and on the road to Bukit Mertajam we were stopped by British troops who were looking for Japs infiltrating in the yellow garb of Buddhist monks. **Harley** and **Norman** left us at the Resthouse with the car, and there we were joined by **Norman's** wife **Monica**, and their small boy (though I do not remember that) and also **Doreen Brown** and her husband **Eric** (who was later shot down over Europe), **Joan Fish** and **Margaret Ritchie** (wife of **Willie Ritchie**, bank manager of Alor Star). **Joan** and **Margaret** were both in the early stages of pregnancy.

There was a full moon that night, and I think it must have been the 9th December, but so much happened so quickly, that it was hard to keep check. There were rumours that the Japs would land parachute troops, and with that in mind, **Harley** insisted on me taking his loaded service revolver before leaving us. I was simply petrified of the thing and got **Monica** to unload it for me! **Doreen Brown*** became hysterical when saying goodbye to **Eric**, which was un-nerving for the rest of us, particularly poor **Sallie**, but **Monica** took her in hand and restored calm. It was then found that there was not sufficient accommodation at the Resthouse for **Sallie** and me, so we were allotted a room in a nearby rubber estate, and we drove there.

[* *Doreen* was "of the country" as we used to say and was excused this un-British behaviour. After the war she married again in England – but is now a widow again.]

We were accommodated in a big room, with two beds, enclosed by a gauzed-wire inner room. The electric light switch was on the left hand side and outside the 'meatsafe.' Facing us was an open louvered window through which the moonlight poured, and by which stood an old fashioned dressing table with mirror. I was just dozing off when **Sallie** shook me, hissing that there was a man by the window. I fell out of bed, but by the time I had got out of the meatsafe and turned on the switch the room was empty.

We had hardly got back into bed, when there were wild screams from further along the passage, where a refugee bank manager's wife was housed temporarily. There was much racing and chasing, though the culprit, suspected of being a thieving Malay servant, got away.

Next morning, **Sallie** obtained a lift back to Alor Star, and I wanted to accompany her, but was deterred by threats of telling **Harley** and upsetting him. I think **Norman** must have been driving **Harley's** car when we left the next day, which contained **Monica** and child, **Doreen**, **Margaret** and me. We came to a small town where there was a meeting being held in the Clubhouse by the local *Memsahibs*, concerning the accommodation of "refugees" – us! My memory is that it was all very British, sniffy and patronising, but the meeting was interrupted by the sirens warning the advent of Jap planes. We all piled out of the Clubhouse and into the deep stormwater ditches at the side of the road. It was the day the Japs bombed Penang, and "crumps" of that merciless bombardment came faintly to us. That was the end of the meeting, and we continued our journey to Taiping, where within a day, many of the sniffy Mems joined us as refugees. It was on this occasion that I remember one of the few humorous incidents of our trek. **Margaret**, the Bank Manager's wife, immaculate as usual, even though her hair was tied pony-tail fashion with a piece of pink tape, was holding forth on a subject of interest to which I was not listening, till I heard, "...and I was discussing this with **Major-General Blather's** wife whilst we were lying in the ditch this morning." The memory has always amused me.

We reached Taiping and booked in at the Resthouse, already full of refugee women, chattering in their clear, high voices and settling into games of mah-jong. I could not help noticing the Chinese waiters hovering near, and doubtless absorbing all the snippets for re-distribution. No-one could be trusted.

Feeling that I could not stand the aimless waiting, and hearing that the temporary war hospital was short of nursing staff, I was interviewed and accepted.

The hospital, converted from a former school, was as short of equipment as of staff and was a full time job. We had Australian airmen who had been shot down, and Indian troops and officers – the latter very arrogant and aloof, as we were regarded as coolie labour. They arrived in frequent convoys and included representatives of the many regiments we had stationed on the border at Alor Star.

One young Australian airman I had was not at all well. Flushed, lethargic and running a temperature, I felt that the injuries he suffered, including one to his eye, did not merit his condition. "When did you last have your bowels open?" I asked. He wriggled uncomfortably, and muttered, "Oh, about eight days ago, I guess." "Right," I said. "then you're for an enema." That roused him. "Oh, I say, Sister, no you can't, really I'll be alright." Nevertheless, he got his enema, and I left him to the Nursing Orderly's tender mercies. When I came on duty that evening, his temperature was down, and he was much better.

That night, I slept fully clad in the empty Maternity ward at the General Hospital nearby, but was awakened in the early hours by a Sister who informed me that the Japs were getting close, and would I come and help her pack the Operating Theatre. When I got back to the Resthouse, I found **Amah Ah Fong** with two of my suitcases, thankfully containing some of my uniforms, and weeping buckets because the transport on which she had got a lift had refused to take the other two she had brought, and made her leave them by the side of the road.

I had to take the car **Harley** had left, and dear **Althea Gentles** (who had somehow come back in to the picture – she had been transferred to Bukit Mertajam before all this blew up, and **Phyllis Briggs** had taken her place), announced she would come with me. **Amah** sat in the dickey seat at the back of the car. Before we left Taiping I bought a new tyre. Also, the night before, **Jimmy Fish** had come to the hospital to tell me that **Joan** had gone into premature labour and produced a daughter, which had Spina Bifida, and would therefore not live. The lady doctor then decided to take **Joan** on in her car, and **Jimmy** stayed behind to see the little one buried. Despite large doses of morphia, it was another day before the baby died, and he saw her buried after being baptised “**Joan.**”

By this time, the Japs had reached the outskirts of the city, and **Jimmy** got out by the skin of his teeth. We had meantime left, accompanied by **Phyllis Briggs** in her car. I had never been allowed to drive **Harley's** precious Ford V8, and the first thing I did was knock down a Chinese cyclist on that very crowded road of fleeing population. At **Phyllis's** instigation, I gave him \$20, and we hurriedly pushed on. We finally reached Ipoh just after a bombing raid, so the hotel where we stopped for food was practically empty of staff, who had all fled. I cannot remember having any food there, but we pushed on in the afternoon towards Kuala Lumpur. It was getting late, and **Phyllis** suddenly remembered friends in a nearby rubber estate, where we could at least have a bath and something to eat.

Alas, when we reached it, the Manager himself was just pushing off, his wife and children having gone ahead. He told us to help ourselves to whatever we required, and then left us. The estate house was just as the owners had left it; standard lamps, lounge furniture and cushions still in place, beds still made. The tiled bathroom below the level of the bedroom still boasted bath salts, soap and talc. In the kitchen we found tea and biscuits, but did not attempt to cook on the typical charcoal stove. The electricity was still on, but as it was bright moonlight, and Jap paratroopers were still being mooted, we did not turn any lights on, but dosed down and slept as best we could until 5 a.m. While it was still dark, we took to the road again.

This time the road to Kuala Lumpur was really crowded with refugees of all colours streaming down the winding mountain roads, nose to tail, whilst passing us in a never ending stream, were Army trucks, troop carriers and all the paraphernalia of war on their way to the Front.

It was on one of these stretches that the door on the right hand side of the car flew open, owing to a faulty lock that had never been repaired. Unable to stop in time, I leaned over to pull the door closed, and in so doing, turned the steering wheel to the left. We veered off the road, down a drop of 20 feet or so, before the never-ending mud, and a rubber tree, stopped our fall. As we went over, I thought, “So this is the end,” but I was too tired to care, and I still had my foot on the accelerator. **Gentles**, ever British, remained calm, but poor **Amah** in the dickey seat, had screaming Chinese hysterics. We crawled out up to the road above us, and **Gentles** produced a packet of Callard and Bowser's nougat, with its silver foil sections. Perhaps **Phyllis** went on, with the idea of obtaining a breakdown van in K.L., but I remember we were sitting at the side of the road whilst **Amah** clambered up and down, rescuing the contents of the car, when two young Police lads from Alor Star came by and suggested we continued the journey with them. **Amah**, the ever-thrifty, rushed back to the car, and to my horror, emerged with a large packet of Kotex, a royal blue package with the name writ in large white lettering. There was no mistaking it! My embarrassment was lessened by catching the eye of one of the police, and we burst out laughing. **Harley's** Ford V8 was left at the side of the road, along with the new tyre, and we never saw it again.

The police lads dropped us off at Kuala Lumpur hospital, where we were received none too graciously by the staff, who were having troubles of their own with the influx of nursing refugees from up-country, but we were allotted beds in an empty ward, and given a meal, which **Gentles** greatly appreciated. She was not a glutton, but food was very important to her and I often wondered about her possibly lean rectory childhood. Anglican clergymen, then as now, have never been generously endowed.

Althea Gentles was later reported drowned in the China Sea when their ship was bombed and sunk by Japs.

[To be continued.]

CHEMICAL ENGINEERING IN CHANGI
A REPORT BY PROFESSOR NORMAN ALEXANDER of RAFFLES COLLEGE
Edited by his daughter MARY HARRIS

[This account was left to his family by Prof. Alexander who wrote it from memory in the mid 1990s, not long before he died.]

In February 1942, I, with about 3,000 others, went into Changi Gaol in Singapore. We were civilian internees – men, who for one reason or another – old age, or providing essential services – had been exempt from conscription into the army. This meant that we included all the medicos, very many engineers, Government Administrative staff, and so on – so that perhaps 75% of us were graduates or holders of equivalent professional qualifications. Also in our camp were about 400 merchant seamen, the crew of the ship, “**The Empress of Asia**” who provided a leaven, if that is the right word and, in a separate wing of the gaol, were about 400 women, many of them nurses or doctors, many who had been unable to get away, or had no place to go, and many with children.

A few months later, after we had settled down, for some reason of which I never heard the details, we found ourselves short of salt. The Japanese provided us with basic foodstuffs, mainly rice, but from money many people had brought into the gaol, we could buy such things as were still available in Singapore, and on the whole we were well enough fed. I don't know where the initiative came from, but the Government Chemist, ‘**Jimmy**’ **Jamieson**, was asked to do what he could about the salt problem. The Japanese were quite prepared to be co-operative (in the spirit of ‘The Greater Asia Co-prosperity Sphere’ which they called their conquests). So **Jimmy** organised a group of us. After fifty years I have forgotten most of the names, and no doubt some of the members – we were seven or eight in number. We had the works manager of the local brick-works (**T.A. Goskar**); a lecturer in chemistry from Raffles College (**Charles T.C. Owen** – not a Volunteer but a diabetic who died in Sime Road); a senior engineer from the Harbour Board; another engineer from the Cold Storage Company; the Senior Science master from the leading school in Kuala Lumpur [**ED: probably the Victoria Institute**] – the only Biologist among us (**F. Daniel**), and myself, then Professor of Physics at Raffles College. There was no shortage of materials – very raw materials: just outside the gaol there was a dump of wrecked vehicles of all kinds – cars, lorries, bulldozers and so on, and nearby a row of wrecked and abandoned houses, no doubt those of the former prison staff, and we were permitted to go out and scrounge. We found a petrol-driven pump, and the gaol was only a mile or two from the sea, so collecting sea-water was easy enough; and we had unlimited access to firewood – rubber trees from nearby plantations, and rubber wood burns well even when green.

The gaol had the usual high outer wall with watch-towers and so on, and inside this was a perimeter road, quite a wide one, with a lower inner wall with gates, which were kept open, and it was in this perimeter road, up against the inner wall, and next to one of the main gates, that we built our plant. Inside the inner wall, and some ten or fifteen yards away, was the gaol laundry, which formed our bath house. Round two of the inner walls of this there were large concrete tanks of fresh water, and we used to dip water out of these to pour over ourselves for our baths; but we were able to commandeer one of these tanks for our sea-water supplies, and the contours of the ground were such that we had a very convenient gravity feed to our works. One problem, of course, was tools. From the town we could get a few basics, but we had to be pretty careful; hacksaw blades especially were very precious, so only those of us fully skilled were allowed to use them; but we had other groups who were our allies. It soon appeared that in our camp there was a vast reservoir of skills of all kinds – a cooper who could make beautiful wooden tubs for carrying rice from the kitchens to the floors where we lived; a man – actually the Entomologist in the Institute for Malarial Research (**Dr. Molesworth**) – who made spectacle frames out of old toothbrush handles, and ever so many more. For us, there was a group who made charcoal and a simple and effective Chinese pattern of bellows, so they could operate a very effective forge; and from this they could turn out hammers, cold chisels, spanners and such like.

The basic design we came up with for a brick-built 'furnace' – furnace in inverted commas because it was essentially a gas-producer, giving a flow along a horizontal below-ground-level-flue, about 18 inches square in cross section, of initially pretty hot but still combustible 'producer gas' – unburnt hydrogen and carbon monoxide. Secondary air could be introduced into this flue from the sides, so that combustion would take place directly under our two evaporating pans. These were simply the tops of the drivers' cabs of motor lorries, making pans about 5 feet long and three or so wide, up to four or five inches deep at the deepest, mounted over the flue and luted to it with clay.

So the first job was to dig a pit, about five feet wide, six feet long and about four feet deep, in which to build our furnace and provide an operating space for it. The furnace was of brick – there were plenty of bricks about – but having no mortar, we used clay instead. Our brickworks man was of course an expert on clay, and we could modify its properties with judicious admixtures of wood-ash or sand. So the furnace began, from below, with an ash-pit below fire-bars (and being in a gaol there was no shortage of iron bars); the front of the furnace, below the bars, was a plate carrying a hinged flap, with a graduated quadrant for the control of the flow of primary air. Then came the body of the furnace – about 2'6" cube, with a brick arch leading to the flue, and, of course, a door above the fire-bars for raking and removal of clinker. On top of the furnace was the hopper for feeding the fuel – two coaxial oil drums – perhaps 40 and 20 gallons, with the bottoms cut out and the drums cut down to the same height. The space between was filled with sand, and the whole sealed at the top with a motor-lorry wheel, suspended on a cable fed through pulleys to a counterweight so it could easily be hauled up and down, and this wheel would fit snugly into the sand in the annular space between the drums. The fuel was rubber-tree logs, about two feet long and anything up to about 6 or 8 inches in diameter. The secondary air was introduced through the side of the horizontal flue, near its bottom so about a foot below ground level, through 'sectorial' valves for controlling the airflow, made from the bottoms of jam tins, and alongside each of our two valves was an inspection port – a horizontal channel out of the side of the flue, a scrap of mirror at 46° and a vertical channel closed at the top with a piece of glass; and through these ports we could see the flames from the combustion.

At the end of the second evaporation pan, the flue emerged from the ground and sloped upwards at about 45°, to the vertical chimney, about 5 feet high, fitted with a flap to control the overall airflow, this flap being remotely controlled using the winding mechanism of a car window and a long length of wire. The height of the whole run of flue was such that the top of the chimney was a foot or so clear of the top of the inner wall. We had had something of an afterthought about this inclined flue, which was about 15" square in cross section. Having noticed a large mild steel plate, about 8' x 15" covering a ladder between an upper floor in the gaol and a kind of cat walk, we decided to make this the top of the flue, and feed the water down it into the first pan; but we could never get the water to spread out into any form of sheet, as we had hoped, to get a good deal of evaporation there. The real trouble was that we were thermally underpowered for this plate as well as our pans, and couldn't get it hot enough; but no doubt it did its bit. It was in fact too much of an afterthought – the urge to elaborate on an initially simple plan. Partly to do anything which might help, and partly to make use of any special treasure-trove we had found, we added one final touch. One of our best sources of supply from the scrap-heap was an air-compressor for supplying pneumatic road drills and the like; this was two-stage with an inert-stage cooler, of radiator sections about two feet long and 3" x 3" cross-section, designed to work under pressure and with end flanges easy to bolt to anything else; so we fitted a couple of these into the base of the chimney as a pre-heater, and fed the sea-water through those and down the plate to the first – the 'far' pan.

Collecting the sea-water had its moments. We had an ancient one-ton lorry, and had extended the body to give it more cargo-space. In it we could mount a number of tanks – I suppose 50 gallons or so – and our pump. We would drive to the sea-front, where there was a convenient sea wall, lower our hose into the water, and fill our tanks, then start back with our grossly overloaded truck, with the centre of gravity of the whole affair over

the back axle or thereabouts; so that going up a small slope on our way home the whole front would sometimes rise in the air, and our poor driver get in a bit of a steering whenever his front wheels happened to touch the ground, so that often we would have to get out and sit on the bonnet to get us home.

The technique of operation was to light the fire and let everything warm up (having made sure our pans were full of water); then set the pans boiling, and when the level had fallen enough turn on the water supply, controlled by an ordinary valve in the $\frac{3}{4}$ " pipe-line. The pan furthest from the furnace was a couple of inches higher than the near one, and a siphon fed from one to the other. By controlling the secondary air supply we could adjust the rates of evaporation in the two pans, and so keep the levels in the two reasonably constant as the water flowed through the relatively small-bored siphon. We had made ourselves a hydrometer from the float of a carburettor, a piece of pure tin that somebody had, and a piece of tubing soldered on the top, so we could monitor the process reasonably well. When the density in the 'near' pan was right, we would use long-handled ladles to transfer the brine to the crystallisation plant – a little further down the road. One snag we met very early on, long before the brine had got to the concentration we wanted, calcium sulphate would begin to crystallise out, and would form a scale on the bottom of our pans, and this much reduced the heat-flow. At first we changed pans (we had a number of spares) and cleaned off the scale, but this was very laborious, so finally we rigged a kind of jelly-bag filter, and used our long-handled ladles for a continuous filtration process.

Our crystallisation plant was simply an ordinary bath, collected from one of the houses, mounted over a long horizontal flue – a go-and-return this time - outer walls to which the base was luted, and a 'midfeather' for most of its length, gas going up one side, round the end, back down the other and up the chimney,. There was a flap-valve for warming up, such that the gases from the fire-box could be sent straight up the chimney until this was hot, when the flap could be swung over and the gases fed round the horizontal flues.

As the salt crystallised (and without any effort to plan this, it came down in a nice table-salt fineness) we scooped it out onto a draining rack, where it drained a bit. We carried on the crystallisation until the salt began to taste slightly bitter as the magnesium sulphate began to come down, feeling that a few mixed salts would do nobody any harm.

We had found somewhere quite a powerful motor-driven blower (fortunately we had a good electricity supply), and rigged this to dry the salt. We laid 4-inch sewer pipes along the bottom of our flue in a go-and-return, hitched the blower to one end, so got a good flow of hot air from the other. We had built a brick wall to carry the chimney and the upper end of the inclined flue, to there was a triangular space between the flue and the wall. Against the wall we built a wooden 'staircase' over which the hot air was blown. The damp salt from the crystallisation plant was dumped on the top step, then slowly fed over the edge, through the hot-air blast, onto the next step down – and so on for I think three steps. By the time it reached the bottom step it was dry – a nice, fine, perfectly white table salt.

We operated this plant for a year or more, and regularly turned out rather more than half a ton of salt a month, enough to give everybody in the camp about the six grams a day our doctors recommended. We used to get very cross with people who spoke of our "Heath Robinson" arrangements; we insisted that it was a modern, well-designed and efficient plant, and were quite proud of it. (We used sometimes to 'show off' to inquisitive passers, by keeping the pan nearest the furnace comparatively cool while the further one boiled vigorously.) As a by-product, we precipitated the magnesium out of the mother-liquor with the potassium hydroxide we could get from our wood-ash, and after a lot of struggles managed to find a way of filtering off the very gelatinous magnesium hydroxide. By putting this in a nice cast-iron box we found and roasting it in our furnace, we could produce a useful amount of magnesium oxide which went to the camp hospital, to make 'milk of magnesia.'

A little later we expanded our industrial activities. The hospital wanted quantities of surgical spirit, and the Japanese were prepared to give us one bag (100kg) of rice a month for this. So we prepared a tray of boiled

rice and exposed it to the air for a while (don't ask me for how long; our one biologist came into his own over this.) Then this was covered, and we waited until colonies of wild yeasts developed, cultured a few of these and tested them for their efficiency as fermenting agents; chose the best, and started production. The fermentation, of a mash of boiled rice, was in wooden tubs and we followed it as well as we could, mainly with another home-made hydrometer. At the right stage the wort was strained and transferred to our distilling plant. The 'flask' was the air-bottle from our useful air compressor, mounted on its own furnace, and the condenser a straight "Leibig" type, cooled by natural convection in a side-arm of a large 50-60 gallon tank. After a distillation there was a nice lot of hot water for baths!

The alcohol content of the wort was, perhaps, 5 or 6%, the first distillate about 35% and this went on to the next stage – our fractionation column. The container for this was the petrol tank of a Baby Austin; a flat bottom about 30 inches by 10 or 12 – very convenient for sitting over a small charcoal fireplace – and a semi-elliptical top. To the tank was fixed the fractionation column – two of the radiator sections from that air-compressor (again) making an air-cooled column about 4 feet high, with the final condensation in a simple worm in a small water tank. The water being replaced by hand when required. I remember the first trial very well, as of course we monitored it thoroughly. The alcohol began to come over at near 100% , and the concentration slowly drifted down to something above 90%. Then it stopped, and we wondered what was wrong; hotted up the fire – and the next fraction that came over was almost pure water. So our home-made column was really fractionating! With this plant we produced about 5 gallons a month of 95% spirit, but could never get anything that was remotely drinkable.

Quality control was difficult, as it depended very much on the pH during fermentation; too acid , and one could smell quantities of ethyl acetate in the distillate; if, trying to correct too high an acidity with a little of our potassium hydroxide we over did it, we got foul-smelling protein decomposition products; but we did have a number of indicators – juices from wild flowers, and even our yeast itself. We operated in this way for several months, and felt we were doing pretty well to convert nearly 20% of our rice into alcohol. We did have suggestions from our medicos that we should try to make chloroform, but we felt that our commercial brand would not have come up to anaesthetic quality, and our doctors seemed quite unaware of the dangers of this; but we were prepared to manufacture chlorine compounds, in the form of 'Milton' or bleach, and in fact had started when we were all moved from Changi to Sime Road. (We had found an electric motor and coupled it to the starter motor of a car which would function as a dynamo, and had prepared electrodes for the electrolytic process.) The whole of the alcohol project had come to an abrupt end a little earlier when a visiting Japanese general got the quite mistaken idea that we were 'making wine' as he put it, but at least we escaped punishment.

This then was "Chemical Engineering in Changi." Much later, in Sime Road, I was involved in a miniature operation. A colleague, **Brock Jamieson**, (no relation of the saltworks one) , a Canadian chemist from a plastics company (he wore a belt made of the first flexible plastic I had seen) had the idea of making a tooth-powder from wood ash, so we joined up in a two-man team. It was easy enough, by stirring up a lot of wood ash in water, to make a suspension, and by a process of repeated fractional sedimentation get a product of the necessary fineness of grain; but the problem was to get rid of the excess alkali. This could be done with repeated washing, but the quality control wasn't easy. We solved this with a supply of 'standard acid' of unknown strength salvaged from an old car battery. Then we could titrate our material against this, again using as indicator the juice of a wild flower, which gave a good colour change at some quite unknown pH. But with a standard of unknown strength and an indicator indicating an unknown pH, we managed quite well. In fact, our product became very popular, and we were able to offer brands of different flavours, using various wild herbs.

INFORMATION EXCHANGE

Patricia Wood writes:

In 2003, my son published a book called, "If This Should Be Farewell" about my parents' experiences while separated during World War 2. The book was advertised in a previous edition of Apa Khabar. I am writing to say that there are still a number of copies available which the publishers wish to get rid of – they are stored somewhere in the Eastern States of Australia. My son **Adrian** will buy back about 50 copies of the book when the publishers decide to remove them from storage, and keep them in Perth WA. The book is still available on Amazon, but when removed from storage, they will probably only be available from us in Perth.

If anyone is interested in purchasing this book, more information can be given by my son **Adrian Wood** via the following e-mail address:

birdboot@gmail.com

I am still working on my own book about my mother.

Gareth Owen writes:

Those interested in reading a day-by-day account of life in a Japanese POW camp in Sumatra written by a Dutchman are welcome to go to my website where I have translated his account into English and added a few explanatory notes. The diary is of special interest to me because my father was one of the internees among some 3,000 Dutchmen. After liberation he never wanted to talk about his experiences. In future, I intend to add further translations from accounts in other languages of men's experiences in war-time Sumatra.

See my website: www.gtowntranslations.com

BOOKS

"NOT WORTH A BULLET. The memories of an old woman." By Josephine Foss. The autobiography of Josephine Foss who spent her life in the Far East, teaching young girls in Kuala Lumpur and endured the war years in Changi Gaol and Sime Road Camp.

Copies of this book are available from: **Diana Sparkes**, 16, Leigh Road, Highfield, Southampton SO17 1EF. Price: £15 sterling. e-mail: basp@soton.ac.uk Tel: 023 8055 6818

Diana writes:

In June 2015 my husband, **Brian**, and I 'published' a new version of my aunt **Josephine Foss's** autobiography, "Not Worth a Bullet." We had a hundred printed and they are winging their way to all corners of the world! It costs £15 for a copy posted in this country, and £20 for a copy posted abroad. The book tells of her life and of her journey in 1914 to China (to be a missionary) via the Trans-Siberian Express. This was twenty years before the well-known missionary **Gladys Aylward** travelled there. Three long chapters are devoted to her time in Changi Gaol and Sime Road, and others to her later teaching in Sarawak and her retirement in London where she taught Japanese pupils!

"DEVOTION TO A CALLING. Far-East Flying and Survival with 62 Squadron RAF." By Group Captain Harley Boxall and Joe Bamford. Published by Pen & Sword. ISBN 1848841 49-3 Price: £19.99

Harley Boxall was awarded his RAF wings on 3rd October 1936 & posted to 40 Squadron flying Hawker Hinds. In 1937 he was posted to train with 206 Squadron, flying Avro Ansons. He joined 62 Squadron soon after it was formed, flying Blenheims. In the summer of 1939, due to the political tensions in Europe it was decided to reinforce the Far East Air Force with 2 squadrons of Blenheims. Aircraft from 34 & 62 Squadrons were flown out to Tengah Airfield in Singapore – taking 50 flying hours to get there.

While on a reconnaissance flight from Alor Star in 1940, one engine malfunctioned and he was forced to crash land in the sea off a small uninhabited island off the coast of Sumatra. He and his crew waded ashore and were rescued 6 days later by a local fisherman.

Later that year, **Harley Boxall** was promoted to Flt. Lt. and given command of 62 Squadron based at the RAF Station in Alor Star. In December 1942, 62 Squadron flew on what **Harley** later described as "the first and only operation it carried out as a unit" when he led 11 Blenheims to bomb the Japanese invasion fleet. All returned safely to base but within half an hour of returning, the Japanese attacked the airfield destroying 3 Blenheims and rendering 3 others unserviceable. **Harley** escaped from Java on 2nd March 1942 aboard the "**Tung Song**" one of the last ships to leave.

[Editor: I am very grateful to Sallie Hammond, daughter of Harley Boxall, who sent me this book. The first part of her mother's story "As I remember it" can be found on P. 19-21.]

"THE CHURCH OF ST. GEORGE THE MARTYR, PENANG. A Bicentenary Guide to the Memorials and Historical Artefacts." By Leslie A.K. James.

This booklet will be of interest to anyone who knows Penang and who may have worshipped in this famous Church. We are grateful to MVG member Leslie James for his research into St George's Church.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

THURSDAY – 5TH NOVEMBER 2015. Cross Planting Ceremony and Service at Westminster Abbey.

Those who have booked tickets for this ceremony, will receive them from **Merilyn Hywel-Jones** shortly. If members are in London over the following weekend, it is well worth paying a visit to the Garden of Remembrance to see the crosses, and plant one in the FEPOW Plot where the MVG's large 8" cross is planted.

SUNDAY – 8TH NOVEMBER 2015. Remembrance Sunday Service and March Past at the Cenotaph in Whitehall.

There are still tickets available for this important occasion to mark the 70th Anniversary of V-J Day. Please apply to **Rosemary** if you would like to join the marchers. Lunch has been booked at the Premier Inn behind the old GLC Building, in Belvedere Road, after the service.

In **Kuala Lumpur**, the Remembrance Sunday Service will take place at 0800 hours on Sunday, 8th November 2015 at the Kuala Lumpur Cenotaph, Tugu Negara Complex, Lake Gardens (Taman Tasik Perdana). Please contact **Andrew Hwang** for an invitation should you wish to partake of the halal cooked English breakfast at the High Commissioner's Residence following the service.

In **George Town, Penang**, the Remembrance Day Ceremony will take place at 0715 hours on Sunday, 15th November 2015 at the Penang Cenotaph, Esplanade. This is a secular ceremony followed by a tea reception.

ANNUAL ACCOUNTS

A copy of the Income and Expenditure Sheet is enclosed with the newsletter. If you would like a complete set of the accounts, please send a SAE to **Rosemary** at the address below. The accounts include those from the U.K. Australia, Malaysia and the final accounts from the "Singing to Survive" concert. The latter account has now been closed. The balance of this account was transferred to **Judy Balcombe** for the Plaque which is to be placed on the communal grave in Muntok Catholic Cemetery bearing the names of all those civilians who died in the camps in WW2. We are very grateful to Miss Sara Haines of SJA Accountants Ltd. for auditing these accounts free of charge to the MVG. Her meticulous attention to detail means that all the accounts are kept in very good order under her guidance.

LIST OF MEMBERS

I regret that it has not been possible to update the list of members with accuracy, and this has now been deferred to January 2017. A list of new members is enclosed with the newsletter.

SIME ROAD PLAQUE UNVEILING CEREMONY



Before the ceremony
Wilfred & Vilma Howe, Olga Henderson & Rosemary Fell



Unveiling the Plaque
Olga Henderson and Vilma Howe

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