

# APA KHABAR

Patron: Her Grace The Duchess of Norfolk

[www.malayanvolunteersgroup.org.uk](http://www.malayanvolunteersgroup.org.uk)



**62nd EDITION  
APRIL 2020**



**Walk for Humanity on Radji Beach,  
Muntok, Bangka Island.  
Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> February 2020.**



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## BRITISH DEFENCE ATTACHE, INDONESIA, HONOURS BRITISH SUBJECTS AT SERVICES IN MUNTOK TO COMMEMORATE THOSE LOST OR INTERNED ON BANKA ISLAND. THE FALL OF SINGAPORE COMMEMORATED IN PERTH, WA.

We are grateful to **Michael Pether** for his detailed report on Banka Island, which was sent to **Group Captain Michael Longstaff OBE., RAF** (British Defence Attache in Jakarta) before the commemorative visits in Muntok and service on Radji Beach over the weekend of 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> February. The report is entitled "**A Broad Perspective**" and lists the vessels sunk or captured in the Banka Strait in the days leading up to and after the Fall of Singapore, on Radji Beach and elsewhere on Banka Island. The actual numbers and names of those who lost their lives in this dark chapter of WW2 in the Far East will never be fully identified. The fact that many people have now been named is largely down to **Michael**, whose ongoing research may reveal more hitherto unknown secrets of the tragedy of Banka Island. His report in the form of a booklet and additional information entitled "**Radji Beach, Banka Island**" which lists the names of those who are known to have lost their lives, are included with this newsletter. Please read them – they make for very revealing facts about the chaotic situation in Singapore, which finally made the authorities accept that the urgent evacuation of skilled military and civilian men was a priority, and that women and children should also be allowed to leave. By the middle of February this was too little too late and the tragic consequences of the incompetence of the administration in Singapore are still being uncovered. It has been a long, difficult and disappointing struggle to get a British representative to lay wreaths on behalf of British subjects killed, drowned and interned on Banka Island after their ships were sunk or captured. It was with the help of our good friend in Singapore, retired Australian Naval Officer, **Lieutenant Commander Bruce Bird**, who laid wreaths on behalf of the British in 2018 and 2019 when no-one from the British High Commission in Singapore or the British Embassy in Jakarta was able to attend the services, that **Group Captain Longstaff** agreed to attend this year. Two letters have been sent to the new British High Commissioner in Singapore, **Mrs. Kara Owen CVO**, requesting that someone from the High Commission should also attend the services in Muntok because this is where the ships and passengers came from. Sadly, to date, no acknowledgement or reply has been received. The first letter, dated 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2020 was e-mailed and followed up with a printed copy sent in the post. The second, dated 20<sup>th</sup> February, was posted with **Michael Pether's** two reports. It is puzzling and disappointing that neither letter has been acknowledged or answered by the British High Commissioner in Singapore. One has to ask, why? The MVG may not be known to the new British High Commissioner, but that does not mean that our letters should go unanswered. They were typed on headed notepaper with our details, website and logo, including the name of our Patron. If anyone wishes to receive a copy of the letters, please ask **Rosemary Fell**.

We are also enormously grateful to **Judy Balcombe** for her tireless efforts to bring to the attention of the world the plight of those shipwrecked in the Banka Strait. The Peace Museum in Muntok has been built, funded and furnished with memorabilia almost single handedly by **Judy**. It was a huge undertaking and she should be very proud of her achievements – as we are. Her report on this year's events and service on Radji Beach is included on Ps.20 - 22

The annual service in the City of Stirling Memorial Gardens, Perth, Western Australia took place on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> February to commemorate the Fall of Singapore 78 years ago. We thank **Bill** and **Elizabeth Adamson** for arranging this service once again. A full report will be issued to Australian members. Also the '**Vyner Brooke**' service for the Australian Army Nurses. We thank MVG's secretary in Canada and the USA, **Sallie Hammond**, for keeping our members there in touch with each other and with the UK.

Members in Malaysia and Singapore can now pay their subscriptions in ringgit to our secretary in Malaysia, **Richard Parry**, unless payment is usually made directly into the MVG's UK bank account. This year, we are pleased that **James Devadason** has agreed to represent the MVG and lay a wreath at the ceremony in God's Little Acre in Batu Gajah on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> June. We realize that the ceremony is in memory of the many expatriates who lost their lives during the Malayan Emergency Years (1948 – 60) – Planters, Colonial Police Officers, Miners and Civilians - but many of our Volunteers came from these communities pre-war and returned to them after the war.

### Visit to Singapore.

To date, we are still planning to go ahead with our visit to Singapore in September, despite the ongoing worries about the Coronavirus. Payment for the Historical Tour, Cricket Club Lunch and coach to Kranji will be deferred until June when a clearer picture of the spread of the virus may be known. Please would you send **Rosemary** your names if you have not yet booked for the Singapore visit. This does not commit you to anything yet, but numbers for the Tour and Lunch are required so that we can decide whether to move to the Tanglin Club which can accommodate more people. The Victoria Room at the



Singapore Cricket Club can only hold a maximum of 30 for a buffet lunch. This room has been booked at the moment, with thanks to **Neill and Morag Aitken**.

#### **An unexpected donation to MVG funds**

MVG's funds are £100 better off as the result of some investigative work and a kind benefactor. A very generous person donated a bottle of "Aberlour" whisky as a draw prize at the annual lunch at the RAF Club last October. This was chosen by chance by one of the winning draw ticket holders, who wishes to remain anonymous. He examined the bottle on his return home, and discovered that it was an unusual bottle of whisky and 33 years old. After further research, he realized that the bottle could probably be sold for a reasonable sum due to its rarity value, and it made £100.

We thank both the giver of the whisky and the seller for this very welcome addition to MVG's funds.

#### **Annual Subscriptions**

Please note that annual subscriptions are due in April. The subscription rate remains at £20 per family, despite increasing costs of printing and postage. Several subscriptions have already been paid, and we are very grateful to those members for their prompt payment. **If you have paid, please ignore the enclosed subscription letter.**

#### **HOT OFF THE PRESS**

##### **Contact with the UK High Commission in Singapore**

With thanks to **Neill and Morag Aitken** and **Tony Daintry**, the MVG has managed to make contact with the British Defence Adviser, **Commander Martin Moore**, at the High Commission in Singapore. He explained that the Commission was unable to send a representative to Banka Island on 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> February because of the Commission's commitment to attend services in Singapore to mark the anniversary of the Fall of Singapore on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1942. We are also informed that they are fully involved in other Commemorative events associated with the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of WW2. The V-J Day Service will take place in Singapore on 12<sup>th</sup> August and in Thailand on 15<sup>th</sup> August 2020. 'The Commemoration of the Signing of the Peace' service takes place on 12<sup>th</sup> September, and this is the service which the MVG is planning to attend. Finally, on 8<sup>th</sup> November, members of the High Commission will take part in the annual Remembrance Sunday service in Singapore.

##### **Notice from the RFH Group about the 7<sup>th</sup> International RFH Conference in Liverpool – 5<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> June 2020 – cancelled**

In the light of the growing worldwide uncertainty around the Coronavirus outbreak and its potential impact specifically upon the UK over the coming months as well as the response to some concerns expressed by our delegates and speakers, the Researching FEPOW History Group has regrettably decided that we need to postpone the conference scheduled for June 2020. We have deliberated long and hard over this decision and also consulted with our hosts, the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine.

This news is, of course, very disappointing for everyone, especially in this 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary year. However, with the growing uncertainty and anxiety expressed by some of the conference participants who have existing health concerns, we have little choice. We do not wish to put anyone at risk and we cannot run the conference without the required number of delegates and, of course, our team of expert speakers.

The good news is that the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM) has agreed to host the postponed conference in June 2021 (the precise dates to be confirmed). We very much hope that everyone who had planned to attend the conference in June 2020 will be able to join us next year. More news will be posted on the researching FEPOW History website <https://fepowhistory.com/blog/> as soon as we have the details for 2021. E-mails to all the delegates & speakers have been sent. We would like to thank everyone for their support and understanding and we very much hope to see you in Liverpool in June 2021.

### **THE INCREDIBLE STORY OF MOLLY BULL**

**With thanks to Michael Pether for his research into the survivors of the "Vyner Brooke"**

Michael wrote on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2020:

Yesterday I had a long telephone discussion with **Molly Bull**.

**Molly**, at age nine years, and her 6 year old brother (at that time called '**Rob-ben**' for intimate family reasons) jumped into the sea from the listing, sinking "*SS Vyner Brooke*" whilst their mother jumped in also holding their little 4 year old sister **Hazel**. Currents swept **Molly** and her brother away down the Banka Strait from their mother, who ended up in Muntok and Palembang etc. and survived the war. **Molly** and her brother were first picked up by a **Mrs. Pearson** on a raft with a couple of other men (including **Lt. Arthur Mann** the Radio Officer on the "*Vyner Brooke*") and then they were all rescued by four sailors in a small lifeboat (or 'skiff'). The story continues as they spent several weeks among the mangroves of Sumatra heading for Java. They ended up in the Banka Strait drifting through the midst of the battle of the Sunda Strait being totally ignored by the battleships and cruisers blasting each other and the ships sinking all around them. They reached a small island, 'Sangiang', in the Strait and made it to the mainland of Java, where the Japanese and local Javanese captured them and beheaded an airman nicknamed '**Carrot**' in front of the children before **Mrs. Pearson** (a Siamese woman and, I believe, the wife of **Sgt. Bill Pearson 1/FMSVF** – a mining engineer in Malaya) took them to Batavia where they eventually entered Tidjeng internment camp. Post-war they were reunited with their parents back in Singapore after the personal intervention of **Lady Mountbatten**.

**Michael** concludes: It is one of the stories that has riveted my attention for many years as the pieces of the puzzle came together. I will be talking again with **Molly** and e-mailing '**Rob-ben**' now using his real name **Robert**.

There are so many stories from the awful events around Banka Island.

[Editor: Also see A.K. July 2010, "Miracle of Patsy Li" P.5].



## FORCE 136 AND THE LIBERATION OF MALAYA – THE CHINESE-CANADIAN CONNECTION

By Leslie A.K. James, George Town, Penang

[Ed. We are grateful to Lesley James for giving his permission to print this article which was published in *"The Expat"* magazine, Kuala Lumpur, Volume 88, January 2005, and in *"bout de papier"*, Canada's magazine of Diplomacy & Foreign Service, Volume 22, No: 1, Ottawa, Spring 2006. It adds to Catherine Clement's article (A.K.61 – Ps 19 & 20) by giving the names of those Chinese- Canadians who were involved with Force 136].

In mid-1944, thirteen Chinese-Canadians were spending the summer in a remote camp on the shores of beautiful Okanagan Lake in British Columbia. This, however, was no ordinary summer camp. The thirteen were learning skills to equip them for one of the most dangerous aspects of warfare – special operations behind enemy lines in Japanese-occupied Southeast Asia. The skills included wireless operation, small arms, demolition, unarmed combat, silent killing, sabotage and boat work. The Chinese-Canadians had been recruited for the legendary Force 136 by "**Mike**" **Kendall**, a Canadian major in the British Army. Before the war **Kendall** had worked in south China where he himself had been recruited by British intelligence before escaping from Hong Kong as the colony fell to the Japanese on Christmas Day, 1941.

In early August 1945, five of the thirteen Chinese-Canadians, led by McGill University engineering graduate **Roger Cheng**, landed from an RAAF Catalina flying boat on a stretch of the Rejang River some fifty kilometers from Sibu, Sarawak. Their job was to help gather intelligence in preparation for landings by Allied forces.

**Roger Cheng** and his party were not the only Canadians to serve in Force 136. And they were not the only Chinese-Canadians to do so. As many as 143 Chinese-Canadians were trained in special camps in India and Australia in response to a request to Canada from Britain's Special Operations Executive (SOE), the clandestine intelligence organisation known in Asia as Force 136.

The first contact between Force 136 and the communist-led guerrillas of the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) was in May 1943, when former Malayan police officer **John Davis** returned to Malaya by submarine. **Davis** negotiated an agreement with **Chin Peng**, a young man later to become secretary general of the Malayan Communist party (MCP) and leader of the 1948-60 communist insurrection. The agreement signed with **Davis** in December 1943 placed the MPAJA under the operational orders of **Mountbatten's** Southeast Asia Command in return for training, weapons, explosives and supplies. Britain wanted the MPAJA to be ready to strike the enemy from behind when British troops landed to liberate Malaya. The mission of Force 136 was to train and supply the MPAJA.

Communications difficulties delayed news of the agreement reaching **Mountbatten's** headquarters until February 1945 and it was not until the middle of the year that significant numbers of Force 136 agents arrived in Malaya to prepare for **Operation Zipper**, the amphibious invasion planned for September. Among those dropped into Malaya were three French Canadians, who had worked with the French resistance behind enemy lines in France, and ten Chinese-Canadian sergeants. Their task was to train the MPAJA in sabotage, ambush tactics and intelligence collection.

Nineteen-year-old **Henry Fung** of Vancouver parachuted into the area north of Kuala Lumpur in June, accompanying his Force 136 unit to a camp near Kajang from where they helped to blow up a railway bridge. Two other Chinese-Canadians from Vancouver operated with Force 136 in Selangor. **Ted Wong** and **Bing Lee** helped attack truck convoys and trains after parachuting into the area in July. **Bob Lew** from Nipissing in northern Ontario and **George Chin** were also members of Force 136 units operating with the MPAJA in Selangor in July. An all-Canadian Force 136 unit operated in northern Johore in early August. It was led by **Joseph Benoit**, a veteran of SOE operations in France and Burma, and included the group's interpreter, Chinese-Canadian **Ernie Louie**. Meanwhile, two more Chinese-Canadians, **Charley Chung** and **Harry Ho**, parachuted with French Canadian **Pierre Chasse** in mid-July near Alor Star in Kedah from where they trekked north to Perlis, ambushing Japanese convoys and sabotaging bridges along the way.

Plans for the Force 136 teams unexpectedly changed, however, with Japan's surrender after the atom bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Isolated Force 136 units suddenly found themselves the sole representatives of victorious Allied forces that were still weeks away from landing in Malaya and re-establishing Britain's pre-war authority. Attached to MPAJA units that were eager to assert their strength in the power vacuum, Force 136 officers were required to take the surrender of Japanese forces and prevent the MPAJA from exacting revenge not only on the Japanese but on those in the local population they considered "running dogs" – traitors or collaborators.

**Chasse** negotiated the surrender of Japanese troops in the Perlis capital Kangar and stayed on to arrange the return from exile of the Raja of Perlis and his restoration to the throne of his state. In Selangor, **Henry Fung's** unit, led by a British pre-war planter, took control of Kajang from the Japanese, while **Bing Lee** accompanied his British Commander to Kuala Lumpur where, from a villa near the racetrack (now the site of the KLCC Twin Towers), they maintained an uneasy truce with the Japanese and the MPAJA until the arrival of the British forces in mid-September.



Chinese-Canadians were sought and recruited as SOE agents in Malaya, Sarawak and elsewhere in Southeast Asia because of their ability to speak a local language and to move inconspicuously among the local population. Those who undertook these dangerous assignments did so with "uncommon courage" (to quote the title of a 1985 Canadian Veterans' Affairs Department publication) and made a special contribution to the Allied war effort; of the five who landed in Sarawak, four were awarded the Military Medal for bravery. Perhaps more important, however, was the fact that they volunteered for the dangers of clandestine warfare at a time when Chinese-Canadians were still denied full citizen rights. It was not until after the war that Canada's federal and provincial governments dismantled the country's discriminatory legislation, beginning with the British Columbia government's decision in 1945 to give voting rights to all those, including Chinese and Japanese, who had served in Canada's armed forces. Thus, the part played by Chinese-Canadians in liberating Malaya and other occupied countries helped win their compatriots full citizenship in Canada.

### **JEAN GARFIT'S EVACUATION ON THE DUCHESS OF BEDFORD**

**With thanks to Guy Garfit for his mother's story**

**Guy** sent the following information about his mother and her voyage back to the UK in 1942 on the **Duchess of Bedford**:

When my mother **Jean Helena Garfit (nee Kidson)** arrived back in England in 1942 she was asked by The Daily Telegraph to write an account of her escape. However, she was required not to mention any specifics such as the name of the ship or that they sailed via Colombo. In return, her stipulation for the Telegraph was to avoid mentioning her husband's name. In the event, the Telegraph condensed the article to about 30 words and included her then husband's name, **Stephen Sidford**.

My mother met **Stephen**, a palm oil planter with Oil Palms of Malaya of Layang Layang, Johore in 1937 when he was on long leave and she travelled out to Malaya late in 1938 where they were married between Christmas and the New Year. **Stephen** died in Kanchanaburi in October 1943, but my mother did not learn of his death until after V-E Day and before V-J day.

My father had also been in Malaya as a rubber planter with Dunlop, but came home in 1938. He was widowed during the war leaving him with a baby boy a few months old. When my parents married in December 1946, my mother had a ready-made family. I arrived 9 months later, followed by my two sisters. My mother told me that one of the biggest reliefs on the voyage home was when they reached Colombo where the American fleet was at anchor, and one of the loneliest was when they set off a few days later, alone, on their way to Africa, with all the American ships blasting their horns to wish them good luck. The ship docked in Durban for several days. During this time she spent every day with friends of her parents who worked for Union Castle. Every evening they would get her back on board by 7 p.m. and pick her up again in the morning if the ship was still there. One night it slipped away and they managed to get a message to her parents in England but could give no date. It just said, "**Jean** hopes to be home in time for your birthday." That was the first that they knew she had escaped.

From Liverpool, she went to Euston expecting to find her parents waiting on the platform, but as the passengers cleared she was left entirely alone. Unbeknown to her, two trains from Liverpool were arriving at about the same time. Her parents were waiting on the other platform. She saw her father rushing over a bridge between the platforms and when he saw her, shouted to her to stay there, and said, "I'll go and get your mother."

This is **Jean's** story, dated 14<sup>th</sup> January 1942:

"I shall never forget the last day in our bungalow. We had two friends staying with us, one who had been evacuated from the north and the other had been staying with us ever since her husband had been called up. We took the dogs out for a walk in the morning, but it all seemed so strange. The army had arrived on the estate during the night, lorries were parked everywhere, dispatch riders were rushing about on motorbikes. The empty bungalows, left by their owners when they joined the Volunteers at the beginning of December, were now all occupied by the military. What did it all mean? Was it that the Japs were getting so close that we, too, would have to leave our bungalow and fly before them? That evening when my husband, **Stephen**, returned from work and he brought five men in with him. He had found them wandering around in cars having lost their way on the estate. They were men in the 11<sup>th</sup> division who had been through all the fighting in the North, six weeks of it, and this was the first respite they had had. That morning they had handed over to the Australians and now they had a few days of rest ahead of them. Their spirits were wonderful, they told stories and made jokes of their escapes and retreats. These men had come right down from the Thai border, fighting all the way. Surely now they deserved a rest, and we all hoped from the bottom of our hearts that they would get it. I got my Chinese boy to heat up as many Kerosene tins of water as he could, and one by one the men went away and had a hot bath and shave. How they enjoyed it. One, a young Lieutenant in the R.Es, took so long over his "soak" that we became quite agitated. My husband went along to the bathroom and found him lying back in the bath having a lovely sleep.



We were a jolly party sitting down to dinner that night, everybody was in high spirits. Not having expected the extra numbers, I had to fall back on a few tins and a Xmas Pudding. My **Ruki** found some brandy which he poured over it, and brought it into the dining room ablaze. It was a large pudding, but at the end there was not a crumb left! The blow came after dinner. Our manager came round looking rather serious and took my husband aside. My heart fell. I knew too well what it meant. All that evening I had had a feeling that this was to be the last night in my home. Our manager, a great friend of ours and the kindest man imaginable, had decided that the time had come when the "girls" must leave the estate and go to Singapore and there await a ship for evacuation. As it was, we were the women furthest North and one more infiltration of the enemy would have probably meant being "cut off" and at the mercy of the Japanese. It was a sad night. My husband and I lay for hours talking, but could see no way out. We loved the country, our home and the people – surely this could not be the end of it all? I pleaded to stay. I could not leave the dogs, the servants, the garden which I loved. After all the Japs could not get this far, our strong line was going to hold them fifteen miles north of here – and what is more, it was cowardly to run away. All this argument was of no avail and next morning I and my two friends were packing. We were to leave the bungalow at 1 o'clock, go round to the manager's house, meet the four other women left in the district and travel down to Singapore in a convoy of four cars. Farewells were passed over quickly, we kept "our chins up" and imagined that we would soon be returning, and what a day that would be! There was only one main road from Johore to Singapore, and we had all travelled it literally dozens of times. But how different was this, our last journey. One long continuous procession of cars, lorries, troops and motorcycles. One could not count the lorries and cars which had turned over and were left abandoned in the road or ditch, owing to the weariness of the men driving them. All the villages we went through looked deserted and the shops were boarded up. One saw weary looking Chinese and Tamils trekking along with their possessions on their backs – all making their way to what they thought would be some safer place of refuge.

When we finally reached Singapore, the question was "where to stay." The hotels were all full up with evacuees from the North. The three of us camped that night in a bungalow which had been taken over for use as offices. Luckily we had a picnic basket with us, so we were able to provide a meal that night and breakfast next morning. Next day, I went to see some friends who lived in Singapore and asked them if they could give us a bed for a night or two until we could get a ship. They had one spare double room and said we could have it as long as we liked, and made us very welcome. We were in Singapore a fortnight. Every day we were told to ring up the P&O office, and always it was the same reply, "we have no notification of any ship yet." The Jap bombers were very regular. They used to come over at breakfast time every morning, and in continuous waves until about 12.30. The afternoons were usually peaceful. All their bombs used to drop together. I think some sign was given by their leader and then they all "let go." One learns a lot about natives getting panicky, perhaps it is true in some cases, I don't know. My friend and I were several times "caught" in a raid, and had to take shelter in some queer places. Once we had to abandon the cars and crawl into a covered-in drain. It was dark and eerie and the smell was awful. Our companions were a few Chinese and a lot of Tamil children and their parents. We all had to crouch together, I admit I did not like it, and although I did not know it at the time, my friend was very near to fainting. Another time, we were motoring through the Chinese quarters and saw everyone looking up and then rushing for cover. We stopped the car and looked out and saw about fifty Japanese planes. They were flying in formation and looked like silver birds in the sky. They were going away from us but just as we were getting back in the car, my friend caught sight of another wave coming up from behind. We thought the time had come to take shelter, but there were only Chinese shops, and they looked just as if they would collapse like a pack of cards. However, we rushed across the road and lay flat behind some sandbags. There were a few Chinese there, and they gave us a welcoming smile. One man was cuddling his child to him, and he put his hands over the child's ears to protect him from the noise. The bombs fell unpleasantly close that day and we had a nasty few minutes. These are the only two incidents, but there were several occasions when we had to take shelter and Chinese were our only companions. They were always kind and friendly and set an example with their calm behaviour.

On 25<sup>th</sup> January, my husband had to leave the estate. The Japs had made another landing and were only seven miles away, and the army had to make another retreat. They destroyed what they could of our factory. My husband had been out on a job that morning and the news was broken to him when he returned to the bungalow for breakfast. That afternoon he arrived in Singapore and next morning joined up with his Volunteers unit.

On the night of the 29<sup>th</sup> January, just as we were going to bed, the phone went. We were told to take our passports at once and go to the P&O office. The P&O were using a large bungalow as their office, and when we got there, there were literally hundreds of cars and people swarming up the drive. I believe this went on for most of the night, and certainly all the next morning. When our turn came, there was none of the usual formalities, no asking for passage money or even if we had the means. The question asked was, "Any



children?" "No", "Well, one mattress aft, such and such a troop ship. Be on board before 3.00p.m. tomorrow, and take a plate, knife and fork and sheet with you."

The question then was how to let our husbands know we were sailing. We knew their unit had reached Singapore but we had not the vaguest notion where they were camping. However, after difficulty we were able to get in touch with the Sergeant Major, and he told us where we could find them. Next morning, we were up early, took the car and went out to the camp, and got there about 6.30a.m. We had just reached the camp when a convoy of lorries went by. They were moving slowly and I noticed my husband was driving one of them. I ran after it, climbed on the running board and was able to tell him that I was sailing that afternoon for the UK. I gave him the number of the 'go-down' and he said he would be there to see me off. All that morning whilst we were packing, raids were taking place, and two or three times we had to dive under the dining room table. We had no idea where the bombs were being dropped, but we were soon to leave. The Japs must have known there was a convoy in, because that morning, for the first time, they dropped all their bombs on the docks. What a drive we had to get to the ship. Looking back on it, it seemed like a nightmare. Bombs had been dropped all round our ship, but except for shrapnel holes she was undamaged. There were no coolies there to help with luggage, and everything had to be done by the men seeing us off, and the crew. The ship had only arrived on the day before and had landed 3,000 Indian troops from Bombay, and now she was taking on 1,400 women and children. All night we stayed in the docks, but early next morning we moved a little outside. Whenever the Air Raid Siren went over the island we had to put on our life belts and go and sit down in the dining saloon. The siren went so often that it was one continuous procession on the staircase, down when the 'alert' went, and up with the 'all clear.' Eventually one grew wise and 'stayed put.' Everybody was 'on edge' and the heat was insufferable – and the screaming of the babies and children. It was a happy relief for all when we sailed in the early hours of the afternoon. The next enemy to compete with were the 'bugs.' It was the people with cabins who suffered the most, as they had got into the wooden bunks and used to come out at night to bite their victims. The only remedy was to sleep on deck, admiring the blue sea, and wondering how it was there could ever be a war on, when the Air Raid Siren went, and we could see the bombs landing in the sea. Two Jap planes had spotted us and dropped their load – luckily they all missed. Our ship's guns went into action but the planes were too high. Where we were sleeping was like a large dormitory right aft in the ship. There were about 50 women, and we each had a mattress on the floor. Some used to build little walls around themselves with their suitcases and other more enterprising ones even had their family photos out! The days were monotonous but passed quickly. Breakfast was at 8. We used to take our plate, collect our food from the kitchen, then sit on benches in the dining saloon. Afterwards, we each did our washing-up in large communal wash-tubs. Then would come the dusting and sweeping-up of our 'bedrooms.' We would all do our own little corners, roll up our mattresses and then give a good swish round with the mop. Lunch would be at 12.30 then high tea at 6.30 and woe betide any who were late! The first few weeks nearly everybody on the ship suffered from some stomach trouble and sickness. It became known amongst the passengers as "Ship's Complaint"!! I don't know for certain but I think it was probably due to the water. A tremendous lot of babies were laid up with bronchitis, and one or two died. Three or four babies were born on board. At Durban, we were all put ashore for a night into hotels and the ship was thoroughly fumigated. About 500 women and children left the ship in S. Africa. So from Durban homewards conditions were very changed. We were all put into cabins, and were attended by stewards in the dining saloon. The crew were really marvellous. Their job was not an easy one. And I cannot write too highly of the kindness that was shown us by the people of S. Africa, and also at our port of arrival in England. I was given a railway pass to my final destination and a £1 note to spend on the journey!

### The Death Railway – Malaya to Burma

The following information was received by our secretary in Australia, **Elizabeth Adamson**:-

"Hi"

My name is **Kalwant Kaur** and my husband **Vijay** is a committee member with AMWA (Association of Malaysians in Western Australia). I attended the fall of Singapore and Malaya ceremony on the 15<sup>th</sup> February at the Stirling Civic Garden Memorial with my husband and friends from AMWA. My husband told me to do a short write up about my dad, **Harnam Singh s/o Inder Singh** and his friend **Kalwant Singh**. Both were 'Volunteers' during the Japanese occupation in Malaya. I hope this small piece of the jigsaw puzzle will bring closure to some of us who lost family in 1943.

Signed – **Kalwant Kaur Harnam Singh**.

This is her father's story:

My father **Harnam Singh** told me these stories and they were confirmed by my brother-in-law, **Prem Singh** whose father was **Kalwant Singh** who also worked in Siam in 1943 and kept a diary.



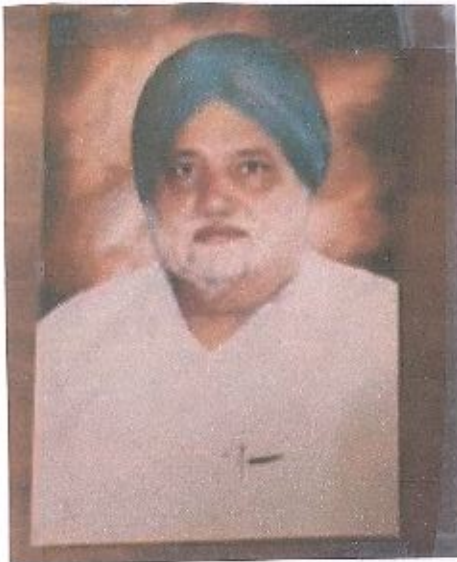
In 1943, **Harnam Singh (son of Inder Singh)** and **Kalwant Singh** worked on the death railway which spanned from Siam to Burma. They were railway men who did not volunteer their services but were given no choice but to work as station masters at Wampo and Tha Sao in Thailand. They were civilian prisoners. They were told to volunteer or else they would be rounded up and forced to work along the death railway as POWs. Both survived the war and died of old age.

**Harnam Singh s/o Inder Singh** worked alone from a small hut at Tha Sao. His job was to pull the levers to change the track when he heard the trains coming. The place where he worked was infested with malarial mosquitoes and he fell ill. He escaped Tha Sao by hiding in a rail cart that held dead bodies of POWs. He hid right at the bottom, because when the train stopped, the Japanese would use their bayonets to stab the dead bodies to ensure no living soul escaped. He told me horror stories of people like him being killed by malaria, the Japs and tigers.

**Kalwant Singh** worked at Wampo. He also worked alone as station master and contracted acute eczema when he was in Siam. He was told that his leg was to be amputated and was discharged from there. In his diary he mentioned other workers from Malaya who had been taken by the Japanese to work on the Railway. These were **Kapur Singh** from Port Klang; **Jora Singh** from the postal department, and **Lambrogrun**.

The diary also mentions Sentul Station being destroyed by USA Superfortress bombers on 19<sup>th</sup> February 1945, and Brickfields Workshop being bombed on 10<sup>th</sup> March 1945. **Kalwant** escaped by sheltering under tapioca plants.

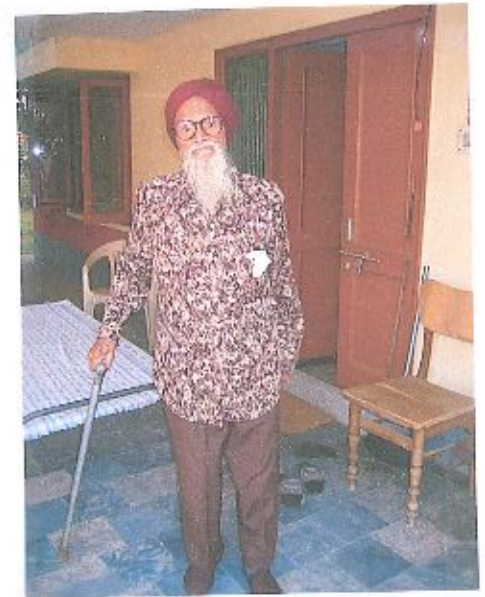
**Harnan Singh son of Inder Singh**



**Plaque at Don Rak Cemetery Kanchanaburi**



**Kalwant Singh Judge**



## **MONSOON BOATS – PENANG'S SUBMARINE BASE in WW2**

With thanks to Dave Croft RAFBPA

During February 1942, the Japanese made Penang their submarine base for the Far East. And in late 1943, the German *Kriegsmarine* also established Penang as the principal base for their Far East U-Boat Fleet, where they could repair and re-supply the "Monsoon Boats" operations in the Indian ocean.

For this purpose, a second Light Railway was built to serve the joint German-Japanese submarine base in the Fort Cornwallis area. An intercepted coded message in March 1942, indicated that the Japanese Navy was to base five I-Boat submarines in Penang for Indian Ocean operations. But the mooring space at Swettenham Pier was reserved for German Navy use and 26 sheds were built to house machine shops and general maintenance. These were linked by the railway track to Swettenham Pier where up to 5 U-Boats could be accommodated at one time. This begs the question of the joint usage of the Pier for German and Japanese submarines. However, Penang was inadequate for major repairs to the U-Boats and these were carried out at Keppel Harbour in Singapore due to the fact that the Germans were denied entry to the Naval Dockyard by the Japanese.

In April 1943, U-178 was sent to Penang to establish the base for operations, although U-511 arrived first on 15th July. U-511 was presented to the Japanese for design copying and from Penang sailed to Kobe, a city port in Japan. 4 "Monsoon Boats" arrived in Penang during October/November 1943 and berthed at Swettenham Pier. Apart from the



U-Boats the *Kriegsmarine* also 'hosted' 3 Italian FE submarines now under German orders following the Italian capitulation in Europe. Also at the Imperial Airways base (as it was still known to the Germans) at Glugor, there were two **Arado 196** seaplanes and a Japanese JE13A floatplane.

By late 1943, U-Boat combat missions were being changed to the transport of essential war supplies between Japan and Germany. Among the transport of materials such as mercury, tungsten, tin, rubber and quinine the U-Boats also carried replacement U-Boat parts and torpedoes for the "*Monsoon Boats*" - essential as the parts were not available in the Far East. Use was also made of innovative local expertise such as that found in the Swettenham Pier workshops where some complex parts were able to be manufactured locally.



"Monsoon Boats" in Penang

4 more "*Monsoon Boats*" arrived in Penang between August and September 1944.

But the situation had now become more dangerous as allied bombing and submarine mine laying was intensifying. Leaving and entering Penang harbour was not a safe proposition!

The German U-Boat administration was based in Northam Road in George Town, with additional offices and accommodation in the Elysee Hotel and at a requisitioned villa on Bell Road. For rest and recuperation leave the crews were able to go swimming at the Springtide Hotel, Penang Swimming Club and Mount Pleasant. They also had the use of the Penang Hill resort and also stayed at Fraser's Hill and the Cameron Highlands. An introductory information booklet was also issued to new arrivals:

*Dress within Penang city is always civilian clothes. A special walking out uniform (white) is issued from the German Service Department. To make yourself recognizable to the Police Department, each German must carry a pin of the black, white and yellow cockade.*" Advice on behaviour towards the Japanese was also issued.

The Shanghai Hotel (demolished in 1964) had been requisitioned by the Japanese at a German request for somewhere to relax for off-duty officers; it was used as a dance hall and bordello.

Regarding food rations for the German crews, the general food shortages experienced by the civilian population of George Town, and to a degree by the Japanese as well, did not seem to affect the Germans. They received rye-bread from a special bakery, meat from a pre-war German immigrant butcher and had plenty of vegetables. In addition they had another source of food. The refrigerator ship *SS Nanking* was travelling between Australia and Burma throughout May 1942 when it was captured by a German raider. The *Nanking* carried vast quantities of canned and frozen meat, also bacon, butter, flour, fruit and vegetables. The ship was escorted to Penang and tied up at Swettenham Pier for the rest of the war for feeding and supplying U-Boat crews.

Crews were forbidden to eat and drink at roadside stalls, although the Asahi beer was allowed and seemed to be popular!

#### **The adventures of U-181**

U-181 left Bordeaux Harbour on 16th March 1944, destination Penang, then Singapore, followed by replenishment at Djakarta (sic) before departing for Europe. The vessel was carrying 85 tonnes of mercury, in steel bottles in place of ballast iron in the keel, to Singapore. After a long journey around the Cape of Good Hope and into the Indian Ocean, via a circuitous route, it arrived at Swettenham Pier on 8th August. A few days away from the U-Boat relaxing, swimming and drinking Asahi Beer refreshed the crew before starting routine servicing and some repairs before going to Singapore. Two months of servicing, repair and preparation for the homeward journey, with the added delivery of mercury to Singapore, followed. Surplus torpedoes were offloaded at Penang for the "*Monsoon Boats*" and the diesel engines, compressors etc. were overhauled by both crew and local dockyard engineers, perhaps to a degree of accuracy not really required!! Cracked bearings of the trimming pump were handed over to the workshop for copying: the work done was excellent and the cracks faithfully reproduced on the new bearings! New bearings were speedily made!



At Keppel Harbour dry dock in Singapore, the 85 tonnes of mercury were rapidly off-loaded by the dockside labour force, watched over by armed Japanese guards. The mercury 'ballast' was replaced by powdered tungsten packed in cast iron boxes. Also Molybdenum and rubber was taken on board. Repair facilities were better in Singapore than in Penang, and damage from an altercation with a Beaufighter (off the coast of India) was speedily repaired and an external coat of paint applied. Refuelling followed, using Asian diesel oil from Borneo, with a different viscosity from the diesel fuel the crew was familiar with, but the engines coped with it. The Asian lubricating oil was a different matter and the low viscosity was to cause serious problems later on.

By the end of September 1944, U-181 was moved to Djakarta (sic) to take on food supplies for the long voyage back to Europe. The crew spent the next 10 days on leave at the Dutch colonial resort of Buitenzorg before departing for the long voyage home.

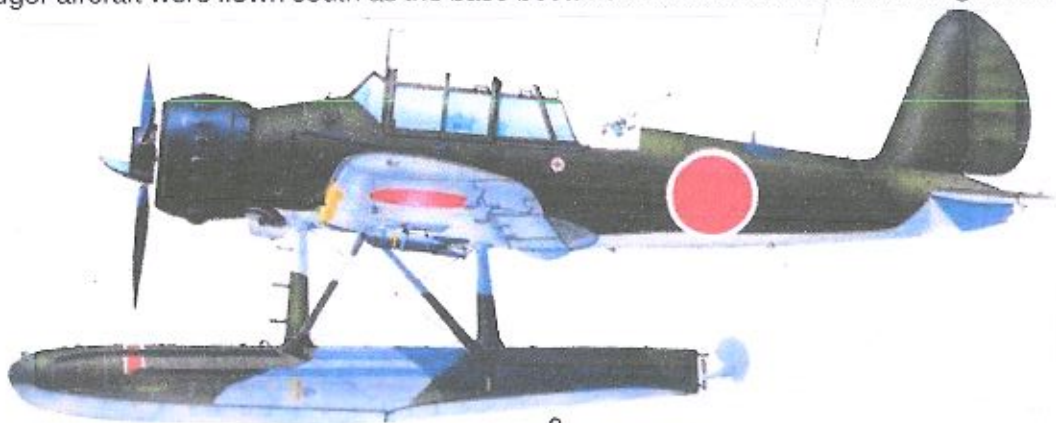
1st November, U-181, after a long chase attacked and sank the *USS Fort Lee* but paid the price when the bearings of the main diesels failed, the Asian lubricating fuel being a contributory factor. Running slowly on one diesel engine, the vessel returned to Djakarta, reaching the harbour on 3rd January 1945. U-181 then moved to Singapore to enlist the help of FIAT diesel engineers stranded in Singapore when Italy capitulated. The FIAT engineers were in Singapore as support engineers to the previous Italian FE submarine fleet and now 'guests' of the Japanese Navy. U-181 was still in Keppel Harbour when Germany surrendered in Europe, and on 9th May the Japanese took over the vessel. Apart from specialists who volunteered to advise the Japanese on the operation of the U-boat, all other German officers and crewmen, from both Singapore and Penang, were moved to Batu Pahat on mainland Malaya. The 'volunteers' preferred to work for the Japanese Navy rather than be 'guests' of the Japanese Army!

Organisation of the U-boats was certainly different with the Japanese. Communication between Germans and Japanese was in the form of English! Additional sleeping accommodation was installed as each Japanese crewman required his own bunk, no sharing on different watches. For various tasks, where one German crewman sufficed, 3-4 Japanese was the norm. The crew numbers doubled and chaos reigned; the Japanese were noisy, shouting commands with plenty of hectic activity all around, but despite the chaos U-181 – now I-501 of the Japanese Imperial Navy – was ready for action by the end of July 1945. It didn't happen, and following Japan's surrender, all German personnel were returned to Singapore. Following the arrival of the British, the Germans were marched to Changi where they were accommodated in former prison guard 'bungalows' outside the forbidding walls of the prison. They helped to get Singapore get back on its feet after the long Japanese occupation and in June 1946 all German ex-Navy personnel were repatriated to Europe.

#### **Arado AR-196 Seaplanes.**

Two of these seaplanes were based at Glugor and used for submarine escort duties and coastal patrol. Interestingly, they were in the Japanese National (Hinomaru) markings but flown by Kriegsmarine pilots. They might have been gifted by Germany to Japan to be used at the Penang base?

It is possible that the AR-196 aircraft remained at Penang until December 1944 when one source of information states that all the Glugor aircraft were flown south as the base became untenable due to increasing Allied air activity.





**In My Father's Footsteps – Part 3**  
**A Trip to South East Asia – by David Sartin**

**Coincidence or Fate?**

We came to Nong Pladuk Junction, which we had passed through on the way to Kanchanaburi, and stopped at the station. The guard on the train informed us that we would be delayed here for at least an hour due to other trains on the line.

The surprise? – My father was held at Nong Pladuk POW camp and put to work on the Railway here. We had just not had time to visit Nong Pladuk when we were in Kanchanaburi, but now here we were in Nong Pladuk station, at the start of the Thailand end of the infamous Death Railway, and where my father had been a POW. I took the opportunity to leave the train for a short while and to look around the station and take some photographs.

I called in at the signal box at the station and spoke as best I could to one of the Railway workers there. Despite our language barrier the chap seemed to realise what I was doing, and immediately produced a book, albeit in Thai, detailing the history of Nong Pladuk POW camps. He was also able to point out to me where the camps had been in Nong Pladuk. Due to the time constraint however, and not wishing to miss the train, I was unable to venture further afield.

I had to wonder to myself, of all the stations on the line, why had we stopped at one? What if we had caught a later train, would we have stopped here? I think even **Ray** was beginning to wonder if my late father's spirit was guiding us somehow.

Upon arriving in Bangkok, we took a taxi to the hotel where we had stayed previously, and after checking in, we went in search of the godowns near Thonburi where the FEPOWs had been taken by rail en route to camps in Thailand.

**Ray** had seen some photos of old railway lines online and we decided to try to follow these tracks as far as we could. **Ray** had printed off directions from Google Earth and we took the MRT out of the city.

After an early false start we soon found the rails tracks in question and followed the tracks through some fairly run down neighbourhoods. We managed to follow the tracks in question to an industrial area where we came across some railway wagons, albeit of a later date, but similar to those we had seen at Hellfire Pass and the Thailand-Burma Railway Centre Museum.

**Ray** took photographs of the tracks, but we could not ascertain how far away we were from the godowns and due to the area we were in, we did not consider it wise to venture further. Whilst investigating the tracks and railway wagons, we noticed a wild boar foraging on the road ahead of us. The boar approached us just as we were lucky enough to reach the safety of a nearby taxi.

The following day we took a flight to Ubon Ratchathani where we were met at the airport by **Ray's** wife, **Khamma**, and members of the Ubon Research Group who welcomed us with open arms. The Ubon Group were delighted to have the son of an ex-FEPOW visiting them, and I was treated like a VIP. A lady called **Aura Thai** arranged for us to meet up later that evening where **Ray**, **Khamma** and I were treated to an excellent Chinese meal at a local restaurant, where other members of the group joined us to meet their special visitor from the UK.

After an excellent meal and convivial company, **Ray**, **Khamma** and I drove to their home at Thamuang in rural Ubon, where I was to spend the next three nights.

**Aura Thai**, however, had arranged for us to meet her the next day with one of the Group called **Kassem**, who had been a Professor at Ubon University. They took us to see the Ubon Monument of Merit which had been erected by the Dutch ex-FEPOWs to honour the people of Ubon who had assisted the Allied FEPOWs by providing food and medicines at great risk to themselves. It was, indeed, an honour to have my photo taken at the Monument. Each year on Remembrance Sunday, hundreds of people gather in the park around the Monument to honour the fallen and the FEPOWs.

Following our visit to the Monument, **Ray** and I were taken for lunch by **Aura Thai** and **Kassem**, and we were touched by their hospitality. In the afternoon we visited an elderly gentleman called **Thong Dee** who had been a boy at the time of the Ubon POW camp and he related stories in Thai about the camp conditions. We went with **Thong Dee** to the site of the former camp which is now just bare fields for growing rice. **Ray** had been to the site



on previous occasions and had found various artifacts from the days of the POW camp. He pointed out an old corrugated shelter in one of the fields where, he informed me, the camp kitchen had been sited. There had been 3,000 POWs at this camp, and the first arrivals had to construct the camp's living quarters from scratch. We had a look around the site of the old camp, and came upon quite a deep ditch which had been constructed by the POWs, supposedly for defensive measures, but I personally wasn't so sure. I felt it might have had a more sinister purpose.

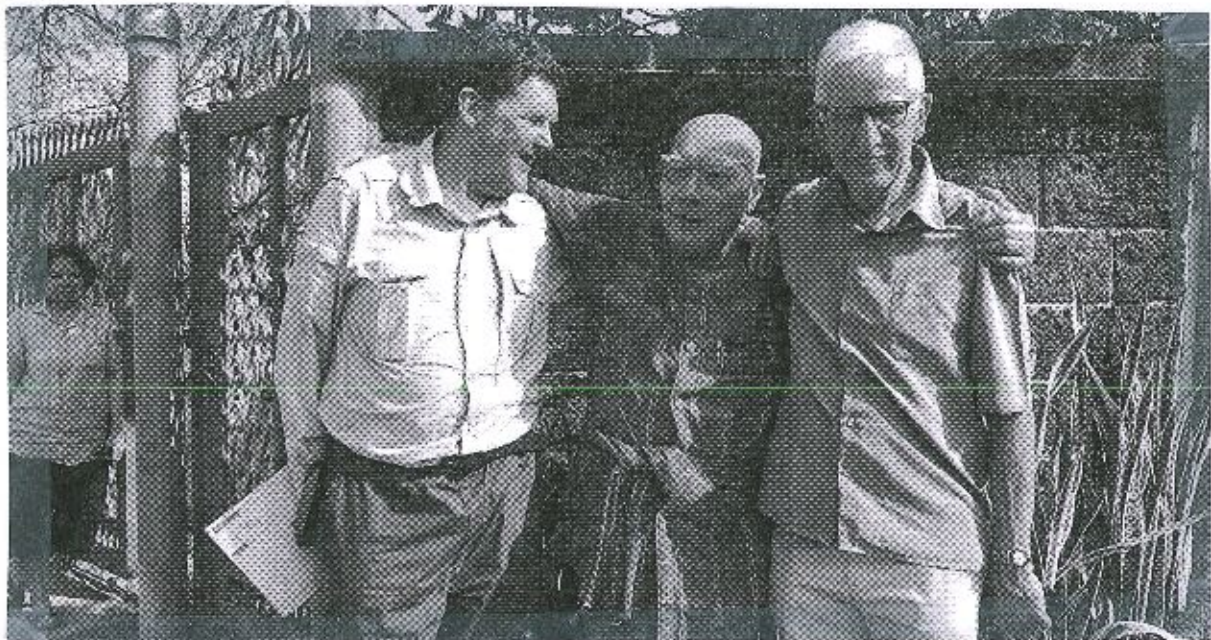
The prisoners had been moved up from Nong Pladuk to Ubon to construct an airfield for the Japanese air force, my father amongst them. He arrived at Ubon on 10.2.45 and was eventually liberated from there in August 1945. The airstrip is still in use today, although only by light aircraft enthusiasts and has been reduced in length from its original 1500 metres to about 600 metres.

We had a bit of a wander around the airstrip and **Ray** took the opportunity to have a search with his metal detector which turned up some bomb fragments. Apparently, after the Japanese capitulated, they had to destroy their weapons and ammunition and these fragments turn up quite frequently. The day was blisteringly hot, and **Aura Thai** contacted a friend to bring out some water and drinks for us which we were grateful to receive. The following day, **Ray** and I were invited to give a talk to the Ubon Research Group at Ubon University. This was something of an experience indeed, but we were made very welcome. I gave a talk, via an interpreter, on my father's experiences in SOE and during his time as a FEPOW, although I knew very little apart from the camps he had been in. After our talk, everyone wanted a photograph taken with me. Their kindness, warmth and hospitality are things which I will always remember. After our talk we were taken again for a sumptuous Chinese meal at a restaurant in Ubon.

That afternoon we were taken to visit "the old man" – a gentleman called **Sumwit**. He is regarded in Ubon as something of a Sage and has taken responsibility for the upkeep of the Monument and for making its history known to the people of Ubon. Although he couldn't speak English and I couldn't speak Thai, it was explained who I was and his delight was plain to see. **Sumwit** spoke about the Japanese occupation of Ubon and the POW Camp. It was an honour to have been invited to his house and to have met him.

This was my last day in Thailand before flying home. The Tuesday morning was spent with **Ray** and **Khamma** and we indulged in a spot of fishing on their farm, followed by a visit to a Buddhist Temple and a spot of lunch at a roadside café in the village.

It had been a remarkable 3-week journey, an experience of a lifetime and I met some wonderful people along the way, experienced the most incredible hospitality and warmth and had my eyes opened along the way. I hope I did my father proud.



David, Sumwit and Ray



**EVACUATION AT SINGAPORE**

In concluding this chapter on 'Evacuation at Singapore' the extraordinary action of the Chairman of the Harbour Board demands special emphasis. He held a position far transcending in importance any held by any other official, with the single exception of the Governor. The key to safe evacuation to orderly allocation and berthing of ships, to refuelling and repair of ships, to the marshalling of women and children lay in his hands. It is possible that the key to the safe evacuation of many of the troops might also have lain in his hands. Not only had he failed at this most critical juncture, but he had never included in his previous secret preparations for the personal safety of himself and his European regular staff, the care and safety of any of the Chinese employees and their families or the care and safety of the European civilians who had volunteered to assist his department. The Chairman of the Harbour Board got a qualified permission for his vessel to depart. Judging from the appearance and actions of the Governor about this time, it is personable to suggest that when he gave this permission, he was a distracted and desperate man.

**CONCLUSION**

The stigma attaching to the defence of Malaya was not the defeat or the defence, but the simplicity and rapidity with which it was defeated. The Japanese succeeded because they knew how to take the country: the British failed because they did not know how to defend the country. Years of preparation and millions in expenditure had very little resisting effect on the onslaught of the enemy. It took the Japanese two months and eight days to acquire possession of the whole peninsular and Island of Singapore with a road length of approximately 550 miles. Its occupation brought with it most of the peacetime resources of the whole country. The capitulation brought with it a surrender of approximately 70,000 troops together with their equipment and opened up avenues of attack on territories in the Indian and Southern Pacific Oceans.

The Malay States were protectorates. Great Britain exercised external sovereignty and by varying indirect means possessed absolute control over internal administration of these protectorates. These means were the appointment of British Advisers to the local Sultans and the employment in key positions of British Officials. The advisers and most of the heads of the administrative departments were members of the Malay Civil Service. Legislative Councils contained official majorities and even the appointment of unofficial members was controlled. In practice, the control over defence measures was vested in the administration headed by the High Commissioner to the same extent as in the Straits Settlements. The Straits Settlements and the Malay States had their own defence organization and a defence security officer responsible to the Governor was stationed in Singapore. On account of the great importance of Malaya and particularly of Singapore, the Imperial power maintained troops and created fortifications. The assistance given in defence by the Imperial power was auxiliary and did not exonerate the local governments from taking proper measures for the defence of their territories. The Governor of the Straits Settlements was also High Commissioner for the Malay States. He was not only the highest civil authority but was also Commander in Chief of forces. The vesting of this supreme military power in the Governor did not require that he should actively interfere with the preparations for defence made by Imperial military agencies. It did require that if he were not satisfied that the defences of Malaya were efficient, he should endeavour to ensure their efficiency by the legislative and administrative powers within his control or by representations to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.

The Malay Civil Service was the channel for the receipt of information by the executive. This service was in the position to obtain knowledge directly of conditions throughout Malaya. Many of the members of the Malayan Civil Service were undoubtedly well informed as to the military and civil position of the country. Some of the officials were men of decided ability, character and imagination. It is difficult to believe that representations were not on occasions made to the Governor and High Commissioner as to the inadequacy of the defences by at least a few of these members.

It is believed that the great majority of the members of the Malayan Civil Service were too complacent, routine minded and militarily ignorant to understand the important questions involved in any scheme for the defence of Malaya. To them it was sufficient that there was a defence security officer stationed in Singapore and that Imperial authorities were also devoting their efforts to make Malaya safe.

The inability of the local administration to create any suitable organisation to meet the requirements of war, was a failure of magnitude. With the outbreak of the European War, the occupation of Indo-China, and the signing of the Berlin – Rome – Tokyo Axis Pact, the writing was clearly on the wall. The peacetime military organisations were developed and civil defence services were created but the bases of defence measures remained unsound. Instead of tackling the defence of the country as an original problem requiring in its solution a comprehensive knowledge of local conditions and the best use of the available manpower and resources of the country, the administration appeared quite content to regard the defence of the peninsular as a matter primarily one for the Imperial service authorities. These service authorities had not that comprehensive knowledge of local conditions. They also had not the qualifications or experience to determine the immense value of the Oriental races and the best use to which the valuable sections could be put.

In considering the defects of defence organisations in Malaya, the historical aspect may require some consideration. British control of Malaya was acquired by diplomatic agencies and not by military effort. British Malaya had never been shaken by any conflict of importance in which experiences could be gained. Unlike countries with military background, no basis for strategy and tactics suitable to its conditions had ever been evolved.

Neither great vision nor experience should have been required for the administration in Malaya to appreciate the consequences of successful invasion of their territory. "Scorched Earth," as the policy was known long before the Nazi invasion of Russia, is an elementary principle of military science and of administration in contemplation of war, that plans should be prepared, not only to cause the greatest damage to any possible invader, but also to reduce as far as possible the



benefit of any advance obtained by such invader. The expression "Scorched Earth" merely emphasizes the degree of application of this elementary principle. Even if official expectations in respect of Thailand had been fulfilled, and Thailand had ranged herself against the aggressor, a successful invasion of southern Thailand and advances in northern Malaya were still probabilities in the absence of British naval control in the Gulf of Siam. An efficient administration should have had plans even for possibilities. The Malayan administration had plans neither for probabilities nor for possibilities. Only in the face of the long and successful enemy advance did this administration attempt by organization to secure some destruction of the material resources and otherwise deprive the enemy of advantages.

The creation of the numerous airfields throughout Malaya by the Imperial power and the probability of an attack by an enemy advancing through the peninsula, necessitated that the Imperial forces brought to Malaya should be trained and equipped for fighting on the peninsula. These factors also necessitated that the commanders, their staffs, and regimental leaders should have adequate knowledge of conditions in Malaya to ensure that suitable heavy equipment was forwarded to Malaya, that the troops were suitably equipped for any fighting expected in the country, and that forces who might be employed on the peninsula were suitably trained for the country in which they might have to fight. Equally important to the above, an adequate knowledge of local conditions was necessary, to devise strategy and tactics for both offensive and defensive fighting in Malaya.

The course of the campaign and the rapidity and simplicity with which defence measures were defeated disclosed that enemy forces were more suitably equipped and in general better trained for the conditions of the country than the defending forces. They also disclosed that neither troops engaged nor the command had that intimate knowledge of the country or its conditions, so necessary for the utmost effect in both attack and defence.

The creation of a Naval Base at Singapore and potential Air Bases throughout the peninsula and in Singapore were important Imperial projects. Schemes for Imperial defence were prepared in England and not in Malaya and experts in England must have played an important part in defence applicable to Malaya. Irrespective of any criticism of military or political authorities outside Malaya, there can be no question whatsoever that the active senior commands in Malaya failed badly throughout the campaign. Spirit was lacking in offence and originality in defence. Once the enemy established his superiority in mobility and his ability to infiltrate through loose defences, the ever pressing need for the High Command was to devise some original defensive strategy, not necessarily to counter enemy tactics which was a matter for the immediate forces, but to counter the enemy's offensive strategy. The enemy's strategy was aimed at forcing withdrawal and it succeeded on every occasion. Retirement and withdrawal was so complete that the enemy was uninterrupted in his possession of the acquired territories and was able to direct the great majority of his forces to his immediate object and not troubled greatly about communications.

During the fighting on the peninsula, the troops engaged had fought under great disadvantages. In preparing the defence of the Island of Singapore, the Command had great advantages which should have outweighed the advantage the enemy had in the air. The failure of the defending forces was due to many causes, direct and indirect. The neglect to prepare adequate defences along the Straits of Johore during the years or at least months prior to the battle of Singapore appears inexcusable and made the task of the defenders much more difficult. It also probably contributed to the lowering of the morale of the troops engaged in the defence of this vital area. The main direct cause was, however, unimaginative leadership of the forces engaged in the area in which the original landing was made. Precautions were never taken which should have been taken. Defence lines were unnecessarily weak. Communications rarely functioned. Artillery did not respond. The result was speedy and effective success by the enemy.

The constant withdrawal from one defence line to another defence line extending throughout the peninsula was not without some encouraging features. Despite the many handicaps, most of the regular combatant troops, European and Indian, displayed splendid fighting qualities. In the fighting in North Johore, the Australians also put up a magnificent showing. Some of the regiments, through casualties, ceased to exist as effective fighting units. Particular mention is made of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. This regiment was commanded by an officer with great foresight. He gave his men a training suitable for the conditions of warfare in Malaya. As it was bound to be, this training was rigorous and produced murmurs from many of his men. During the whole course of the campaign, this commanding officer displayed great qualities of leadership and his officers and men responded with great gallantry. Harsh feelings engendered by the hostility to the rigorous training were replaced by gratitude and deep respect. This splendid regiment eventually got to Singapore still an effective unit, but reduced by casualties to less than 150 officers and men.\*[See note].

During the course of the campaign, heartening response was heard from Great Britain promising substantial aid in men, equipment and aircraft. Reinforcements, equipment and aircraft did arrive but not to the extent which it was considered was required. After the fall of Singapore, the excuse offered for the lack of defences and aircraft prior to the campaign was that planes and equipment intended for the defence of Singapore had been diverted to Russia or the Middle East. It is suggested that the requirements in the preparation of the defences of Malaya were not large fortifications, heavy equipment, nor thousands of imported troops. The main requirements in the preparation of Malayan defences were intelligent civil and military organizations combining so that all the advantages the country had to offer could be directed to the defence. The essential requirement in the active defence of Malaya was one intelligent and simple organisation which could direct the military and civil resources with the utmost effect. The essential requirements in resources were not equipment, men and aircraft, but suitable equipment, suitably trained troops, and aircraft that at least could be a match for anything the opposition had to offer.

\*Note: The Commanding Officer of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders was Lt. Col. Ian McAlister Stewart DSO., OBE., MC.

See "Moon Over Malaya" by Jonathan Moffatt and Audrey Holmes McCormick.



## MALAYAN ODYSSEY

By Ulick Loring

When Robert Young, a young engineer from Leeds and a grandson of Timothy Hackworth the early railway pioneer, embarked on a steamer to India in about 1885, he could scarcely have imagined that he would begin a family tradition linking his descendants to the Malay Peninsula for over 150 years. Robert undertook his apprenticeship with Airedale Foundry and brought with him a reference from the Edinburgh Street Tramways Company. He later joined Kitsons the tram maker in Leeds. Although his family was from Tyneside, the peripatetic work of his father, a Methodist minister, led his mother and siblings from one posting to another throughout the country.

Around 1890 Robert moved from India to Penang which at that time seemed to rival Singapore as a commercial centre (see F.A. Swettenham, *British Malaya*, 1906 p330.) He rapidly involved himself in the island's life. Although he was not particularly wealthy and certainly not part of the most privileged part of the colonial élite, like most young English professionals he lived a good life and was one of the first people to drive a car on the island. He founded his own company R Young & Co and being a freemason no doubt made many commercial contacts.



Robert Young in his car

The problem for many young men in the Empire was the absence of eligible young European women. It is unsurprising therefore that Robert remained unmarried until he was forty-five. His wife to be, Edith was the sister of a colleague of his in Malaya, Edward Lees. Edith was the youngest child and only daughter of a onetime Staffordshire farmer, but when the latter remarried she was as, it were on the shelf, and was 30 - a relatively late age - for those days. She sailed to Malaya on a P & O liner at Christmas 1904 and married Robert at St George's Church, Penang. It must have been a challenging experience, marrying someone she did not



know and suddenly becoming the mistress of a colonial household with servants and the expectation of entertaining as a hostess. She told me how she once woke up to find a python in her mosquito net! Nonetheless according to her son-in-law James Loring, she never regretted her marriage. The Youngs lived in a Black and White house in Scotland Road called England House. When I visited Penang a few years ago it still existed and was then the headquarters of a political party!



Outside England House in 1914 showing three of Robert's surviving daughters

Still life for Edith may have been claustrophobic and not very exciting. Robert and Edith had six children, all daughters. The first two, Rhoda and Joan, died as babies in Malaya, and when Edith became pregnant with her third child she returned to England to give birth to Margaret. However, while Edith was concerned with domestic life, Robert was busy with business and public life. He was appointed to the Straits Settlements Legislative Council, chairman of the Penang Harbour Board, and editor of the Penang Gazette. That was apart from his business activities, for example designing the first concrete bridge in Kedah in 1909 and pioneering the Georgetown tramway system. He also had a business interest in the Sungci Batu rubber plantation. He was in tune with public affairs and spoke out prophetically about increasing Japanese influence in the region.

The First World War did not affect the expatriate community to the same degree as people at home, but it was a dramatic shock when in 1914 a German cruiser, *The Emden*, shelled Penang and a piece of shrapnel, still in the family, landed in the grounds of England House. The Indian Army mutiny in Singapore in February 1915 also had repercussions and Robert was commended for enrolling as a private in a local defence force which was set up.



Robert retired in 1916 and returned to England with his family now including four daughters. They lived in Haywards Heath first with before settling in St Leonard's-on-Sea. He returned to Penang at least once after his retirement when he attended a Masonic dinner in 1924. He still had many connections there and it must have been because of this that members of his family took posts in Malaya. Here he found himself with responsibilities to suddenly orphaned nephews and a niece, Kay Young whom he and Edith took in.

Robert's eldest surviving daughter Margaret taught music at Tanglin School in the Cameron Highlands from the mid 1930s under the headship of Anne Griffith-Jones ("Griff.") At the time of the Japanese invasion those still at the school (a number of children were ill at the time and had gone home) were sent down to Singapore to be evacuated.



The teaching staff of Tanglin School. Margaret is third from the right at the back

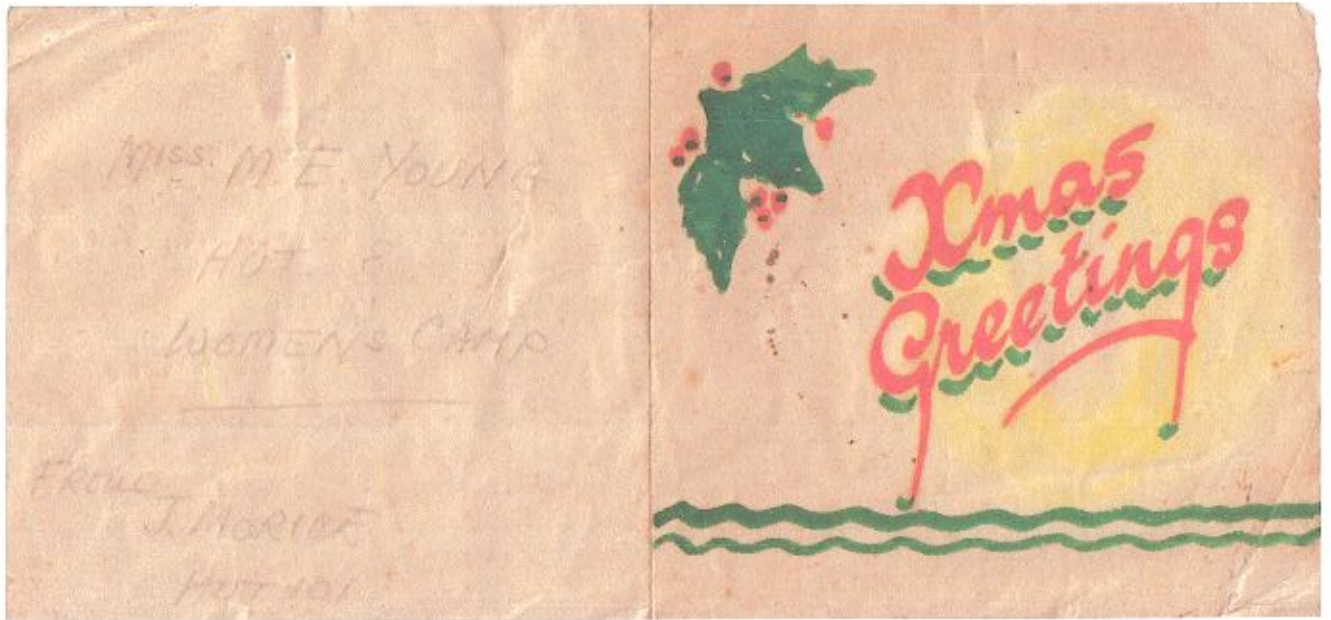
Margaret's cousins Kay (now Fletcher) and the latter's daughter, Judith, were living in Penang, and had already left soon after the sinking of the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* and safely reached Australia. Margaret could have taken a berth and but she chose to stay behind because she thought she should set an example to local people. It is said that the ship she was supposed to have joined was sunk and so maybe she had a lucky escape.

Like many civilians Margaret was interred in Changi which was a regular prison that had been built by the British. Here she lived in a cell which she shared with a nurse, Mary Thomas, who wrote a memoir, *In the shadow of the Rising Sun* (Singapore 1983.) She remembered singing "There will always be an England" during the march to prison. Margaret was sparse in her comments about camp life though she referred once to the infamous Double Tenth when the prison was searched for evidence of collusion between internees and the recent commando attack on Singapore harbour. She was a devout Anglican and she was charitable about Japanese soldiers of whom she said "had a hard time too." (See for example Fergal Keane, *Road of Bones*, 2011, and the novels of Shusaku Endo.) Civilian internees were transferred to Sime Road camp in May 1944. She commented on internees being able to grow their own vegetables and she also played the piano at concerts. However

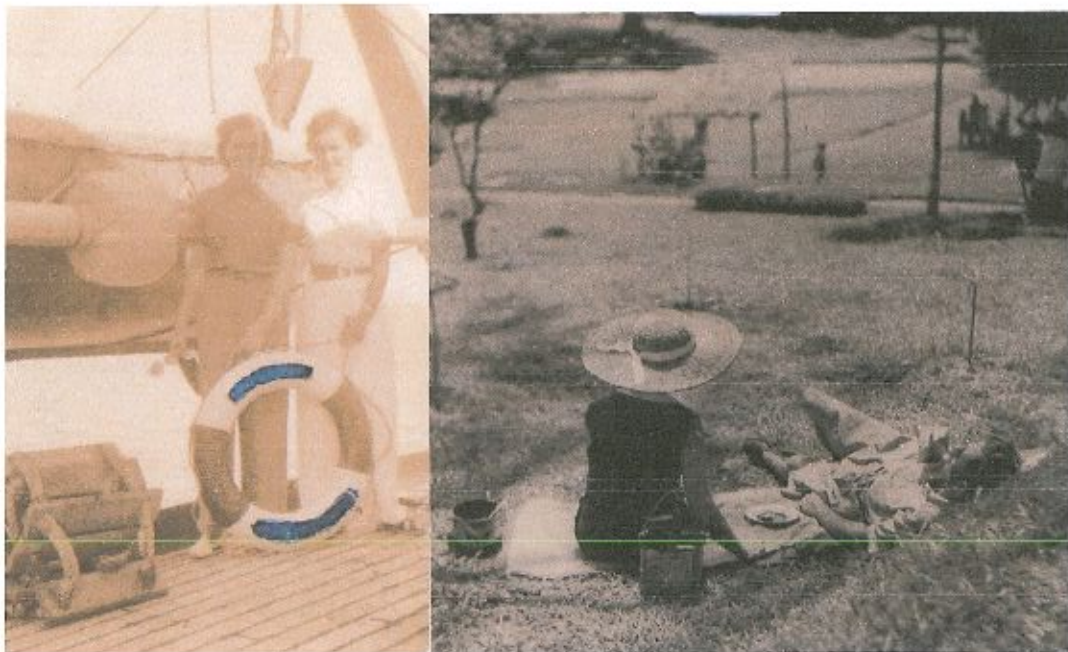


she made no reference to the hardships experienced towards the end of the War as described by Sheila Allen in *Diary of a girl in Changi* (Pymble NSW, 1994.)

At the end of the war she was, as her sister, Roberta Loring, put it "fatted up" before being allowed home. The time of internment for her family was a very anxious one, and it was a long time before they learnt that Margaret was alive. Her return was the cause of great rejoicing and her niece Georgiana de Lussy remembers the preparations for the home coming.



A Christmas card sent to Margaret in camp



The return to England after internment and in Sime Road camp with cousin Bill. (I have read that there was Dutch photographer in Sime Road who secretly took pictures.)



. Two other relatives were caught up in Japanese invasion. Cyril Hackworth Young (Kay Fletcher's brother) made a dramatic escape from the Japanese by diving into the sea, and being picked up by a Malay boat. He reached South Africa eventually. Bill Fletcher an engineer was interned, and met up with Margaret in Sime Road camp where men and women were allowed to fraternise on occasions. Margaret received no compensation for her hardships from the British government. She stayed in contact with other internees like Mary Thomas. She never revisited Malaya and died in 1989. She was a righteous and humble woman whom I admired greatly.

In 2003 I had the opportunity to visit Singapore and Penang. As in the early morning the plane dipped over the sea and down towards Penang I felt deeply emotional when I saw the island I had heard so much about from my childhood. Amazingly in the English cemetery I found the graves of my baby aunts, Rhoda and Joan and they were in remarkably good condition. Later my friend, Zygmunt and I, were driven up into the Cameron Highlands by a Chinese priest, Father Charles Chan of the Diocese of Penang. Margaret Shennan the author of *Out in the Midday Sun* (London 2000) enabled me to obtain an introduction from the High Commission in Kuala Lumpur to the site of Tanglin School now a Malaysian Commando camp. At the gate the guard tried to read the letter upside down! Inside I found it remarkably unchanged since my aunt's time. In 2006 I returned once and donated artefacts of my aunt's to Tanglin School (now in Singapore,) the Penang Heritage Trust and to Changi Museum. In Singapore I was also able to attend the annual ceremony marking civilian sacrifices during the occupation.



The entrance to the site of Tanglin School in the Cameron Highlands showing Malaysian Commando insignia





The civilian memorial service Singapore 2006

### A LINK WITH OLD PENANG

Report in "The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser," 13<sup>th</sup> May 1932

#### Death of Mr. R. Young

Engineer, Editor and Legislative Councillor

News was received in Singapore yesterday of the death at home of **Mr. Robert Young**, founder of the well-known Malayan civil, constructional and sanitary engineering firm, and for several years a member of the Legislative Council of the Colony. He was 71 years of age.

**Mr. Young** retired from Malaya about fifteen years ago after spending 28 years of varied activities in the country and earning the esteem of a very large circle of friends, an esteem which was happily demonstrated in the form of a presentation when he left Penang on retirement. After three years in the service of the Great Indian Peninsular Railway Company, **Mr. Young**, who was a native of Bishop Auckland, Durham, and had been trained as a mechanical engineer at Leeds, first came to the Straits in 1888 as engineer of the old Penang Steam Tramways Company, which had been started by **Messrs. Kerr, Stuart and Co.**, about a year earlier. **Mr. Young** took over charge of the steam tramways from **Mr. Grant Mackie** in 1894 but in the same year gave way to **Mr. R. W. Twose**. Six years later the tramways went into liquidation and were purchased by Government on the suggestion of the Municipality, and **Mr. Young** was appointed lessee and manager, a post which he filled until the inauguration of the electric tramways under direct Municipal control in 1906. **Mr. Young** carried out the contract for the permanent way of the new tramways and he carried out other important contracts in and about Penang and in Kedah. At the same time he found opportunity for a considerable amount of work of a public character, serving for six years as a member of the Legislative Council, and being the first unofficial Chairman of the Penang Harbour Board. **Mr. Young** was a keen Volunteer and a prominent Freemason, notable services to which movement were recognized by his election as Deputy District Grand Master. As we have said, **Mr. Young** had varied interests. For more than twenty years, it was recorded in the address which was presented to him by Penang admirers on his retirement, he "helped to guide and give expression to public opinion as editor of The Pinang (sic) Recorder and Shipping Gazette and as one of the founders and a director of The Times of Malaya, on more than one occasion editing the Pinang Gazette with great judgment and skilful pen." For upwards of twenty years **Mr. Young** was consulting engineer to the Penang Municipal Fire Brigade, and he founded the firm which bears his name in 1897.



## **Commemorative Services in Muntok, Bangka Island, February 2020**

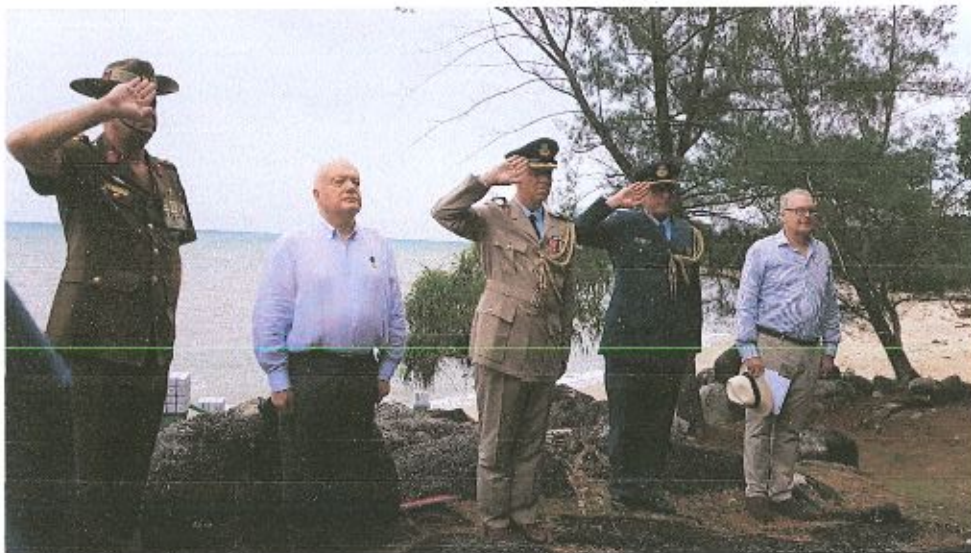
The word Muntok means ‘the end of the road’. This small town lies on the tip of the West coast of Bangka Island in Indonesia. In World War 2, it was the end of the road for many people. 1000’s of evacuees from Singapore died as their boats were bombed in the Bangka Strait, were killed by the Japanese upon landing or suffered and died in the harsh prison camps. Although remembered by their families, many had no official recognition.

Muntok remained remote to Westerners for some time after the War. Dutch and British War Investigators visited and the Dutch authorities moved their War dead from Muntok to Java in 1964, unlike the British, who allowed their civilian graves to remain untended in the town. These graves now lie under houses and a petrol station and in a group grave. Political instability and the swampy malarial climate were later deterrents to visitors.

In 1979, Vivian Bullwinkel, the sole Australian Army Nurse to survive the massacre of 21 Nurses, civilians and about 60 British servicemen on Radji Beach on February 16 1942 returned to Muntok to help choose a site for a Nurses’ Memorial. A ceremony attended by Nurses who survived the Camps was held in Muntok in 1980.

On February 17 1942, Mr Vivian Bowden, Australia’s Official Representative to Singapore (the role now called ‘Ambassador’) was killed by 2 Japanese guards outside the Muntok cinema. Mr Bowden had been remonstrating with Japanese soldiers who were mistreating Frank Brewer, a British soldier. Mr Bowden had been raised in Japan and spoke fluent Japanese. When he explained his diplomatic status and asked to speak to a senior officer to request proper treatment of the 1000 captives in the building, he was taken outside the cinema, made to dig his own grave, gather a bunch of flowers and was then shot.

Now each year on February 16 and 17, a large number of Australian Army Nurses’ families, civilian internees’ families and Embassy staff from Australia, Britain and New Zealand gather with Indonesian people for commemorative services. These take place at Mr Bowden’s memorial, at the Peace Museum situated at the former Women’s prison camp at Kampong Menjelang and at Radji Beach, the site of the massacre.



**Commemorative service, Radji Beach February 16 2020, Australian Defence Attaché, Australian Ambassador, British and NZ Defence Attaches and Mr John Bullwinkel, nephew of Vivian Bullwinkel**



Following the spontaneous actions of current Australian Army Nurses who held hands and walked into the water in 2017 and the Indonesian Nurses and Doctors who gathered to throw petals into the sea, the annual Walk for Humanity is now held on the beach. All present hold hands and walk towards the water, throwing flowers, hoping and praying for Peace.



**Annual Walk for Humanity, Radji Beach, Muntok February 16 2020**

This year, Radji Beach Nurses' families approached the Japanese Embassy in Australia to ask if a representative may like to attend the services. Mr Takonai Susumu, the Political Advisor to the Embassy of Japan in Indonesia joined us for the Commemorative Services, the Walk for Humanity, a visit to the Muntok Peace Museum and also joined the Australian Ambassador and the Australian, British and New Zealand Defence Attaches in planting a rose bush for Peace in the garden of former Prison Camp commandant Captain Seki Kazuo.



**Mr Takonai Susumu joins the Australian , British and New Zealand Embassy staff in planting of the rosebush for Peace in Captain Seki Kazuo's former garden, Sudirman guesthouse, February 16, 2020**

We were made very welcome in Muntok, with a formal dinner hosted by the PT Timah Tin Company and a reception at a local Junior High School. Here we were entertained by school musicians and dancers and then invited to join the dancing. Our group presented 2 basketball hoops to the school, a gift from a former Australian naval commander, Bruce Bird. A new







## 'RADJI BEACH', Banka Island

- British citizens who died as a result of Massacre on 16 February 1942

[Version 1.0.0; February 2020]

By the morning of 16 February 1942 about 100 people had arrived on 'Radji Beach' including the passengers and crew of 'SS Vyner Brooke', a group in a lifeboat of the 'Z Advanced Ordnance Workshop' Royal Army Ordnance Corps ('ZAOW', RAOC) passengers and ship's crew from 'Pulo Soegi' and several crew from 'HMS Li Wo'.

During the early part of the morning it is well known that a group of about 15-20 women and children, led by Mr Dominguez and his wife from Australia and accompanied by several walking wounded Royal Navy ratings were ordered to start the trek through the jungle to Muntok – so as to not slow down the main party when they left on the return of Lt Sedgmen, RNR, the First Officer of the 'Vyner Brooke' who had gone in search of the Japanese to advise that the group on the beach wished to surrender.

This left approximately 75-80 people on the beach including an estimated,

- Australian Army Nurses      22
- New Zealand naval officers    3
- British,
  - Civilians                      10
  - Soldiers (RAOC)            25
  - RN /RNR sailors            20

What is known by few people is that about this time a group of "*...able bodied men...*" also left the group heading towards the Muntok lighthouse (see end of this paper).

About half the people who died in the massacre by Japanese troops remain unidentified – some will be listed in official and research documents as having died on or around the sinking of the 'SS Vyner Brooke' and some will have come from the 'ZAOW' RAOC group from the 'Pulo Soegi', whilst others will be on the list of casualties in the sinking of the 'HMS Li Wo'.

Known **British** victims on 'Radji Beach' are listed below – see the memorial documents on each ship for more details;

### **'SS Vyner Brooke',**

- **Thomas Betteridge**, B.1880, Lancashire and a Partner in the brokers Hallam & Co., Kula Lumpur.
- **Mrs. Carrie Rose Faraday Betteridge** – wife of Thomas for 50 years.
- **William Hay Pratt**, an engineer from Seremban, Negri Sembilan.
- **Mrs Kathleen Elise Waddle**, b. 1900 in Shepherds Bush, London and Headmistress of Raffles Girls School (either the whole school or just the junior school), Singapore and



wife of Robert Alfred Waddle, an electrical engineer in Singapore ( see archived family film in Singapore National Archives).

- **Ernest Charles Watson**, b.1874, a Judicial Commissioner in Malaya and then a Barrister.

- and from the crew of the 'SS Vyner Brooke',

- **Able Seaman Hamilton McClurg**, D/JX 204773, RN and ex 'HMS Prince of Wales' from Glasgow.
- *Denis James O'Brien, 3<sup>rd</sup> Engineering Officer aged 54 years (this person 's presence amongst those massacred on 'Radji Beach' after the sinking of the 'Vyner Brooke' is more tenuous from the historical clues available).*
- **Lt. (E) David Reith**, RNR, Chief Engineer, aged 67 years and from Aberdeen.
- **(First Officer) Lt. William Sydney Sedgeman**, RNR, b.1911 aged 31 years, from Goodwick, Pembrokeshire, Wales.
- EITHER **Robert Trehwitt**, and engineer on the Jasin Lalang Estate in Malacca (and a Volunteer CQMS in the Malacca Local Defence Corps) serving as 3<sup>rd</sup> Extra Engineer in the engine room of the ship OR **Captain Cuthbert Tyrwhitt**, ostensibly of the Cambridgeshire Regt but in fact with the 'Far East Combined Bureau' (which was the counterespionage unit, against the Japanese, of British Intelligence).

'Pulo Soegi',

- **Craftsman Arnold Wilson Atkins**, # 7646, 'ZAOW', RAOC aged 32 years.
- **Lt. Stephen Day**, SSRNVR, b.1909 at Barton – upon – Irwell, Salford, Manchester an Assistant with Sandilands, Buttery & Co, Penang and aged 33 years.
- **Staff Sgt. Thomas Hurrell**, #7610705, 'ZAOW', RAOC aged 37 years.
- **Private George Cecil Kinsley**, # 7654688, 'ZAOW', RAOC (the serviceman bayoneted on Radji Beach and whom Vivian Bullwinkle cared for in the jungle - he died soon after in Muntok POW camp from his wounds).
- **Cpl. William George James Sherrington**, #7624357, 'ZAOW', RAOC aged 26 years.
- **Sgt. Archibald Skimming**, #7634180,'ZAOW', RAOC aged 29 years.

- Plus, another estimated 15 officers and men from the 'ZAOW' RAOC who had been aboard the 'Pulo Soegi'.

**RESEARCHER NOTE:** extending previous knowledge, we now know from wartime notes secretly taken and hidden in POW camps by Private Hal Richardson, an Australian journalist serving in the AIF and also a POW in Muntok and Palembang, that some of those people present on 'Radji Beach on



the morning of 16 February who lost their lives at the hands of the Japanese that day did not all die at the time of the massacre either on that beach, or in the adjacent cove or in the sea. A group of British servicemen had left the Beach independently and headed for Muntok lighthouse just before the arrival of the Japanese. The reality is also that with the onset of the massacre men and women – the men from our knowledge of the people on the Beach were almost certainly British - ran for their lives along the beach and up into the jungle cover as the Japanese started bludgeoning, bayonetting and shooting the victims.

Firstly, insofar as those actually attacked during the massacre, we know from Leading Seaman Wilding, RN from 'HMS Li Wo' who swam ashore at Radji Beach several hours after the massacre that he found a "... man..." in the "... fringe of timber..." above the Beach on which the nurses were killed - he had been bayoneted and his intestines were spilled but he was still alive and only able to gasp "... Japs .." to Wilding, who then moved on to the next cove where he found survivor Eric German who had also been severely bayoneted. Wilding then met up with Cpl. Seddon, Royal Marines, from the sunken tug 'HMS Yin Ping' and then walked up to the fisherman's hut (presumably the one at 'Radji Beach') where they found a "... white man, doubled over also bayoneted who said he had been in the massacre..." with three dead Royal Navy ratings. The two men then walked inland and after some time on the jungle trail came across a "... European lying with his back to the broad base of a kapok tree. He was like a deflated sack... slumped in a pool of blood... he had been on the beach but feigned death... but now could go no further...". There will have been more people who died away from the Beach after the massacre.

Secondly, insofar as the group of servicemen who were present on Radji Beach, but left just before the Japanese arrived, Pte. Hal Richardson, AIF, continues in his monograph in the Australian War Memorial Museum that he learned during his interviews in POW camps from one 'Victor Spencer' (this was Leading Seaman Victor Spencer, DSSX 23078 aged 25 years from Hull who was ex 'HMS Prince of Wales' and then 'HMS Li Wo' – and who died later as a POW on 24.7.45) who had come ashore at Radji Beach, and with others had "...gathered wood for the fires that warmed and cooked for survivors..." and had then with "... other able bodied men..." had "...struck out for the lighthouse a mile or so along the beach..." . This group then turned inland but encountered a squad of Japanese soldiers when they "... reached a tar road..." and Spencer says he was bayoneted and struck unconscious, when he came around he found that all the others "... were lying around, shot and bayoneted...". Spencer then walked off, but soon encountered another badly wounded sailor "... Leading Stoker Hadley who had served in REPULSE then LI WO..." whom "... was in pain from his wounds and could not move without assistance..." – it seems that Hadley might also have been on Radji Beach - this was **Leading Seaman James Bruce Douglas Hadley**, DJX 142890, RN aged 23 years from Coventry who died soon after in POW camp from his wounds.

The 'Radji Beach' massacre victims died in a chaotic and dispersed situation that extended along the coast and inland – their unburied remains still lie on Banka Island along with the remains of many hundreds of bodies of British civilians and servicemen which washed ashore on the beaches of Banka Island during the weeks of mid-February 1942. .

Michael Pether

Auckland

New Zealand.



## **DUCHESS OF BEDFORD**

**World War II Sea War, Vol. 5: Air Raid Pearl Harbour. This Is Not a Drill.** *Donald A Bertke, Gordon Smith and Don Kindell.*

**29 Jan. 1942.**

Arrived Singapore with 1955 troops.

**30<sup>th</sup> Jan.**

Duchess of Bedford and Empress of Japan damaged by aircraft. Holed above waterline.

18.00 hrs departed for Colombo.

**31<sup>st</sup> Jan.**

Attacked at sea by Japanese aircraft.

**Arrived Colombo 13<sup>th</sup> Feb. onto Durban, arrived 25<sup>th</sup>. Feb.**

**The Road to Singapore: Britain at War.** *Online.* Chap. 5.

30<sup>th</sup> Jan 1942

All that morning the docks and the approach roads had been heavily attacked by formations of Japanese bombers. Half of the godowns in the docks were raging fires. The smell of burning rubber, tar and rope.

West Point, Wakefield, Duchess of Bedford and Empress of Japan were berthed in the main wharf of Empire Dock. The quays which were seething with women and children and their menfolk who had come to see them off, were so hot that one could feel the heat through the soles of the shoes. Every inch between the lines of godowns and the ships were jammed with women and children waiting patiently for their turn to pass through the one small gate where an official, one lonely man with a small table and a pencil, who took down every passenger's name writing it beautifully but with painful slowness in a ledger.

In those last few hectic hours before Singapore became a beleaguered city, the four transports managed to get away.

**War Diary C in C Eastern fleet 1941-1942 (ADM 199/1185)**

Friday 30<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1942

Keppel Harbour and Singapore dock areas were heavily bombed. USS Wakefield damaged. Empress of Japan and Duchess of Bedford holed above the waterline.

These three ships escorted by Dragon and Durham, however, sailed from Singapore later for Colombo with more than 4000 evacuees, dockyard, naval, military and air personnel.

Singapore Dockyard closed down. Commodore and all Heads of Departments, except CD, CE, NSO, VSO and skeleton staffs left in WEST POINT.



## YOUR STORY

### The Long Nawang Massacre

by Melissa Murphy



Desmond Verdon Murphy was the son of John Murphy (born 1866, baptised at St. John's in Limerick, died in Bath 1933) and Frances Amelia, nee Spearman (died 1948). His parents were married at North Strand Church, St. Thomas, Dublin on 22 June 1893. Desmond was the only boy, with sisters Moya, Nina and Erris. At the time of Desmond's birth, in Dublin, 1894, his father was a Colour Sergeant/staff clerk, who was probably serving in the Army Ordnance Corps. In 1906 John was promoted from the ranks to become an Assistant Commissary/Hon Lieutenant in the Army Ordnance Department. Despite seeing home service during the Great War his personnel record does not appear to have survived, but an Army List confirms that he ended his career on 29 March 1920, retiring with the honorary rank of Major. Desmond was educated at Hutton Grammar School in Preston. He went on to study electrical engineering. Following in his father's footsteps, Desmond answered the call of the nation in 1914, joining the Officer Training Corps, and was commissioned in December. He had requested a commission in the Army Ordnance Department, but ultimately embarked for France with the Scottish Rifles on 20 April 1916.

His time at the Front was limited, for he soon returned home due to sickness and remained there. His exact movements after that are a bit sketchy. There was talk that he went

out to join the police in South Africa, and then Rhodesia, but this rumour has not been substantiated. What can be confirmed is that he arrived in Sarawak in the mid-1920s, and was employed by the constabulary under the government of the Brooke family - the White Rajahs of Sarawak. He was swiftly promoted; firstly to Superintendent of Police in 1929, then to Commissioner and Superintendent of Prisons in 1933, and eventually Superintendent of Police at Sibul, the Third Division of Sarawak. He was acknowledged by the locals as a 'Tuan' (respected person), and he took Siti Sulastry binti Sulaiman - a local girl born in Java - as a wife. She bore him three sons. Two died as infants, but the middle child, born in 1937, was my father Michael Murphy. They lived well and were happy, but their conjugal bliss was cut short when the war broke out. Desmond's wife Siti and my father, having been advised that it was safest for them to blend in with the locals, never heard from him again. Desmond was officially listed as 'missing in action' after the war, with his fate unknown.

By 2006 I had managed to piece a few things together, but living in Kuching, Sarawak, meant that I could not easily access overseas records. I employed London-based researcher Roger Nixon to help me, and among other things he located two important documents. One was the death entry for Desmond,

included with several others in a Colonial Office register, and the other was Desmond's WWI officer file. The Colonial Office register (TNA RG 31/132 Malaya, Borneo & Sarawak deaths from enemy action) provided the proof that my family had waited so long for. It showed that Desmond had been killed by the Japanese in September 1942 in Long Nawang. Sadly, the news came too late for Siti, my grandmother, who passed away in 2001 and never did know what had happened to her husband. My father had no memory of his father, but at last we now knew of his resting place. Or did we?

Later research showed that all the casualties were originally buried at Long Nawang in two mass graves, but were re-interred in 1950 and laid to rest on Tarakan Island in east Borneo in a cemetery called 'Field of Honour'. I later discovered that this cemetery had fallen into disuse, and that the remains had been yet again reinterred in 1967 and transferred to 'Kembang Kuning War Cemetery' in Surabaya, Java. This is maintained by the Netherland War Graves Foundation [www.ogs.nl](http://www.ogs.nl). Sadly, my father Michael died in February 2012. He had dreamed of making a trip to Surabaya to visit his father's gravesite. He never made it, but I am glad that he had found out everything about Desmond from my investigations before he passed. I imagine that they are now finally reunited in the afterlife.





**On the morning of 25 December, 1941, nine Japanese bombers in three groups of three carried out air strikes on Sibul, the inland town of the central region of Rajah Brooke's Kingdom of Sarawak, then a British protectorate.**

The enemy bombing of Sibul lasted for about 15 minutes. As there was no anti-aircraft resistance from the ground, the Japanese planes flew off intact. There was panic among the residents of Sibul, and the European officers knew that soon the enemy would enter the town. Kuching, Sarawak's administrative capital, had already fallen, undefended, into the hands of the Japanese on Christmas Eve.

The unfolding Rising Sun against the blue skies of Kuching signaled the beginning of a new era, a new world. The somber scene of Imperial Japanese troops in battle fatigues escorting a line of disenchanted Europeans, many recognizable as officers of the fallen Brooke government; provoked despair amongst the Asian inhabitants. The majority of the expatriates were interned, but a number - including a group from Sibul that included Andrew Macpherson and nine of his staff, his wife Clare, who was eight months pregnant at the time, Mrs Bompfrey and her nine month old baby and five year old son and two visitors - managed to escape hours before the enemy advanced from Kuching. On the night of 26 December, 1941, they began the journey to Belaga on the upper Rajang. From there, they planned to travel up the Balui River to the remote village of Long Nawang, a Dutch army post situated in the highlands, some 300 miles distant in Dutch-controlled Borneo (now known as Kalimantan). Before departing, Macpherson radioed Sir Shepton Thomas in Singapore, who

advised him, "Do whatever you think best." Sir Thomas in turn contacted the Dutch government, asking them to expect and assist the group.

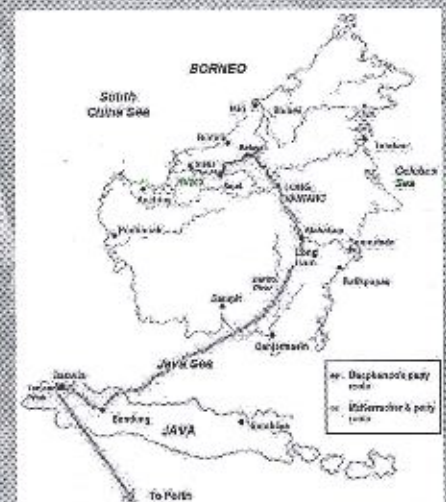
The perilous journey of 28 days, in the course of which they "one morning crossed one river 36 times, a raging mountain torrent sometimes knee deep, sometimes armpit deep and particularly powerful", ended on 22 January when the military outpost, which the travelers hoped would provide a safe hideaway from invading forces, was finally reached. It was situated in a mountainous area in a pleasant, temperate climate, with sufficient provisions for a year. Nevertheless, some of the men toyed with the idea of returning to Sibul to be interned, but changed their minds upon hearing of the Fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942. Local Dutch forces surrendered in March 1942. One group headed off back to Kuching, but was never heard of again. Another small group of five men left Long Nawang, three of whom were fortunate enough to meet a Dutch army launch, which took them downstream to a secluded Dutch army airfield, from which they were flown to Bandung in Central Java. Two of these eventually reached Perth, Australia, while the third man is believed to have joined a merchant vessel in Java. The other two were unfortunate enough to be picked up by Japanese marines and interned in Java.

The remaining group stayed at Long Nawang, and was joined in April by a Dutch Army group of 40 men. In August a number of missionaries from the United States and a priest, Father Joseph Feldbrugge, also sought refuge there. On 19 August two tribesmen arrived at the post with news that a raiding party of Japanese marines had been hacking its way through impossible terrain for over a month, and that they were

in sight of Long Nawang. Thinking that this group was actually a retreating force of the Dutch East Indies Army, the commander of the post dismissed the news and took no further action. It was a decision which was to determine the fate of every soul remaining there. Soon after, a party of 70 Japanese soldiers reached Long Nawang.

On arrival the Japanese ambushed the whole post, despite a flag of truce being shown. Once they had taken control, the surviving men were forcibly led to an execution ground. Rifle shots and grenade explosions punctuated the quiet, and before midday, the execution was over. A month later the women were put into gunny sacks, dragged to a nearby location and mercilessly bayoneted to death. This included Mrs Macpherson and her infant child. Native witnesses later told investigators that the children were made to climb nearby trees, then allowed to drop from exhaustion onto upturned bayonets. The Long Nawang massacre has been described as one of the worst brutalities of the Japanese occupation of Borneo, but despite intensive post-war investigations, it was never discovered which Japanese officers were ultimately responsible for this atrocity - nor was there any war time trial. My grandfather, Desmond Verdon Murphy, was amongst those killed.

This tragic story became known to my family only after I decided to investigate the disappearance of my grandfather. For more than 60 years, the circumstances of his death remained a mystery and no one knew what had happened to him. The last anyone had heard of him was when he was working in Sarawak, on duty with the Police Constabulary there.





## THE LONG NAWANG MASSACRE MEMORIAL

By Melissa Murphy

[This article was featured in "The Forces of War" e-magazine, Issue 14, 2016 – with acknowledgements to this publication].  
**Melissa** writes that she has been working on the following memorial for a few years now. She has been in contact with various organizations in Sarawak – Sarawak Tourism Federation, the Heritage Association, and the Minister of Sarawak Tourism and Heritage (now the Chief Minister of Sarawak). All were very helpful, but unable to offer any funding towards the Memorial. **Melissa** is now planning to write a book based on her grandfather's story and seek donations from friends and victims' families. [N.B. The MVG has offered a donation towards this worthy memorial].

The cost of the Memorial, which is in stone, is in the region of RM10,000 not including labour. It will be surrounded by a flower bed, and there is verbal permission for it to be situated in the WW2 Heroes Grave in Kuching.

**Melissa** adds that she would like to connect with families of the victims of this atrocity. If anyone has any information about this massacre or knows family members of the victims, please would they contact **Melissa** at:

[melissamurphy3003@gmail.com](mailto:melissamurphy3003@gmail.com)

### **World War II Memorial In Honored Memory of the Sarawak Civil Service Officers, Women and Children who fell in 'Long Nawang' August 26 & September 23, 1942**

**Andrew MacPherson (Resident Sibn)**

**Desmond V. Murphy (Constabulary Sarawak)**

**Francis L. Mansel (Division Treasurer Sarawak)**

**Mrs. Clara MacPherson (wife of A. MacPherson)**

**Infant MacPherson**

**S.G. Hanson (District Officer Sibn)**

**R.F. Sinclair (Customs Officer Sibn)**

**H.J. Spencer (Office of Information Sibn)**

**P.C.V. Cobbold (Borneo Co. Ltd. Sibn)**

**John E. Bach (Assistant Engineer PWD Binatang)**

**Leonard G. Lee (Sarawak Steamship Co. Ltd. Sibn)**

**Mrs. Jean Lee (wife of L.G. Lee)**

**Stephen H.K. Cox (Food Controller Sibn)**

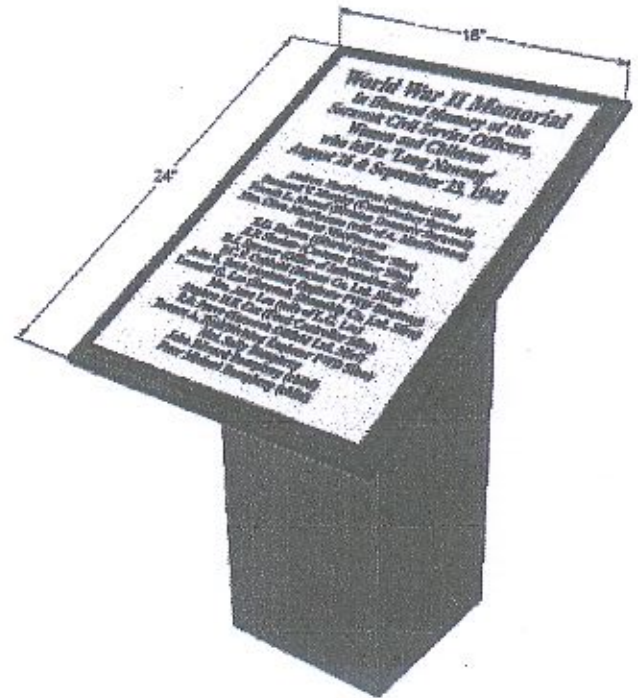
**B.B. Parry (Sarawak Oilfield Ltd. Miri)**

**Terence A. Reid (Division Engineer PWD Sibn)**

**Mrs. Sally Bomphrey**

**John Edward Bomphrey (child)**

**Peter Michael Bomphrey (child)**



WW2 Heroes' Grave Kuching



## **BOOKS**

**"From Shanghai to the Burma Railway. The Memoirs and Letters of a Japanese Prisoner of War"** By Richard Laird. ISBN 978-152-677-1117. 192 pages. Hardback. Due to be published in April.

This is a Pen and Sword book of Richard Laird's previously unpublished record of his wartime experience as a Japanese prisoner of war. It ranks among the most shocking. Captured after the Malayan Campaign, he was sent to the Burma Railway, and was one of only 400 out of 1600 to survive Songkurai No: 2 Camp despite terrible hardships.

Richard Laird was an RASC POW with a background in Shanghai and the Shanghai Volunteer Corps Scottish Company. From late 1939 until the war, he was in Singapore with Thames & Mersey Maritime Insurance then Brinkmann and Co. He features in the SCC soccer & rugby sports pages of 1940.

<https://www.pen-and-sword.co.uk/From-Shanghai-to-the-Burma-Railway-Hardback/p/17720?fbclid=IwAR2UVKqgE-eXQfbTt9t0xQNohi1j7vZc87sRRFf7L4c1c7Dilpv1I24XfD>

## **WEBSITES**

Wartime Heritage Sites in Singapore:

[https://hjtann.blogspot.com/2013/05/ww2-heritage-sites-in-singapore.html?fbclid=IwAR2A-hKZZ8ZDC17Dsfqgd-dWh8wFq\\_bYNA-0chXxT8KHQ3jsH3s3Zd6AT0w](https://hjtann.blogspot.com/2013/05/ww2-heritage-sites-in-singapore.html?fbclid=IwAR2A-hKZZ8ZDC17Dsfqgd-dWh8wFq_bYNA-0chXxT8KHQ3jsH3s3Zd6AT0w)

## **OBITUARIES**

**Ann Walker – MVG member who died on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2020.**

We send our deepest sympathies to Ann's husband **Alex** on hearing about **Ann's** death in February following chemotherapy. Those who travelled to Singapore in February 2017 to mark the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Fall of Singapore will remember **Alex** and **Ann** who joined the group. **Alex** writes that they very much enjoyed meeting other members of the MVG and the experience of attending the events in Singapore.

We report that **Innes del Tufo** died on 5<sup>th</sup> February aged 84. **Innes** was the wife of **Anthony del Tufo** formerly of Malaya. The death was also announced of **Lord Chalfont ('Alun' Gwynne Jones)** aged 100, who saw service in Burma as platoon commander, intelligence officer, adjutant and company commander. Post-war he moved into military intelligence and returned to service in Malaya where he was awarded an MC for his role in operations against the Communist guerrillas. He commanded an operation against the notorious Selumpur Branch in which 2 were killed and later a third was tracked down. Although wounded, the guerrilla ran towards Lt. Col. Gwynne Jones with a grenade. Gwynne Jones shot the man, disabled the grenade but kept the prisoner alive until he could be questioned.

In 1958 he was posted to Cyprus with operations against EOKA guerrillas.

On 11<sup>th</sup> March the death was announced of **Major General Ian Lyall Grant**, aged 104. He fought in Burma from 1942 – 1944. He was a Colonel in the Royal Engineers and won an MC for his role in building tracks for the forward attacking troops. After the war, he co-founded the Japanese Reconciliation Association, qualified as a gemologist and wrote 2 books about the Burma Campaign.

## **INFORMATION EXCHANGE**

**Graham Lee** writes:

Referring to **Mark Morrison's** article, my father (**Cecil Lee FMSVF**) was a keen weekend (Volunteer) soldier. Aged 30 in 1941, he became a sergeant in his unit. He recollected that Volunteer officers tended to be appointed from the senior ranks of British firms. Some were lazy and some incompetent. His friend **William Goode**, then a junior in the MCS (later **Sir William Goode, GCMG, Governor of North Borneo and Singapore**) was a Corporal. Men who could speak local languages and knew the country were not suitably employed. My father's most active service was in the anti-aircraft defence of the KL airfield where the remaining Buffalo fighters put up a spirited but vain resistance to several intense Japanese air attacks, before retreating to Singapore to join the main concentration of Commonwealth Air Squadrons. He remembered a cockney regular gunner saying to him, "As far as I'm concerned, the Japs can have bloody Malaya," an indication, perhaps, of the state of troop morale then – early January 1942.

It strikes me that the Governments of **Baldwin** and **Chamberlain** after 1933/4, despite official warnings, failed to recognize, or chose to ignore, the full potency of the hostile triad, Germany, Italy and Japan, so that defence measures remained half-baked in the Far East. After the scramble to reinforce Malaya and Singapore in 1941, in particular Commonwealth Air and Naval contingents available on 7/12/41 were no match for the composite IJA/IJN forces.

It tends to be forgotten that Japanese bellicosity over the Tianjin (Tientsin) Incident in summer 1939 nearly precipitated war with Britain when it was much more exposed in Malaya/Singapore than in December 1941. War was only averted by:

1). The astute diplomacy of **Ambassador Craigie** (in Tokyo).

2). The determination of the IJN to avoid war with Britain and the United States who were much concerned with Japanese expansionism in China. IJN policy was in the hands of Navy Minister, **Admiral Yonai Mitsumasa** and **Vice-Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku**, his deputy, both unpopular with fanatical nationalists on the ascendancy.

3). The perceived betrayal of Japan by Hitler with the Nazi-Soviet Pact, the USSR being seen by many in the Army as Japan's chief enemy. In the summer of 1939, British forces in the Far East were exiguous indeed: there were 3 Battalions of British Troops attached to the Singapore garrison: the FMSVF were even being considered for the front line, should the IJA land in northern Malaya. The RAF had 4 obsolete or obsolescent bomber squadrons, some old seaplanes, no fighters. The RN's China fleet, based in Hong Kong, was not designed to resist an IJN battle fleet. Before the Tianjin Incident was finally resolved, Britain was at war with Germany and HMG's focus and efforts were, perforce, on the German, and from June 1940, the Italian



threats. Only after the Battle of Britain, could Churchill turn his attention to the Far East. Even then, there was naturally more concern over the home front and the Middle East. Only in December 1940 were the Italians driven back in Libya. No tanks, Hurricanes or Spitfires for the Far East, nor an RN fleet. For the first half of 1940 Admiral Yonai was Prime Minister of Japan, but was replaced by the hawkish, if irresolute, Prince Konoye with the help of IJA extremists. British success in the battle of Britain seems to have given the firebrands pause. Churchill gambled on Japan's fear of attacking Britain and thereby tangling with the USA especially after severe economic sanctions against Japan by the USA, UK and the Netherlands in July 1941. Humans are adept at creating convincing rationalizations for their beliefs. Air Chief Marshal Brooke-Popham in autumn 1941, fully aware of British Military weakness in the Far East, thought Japan would attack the USSR, then in full retreat before the Wehrmacht. The IJN had become dominated by anti-Western junior officers. The Emperor was equivocal, his attitude still unclear to this day. On the 18<sup>th</sup> October 1941, Konoye was replaced by the bullish General Tojo. The truth could no longer be avoided. Churchill sent out to Singapore 2 battleships, no aircraft carrier could be found, as a deterrent to Japan, arriving in early December; the IJN was not deterred. Churchill overrode official RN advice against this venture. The IJN had established airbases in the south of former French Indo-China. Without air cover at sea, the Far East Fleet was destroyed by IJN land-based bombers, 3 days after war broke out. A shudder ran through all of the British Far East at this news. My father told me that he, my mother, and their friends felt despair at this antithesis of Trafalgar, but the consensus was that one could not desert the Flag.

#### DATES FOR YOUR DIARY.

**In view of the restrictions being placed on travel due to the Coronavirus, we hope to be able to hold the following events. If any of them has to be cancelled, we will inform those who have booked (and paid) to attend. Payment is not being requested yet. If the V-J Day Service has to be cancelled, we will refund any money paid to the MVG.**

**WYMONDHAM – Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> May 2020. Annual FEPOW Service at the Church of Our Lady & St. Thomas of Canterbury.**

This service has now been cancelled. The following message was sent by Peter Wiseman – Church Archivist and Historian:-  
“Regrettably, in common with many other gatherings, Wymondham FEPOW service on 17 May is CANCELLED due to countrywide precautions against COVID19 Virus. Providing that our regular church services are still able to take place, I hope to lay a wreath on the 17 May to keep the flame of remembrance alight. Next year’s service date will be announced in due course. Could I ask that, if your website carries our event, please be kind enough to have it amended.”

**MALAYSIA – June 2020. MPOA Commemoration Service in Batu Gajah (“God’s Little Acre”).**

We are not sure at the time of printing whether this service will take place. Please contact MVG’s secretary in Malaysia, Richard Parry, for further updates.

**NMA – Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> August 2020. V-J Day Service to mark the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Japanese surrender in 1945.**

Please see separate sheet sent in January for details, and let Rosemary know if you are still planning to come, as soon as possible. **Please do not send any money yet because we are not issuing tickets until we know whether this service can go ahead. It is too early to confirm this. When notified, the tickets cost £25 with cheques made payable to:**

**Mrs. R. Fell Malayan Volunteers Group.** We have kept the reservation for the dining room facility OAK 1 for morning coffee before the service at 12 noon, and the buffet lunch after the service. Friends and guests are welcome to attend with members as long as they have tickets. Places in the Chapel will be reserved for members and their guests.

**SINGAPORE – Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> September 2020. Service at Kranji to mark the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Japan’s surrender.**

Please see the separate leaflet for the programme of events and let Rosemary know if you are planning to travel to Singapore. A deposit for the Historical Tour has to be paid for in June, and there needs to be a minimum of 30 to make the tour viable. If you wish to stay at the YWCA, please contact them on: [reservations@ywcaflodge.org.sg](mailto:reservations@ywcaflodge.org.sg)

**We will keep everyone informed and ask for payment for the Historical Tour, SCC Lunch & Kranji coach in due course.**

**MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA – Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> September 2020. Australian Nurses Memorial Centre – 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Liberation of the FEPOW Nurses.**

Commencing at 7.00p.m. at the Rouce Hotel, 379, St. Kilda Road, Melbourne 3004. For further information contact: Office Manager on 03 9866 3756 or [admin@nmc.org.au](mailto:admin@nmc.org.au) for further information.

**LONDON – Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> October 2020. Annual Reunion and Luncheon at the RAF Club, Piccadilly – 12 noon – 5p.m.**

The Sovereigns’ Room has been booked for the annual luncheon. Our speaker this year is Colin Hygate who will be talking about his father’s wartime experiences. More details about menu and cost will be given in July.

**LONDON – Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> November 2020. Cross Planting Ceremony at Westminster Abbey.**

**LONDON – Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> November 2020. Remembrance Sunday and March Past at the Cenotaph in Whitehall.**

**MALAYSIA. November 2020. Remembrance Services in Kuala Lumpur and Penang**

**CANADA - 11<sup>th</sup> November 2020. Armistice Day Service**

**NMA – Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> December 2020. Anniversary of the sinking of HMS Prince of Wales and HMS Repulse.**

#### CONTACTS

**ELIZABETH ADAMSON – MVG Secretary in Australia**

5, Penistone Street, Greenwood 6024, Perth, Western Australia. Tel: 089247 3374 e-mail: [bunneyelizabeth5@gmail.com](mailto:bunneyelizabeth5@gmail.com)

**SALLIE HAMMOND – MVG Secretary in Canada and the USA.**

68, Kinnear Crescent, London, Ontario N6K 1V8, Canada. Tel: 519 473 1542 e-mail: [salliehammond@nmc.org.au](mailto:salliehammond@nmc.org.au)

**RICHARD PARRY – MVG Secretary in Malaysia and Singapore**

Apartment A2, 12B-02, Infinity Condominium, Jalan Tanjung Bungah, Penang 11200, Malaysia. e-mail: [rparry@hotmail.com](mailto:rparry@hotmail.com)

**JONATHAN MOFFATT – MVG Historian and Archivist**

49, Coombe Drive, Binley Woods, Coventry CV3 2QU. Tel: 02476 545 013 e-mail: [jonathanmoffatt@btinternet.com](mailto:jonathanmoffatt@btinternet.com)

**ROSEMARY FELL – Secretary/Editor of Apa Khabar/Membership/Subscriptions/Donations/Annual Luncheon**

Millbrook House, Stoney Lane, Axminster, Devon EX13 5EE. Tel: 01297 33045 e-mail: [rosemaryfell11@gmail.com](mailto:rosemaryfell11@gmail.com)