

# APA KHABAR

Patron: Her Grace The Duchess of Norfolk

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



**72nd EDITION  
OCTOBER 2022**



**We mourn the loss of Her Majesty The Queen Elizabeth II  
1926 - 2022**



## **HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN ELIZABETH II**

**21 APRIL 1926 – 8 SEPTEMBER 2022**

It is with profound sadness that we mourn the passing of our beloved Sovereign Lady, Queen Elizabeth II. I write to express, on behalf of members of the Malayan Volunteers Group, our deepest feelings of sorrow and grief.

Many of us will have witnessed the whole of her long and glorious reign and her exemplary life – her extraordinary dignity, wisdom and devotion to duty right to the end. We thank her from the bottom of our hearts for her continuity and steadfast reign over the past 70 years, which has seen enormous changes since her Accession to the Throne in 1952. A magnificent lady, she will be sadly missed not only by this country, but also by the Commonwealth Countries, Realms and former Colonies over which she reigned or been their Head of State.  
God Bless Her – may she rest in peace.

I am sure we can all remember that day in February 1952 when King George VI died, many of us at school and summoned from our classrooms to hear the news. In my case, we were told to go to the School Chapel – all of us wondering what on earth had happened. We were astonished to hear that we had a new Queen. No doubt, we will also vividly remember where we were on the 8<sup>th</sup> September 2022, when the news of our Queen's illness and death was announced on the media.

After the death, last year, of her beloved Philip, HRH The Duke of Edinburgh, the Queen became the only still living member of the Royal Family to have served in the Second World War. We all know and appreciate the deep interest and respect the Duke held for all prisoners of the Japanese. As children of FEPOWs and civilian internees, we understand more than most the true meaning of the late Queen's remark, "*Grief is the price we pay for love.*" She would also have understood the Duke's interest in the Far East theatre of WW2 after he had served in the Royal Navy and witnessed the signing of the Japanese surrender.

As our Nation and the World reflect in sorrow and mourn the loss of our late Queen, our thoughts and sympathies are also with His Majesty, King Charles III, The Queen Consort, and all members of the Royal Family for their loss. We pray that The King may have the strength and courage to carry out the awesome responsibility of taking over the mantle from his mother, Queen Elizabeth II. We offer The King and his Queen Consort our steadfast support and love.

**Vive le Roi.**

**Long May He Reign.**

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## FUTURE OF THE MVG

CONGRATULATIONS TO JEYA ON HIS AWARD OF THE MBE  
A SECOND VOCAL ORCHESTRA CONCERT  
AND BOOK LAUNCH TAKE PLACE IN CHICHESTER.  
LONG NAWANG MEMORIAL PLAQUE UNVEILED IN KUCHING.  
V-J DAY SERVICE COMMEMORATES THE 80<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY  
OF THE FALL OF SINGAPORE.

### Future of the MVG

We are delighted to announce that **Colin Hygate** has agreed to take on the position of Secretary of the Malayan Volunteers Group from April 2023. We are also delighted that **Roger Willbourn** will work with **Colin** by taking over the collection of subscriptions from January 2023. We look forward with confidence and pleasure to 2023 when **Colin** and **Roger** take over, and we can be assured that the MVG is in safe hands and feel very fortunate that our future is secure. More details about the new arrangements for the collection of subscriptions from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2023 will be announced in the January newsletter. **This is very important to note because members will need to change their Standing Orders for payment into the new account. The present account, held in the name of Mrs. R.A. Fell, will remain open until the end of the fiscal year on 5<sup>th</sup> April 2023 for those members who prefer to pay by cheque. All funds held in this account will then be transferred into the new account on 6<sup>th</sup> April, and this account will be closed.**

### Congratulations to Jeya on his MBE

It came belatedly to our notice that our good friend **Jeya** was awarded the MBE in June as part of Her Majesty The Queen's Platinum Jubilee Celebrations. We have sent our heartiest congratulations and are delighted that he has received this well deserved award for all the work he and his team at the Singapore History Consultants have done to keep alive the memory of those who died in the defence of Malaya and Singapore in WW2. **Jeya** is one of very few recipients of awards given to about a dozen Singaporeans, one of whom was **Elizabeth Choy**, the wartime heroine to so many FEPOWs in Changi. The award is to be presented to **Jeya** by Her Excellency, **Kara Owen**, the British High Commissioner in Singapore.

**Jeya's** company now runs Haw Par Villa in Singapore, where models depicting Chinese mythology can be found – with some very blood-thirsty scenes, not for the faint-hearted.

See: <https://www.insiderecent.com/singaporean-historian-awarded-honorary-member-of-mbe-51776.html>

### Vocal Orchestra Concert and Book Launch

The second Vocal Orchestra Concert, to commemorate the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *The Captives' Hymn* which was first sung on 5<sup>th</sup> July 1942, took place at St. Paul's Church in Chichester on Sunday, 10<sup>th</sup> July. The Church provided the perfect setting, once again, to hear the wonderful music written for a women's internment camp choir in Palembang, Sumatra, in WW2. It also provided the perfect venue to combine the concert with the launch of **Barabara Coombes'** book about **Margaret Dryburgh** and **Shelagh Brown**, two of the women in this camp – **Margaret**, who had written the music from memory and **Shelagh**, who sang in the Vocal Orchestra Choir. The concert was attended by several relatives of these civilian internees, who had come from as far afield as Australia and the Netherlands, as well as from various parts of the UK, and was enjoyed by all. The Music was linked with poems written by **Margaret Dryburgh** and beautifully read by **Paula Tinker**.

A wonderful tea, provided for the choir and members of the audience, took place afterwards in the grounds of the Church during the book signing. It was a good opportunity to meet and talk to the families of those who had been interned. [See P.6]

### Unveiling of the Long Nawang Memorial in Kuching

With many thanks to **Melissa Murphy** who has worked so hard to bring to fruition the building and unveiling of this memorial. The MVG is delighted to have been able to make a contribution to a memorial fund in memory of the victims of this particularly horrific massacre of civilian men, women and children who were fleeing from the Japanese after they invaded Sarawak. We are also very grateful to the Sarawak Tourism Board and the Teachers' Education Foundation in Batu Lintang, Kuching, for giving permission for the memorial to be placed in the Memorial Square. See **Melissa's** report on Ps. 4 & 5.

### V-J Day Service

It was good to see many of our regular members and friends at our V-J Day service on Monday, 15<sup>th</sup> August, this year, and to meet new members. Our thanks go to those who took part in the service, which was arranged specifically to mark the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Fall of Singapore on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1942. Readings from letters, books, diaries and poems covered "War and Evacuation," "The Surrender," "Escape," and "Captivity." Poems describing captivity and freedom entitled, "The Sanctuary" and "Freedom" were also recited during the service. Due to a problem with the organ, we were unable to sing the second hymn, "The Captives' Hymn" and this was read instead. We are sorry that our organist, **Jim Tribble**, who had travelled from Scotland to play for us, was therefore unable to do so. Returning to the Visitor Centre after laying the wreath in our plot, a long lunch was enjoyed by all, and a good chance to catch up. See the full report by **Jonathan Moffatt** on P.3.

### Dave Croft MA

It was with great sadness that we heard of Dave's sudden and untimely death on Friday, 26<sup>th</sup> August 2022. His funeral took place in his home town of Boynton, in Yorkshire, on 9<sup>th</sup> July. The Eulogy, given by Tony Parrini (Chairman of the RAFBPA and Member of the MVG) can be found on pages 11 and 12.

As editor of the RAF Butterworth and Penang Association's newsletter, "Eastward," Dave has contributed many interesting and well researched articles for "Apa Khabar" about RAF personnel involved in the Malayan Campaign, many of whom were captured in Java and became FEPOWs. We are grateful to him for his interest in the Far East theatre of war, and shall miss his contributions to "Apa Khabar" and support as a fellow editor. The first part of his last article about the RAF's Photo-Reconnaissance Unit in the Far East in WWII can be read on pages 7-10. Our deepest sympathies go to his wife, Margaret.

### The Bata Shoe Company Ltd.

We are grateful to Donald Ruffell for sending another interesting reference to the Bata Shoe Company Ltd.

Forbes Wallace CPM, FMS Police and 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion The Royal Norfolk Regiment, father of his late wife, Diana, recounts his own and Captain Bob Hamond's experiences of visiting the Bata shop whilst a prisoner of war of the Japanese in his book, "War-Time Interlude of a Temporary Soldier 1941-1945."

*"There was a large branch of Bata Shoe Company about a quarter of a mile away from Hill Street and I paid them a visit one day to see if I could get a pair of shoes for myself on credit.*

*The pre-war Czech staff were still on duty, Bata being a Czechoslovakian firm they were not at war with Japan and therefore not interned. I explained my needs and they pointed to a vast pile of shoes which had been brought in for repair in November/December 1941 and had never been claimed by their British owners. Provided I signed a receipt I could have the shoes I wanted. They were afraid the original owners might come back after the war to claim their shoes, so the Czechs wanted proof of what had happened. Such was the tremendous optimism and faith in eventual Allied victory in the middle of 1942. Having collected a pair of nice brown brogues, I returned to camp in triumph and soon had 'orders' from the C.O. and other officers with their sizes. Over the course of some weeks I was able to fix up most of the officers of 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Norfolks with a new, or rather second-hand pair of shoes for which I duly signed a receipt. The final episode of this "shoe collecting" was most alarming, to say the least. On entering the shop I found to my horror about six senior Japanese army officers trying on Jack-boots, etc. I did not dare to turn and run, so I decided there was nothing for it but to brazen it out. I clicked my heels, saluted and bowed and took a seat between two Jap officers. I put my foot on the foot-rest, winked at my Czech friend and asked for a pair of gym shoes. They were quickly wrapped up, and having saluted and bowed once more out I went. They never queried my presence but merely bowed when returning my salute. With my heart in my mouth, I returned to Hill Street in double quick time."*

Bob Hamond's account of a similar incident at the Bata Shoe Shop reads as follows:

*"On one occasion when you and I were on No.9 Fatigues, I wanted some shoes but you had to go somewhere else and said you would meet me at Batas. There had been a Jap troopship in that day and when I entered Batas there must have been about 50 Jap officers there. I was appalled but it was too late to turn back so I sat down at a table with several Jap officers. They spoke no English (thank God) and were obviously curious about me but didn't ask me anything. The Czech came and brought my shoes (which I did not pay for) and I sat on – the longest 10 minutes of my life I think! You came in, saw the situation and said, "We must go" so, saluting my Jap companions who bowed gravely in return, we strolled out and then really hurried back to Hill Street!"*

### Judy Barradell-Smith writes from Canada

"I will be visiting the Kranji War Cemetery in Singapore in late February 2023 on a special mission to commemorate a POW captured at the Fall of Singapore but born and raised in my UK village of Aston Tirrold, Oxfordshire, who has no known grave and who lost his life on board one of the Hell Ships bound for Japan in February 1943. His name is inscribed on the Kranji Memorial. I was wondering if there is anyone who might want a photo of a particular grave there or one of the inscriptions on that monument. In which case, I would be very happy to oblige."

Please contact Judy on: [judybs1184@icloud.com](mailto:judybs1184@icloud.com)

### "2022 Belalau & Beyond" – Talk by Dr. Judy Balcombe on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2022. Judy says:

"On Thursday evening I was asked to give a Zoom talk for the History and Heritage Committee of the Australian Nurses' Memorial Centre in Melbourne. 15<sup>th</sup> September was the anniversary of the release of the 24 surviving **SS Vyner Brooke** Australian Army Nurses and sickest prisoners from Belalau Japanese Prison Camp at Lubuk Linggau in Sumatra.

In the talk, I endeavoured to speak about the liberation from Belalau Camp, the history of the War as it affected these prisoners between 1942 and 1945, our visits to the Camp sites of Muntok, Palembang and Belalau since 2011 and the many ways we have tried to ensure these prisoners and all who suffered continue to be remembered today.

If any one missed the talk and would like to hear and see it, the link is now available to view on the Australian Nurses' Memorial Centre website. The talk can also be viewed on YouTube, under the title, "2022 Belalau and Beyond – YouTube"

<https://www.youtube.com>

### Bert Warne gets the Freedom of Southampton

Our wonderful 102 year-old Honorary member, Bert Warne, who spent 3½ years as a FEPOW, and is one of the last living survivors of the Thailand-Burma Railway, was awarded the Freedom of the City of Southampton last November following the commemoration service in the Town Quay Park at which Bert laid a wreath in memory of the arrival of the Queen Mary in Southampton carrying 3,500 FEPOWs in 1945. The honour was awarded because of Bert's commitment to ensuring that those who had served in the Far-East theatre of war are remembered. As Bert remarked, "If you did something wrong, a Jap guard would come along and hit you. You stood there. You didn't retaliate, you took it." By the end of the war, his weight had dropped to 6½ stone.

## MVG V-J DAY SERVICE AT THE NATIONAL MEMORIAL ARBORETUM, 15<sup>th</sup> AUGUST 2022

Report by Jonathan Moffatt

28 members of MVG and friends gathered in the NMA Chapel for our annual V-J Day Service. Some had travelled a considerable distance – from the Scottish Highlands, the West Country and London. An evacuee came as well, as a then child Changi Gaol/Sime Road Camp internee, **Olga Henderson**, was there.

After a little 'Keep Calm and Carry On,' roll your sleeves up crisis management – the NMA staff had failed to check and inform us that the chapel organ was broken – the service proceeded ten minutes late. The broken organ was annoying because **Jim Tribble**, a professional musician and friend of **Sandy Lincoln**, had come with her from Scotland especially to play for us.

In her opening remarks, **Rosemary** welcomed those gathering at this act of Remembrance. She referred back to the Fall of Singapore and quoted **Dr. Stanley Pavillard's** description of the POW march to Changi: *'The Japanese had defeated us but had not broken our Spirit.'* **Rosemary** ended by quoting from **Margaret Dryburgh's** Captives' Hymn:

*'Give us patience to endure, Keep our hearts serene and pure, Grant us courage, charity, Greater faith, humility, Readiness to own Thy will, Be we free or captive still.'*

After the wreath laying by **Ruth Iversen Rollitt** and **Susan Wouters**, we held a two-minute silence then sang, 'Abide with Me' accompanied by a computer-relayed recording. **June Jackson** then read from Corinthians 2: *'We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed in our hearts we felt the sentence of death.'*

What followed was a series of personally chosen readings by MVG members; readings about loved ones, by them or by people they had known. **Anne Hinam** read from the letters to his wife by her father **Kenneth Dohoo MCS**. Like many others, he had been on his long leave in Australia when news of the Japanese invasion of Malaya came. He had no doubts about returning, setting out on Christmas day 1941. On return to Malaya, he commented on how *'everyone was doing two jobs, his own and something special.'* In his last letter of 7<sup>th</sup> February 1942 he wrote: *'Just off to a new job. It will enable me to indulge one of my hobbies. Not exactly safe...'* This was almost certainly handling small late evacuation craft with the RNVR. **Kenneth Dohoo** died in captivity at Muntok, Sumatra in October 1944.

**Michael Mowat** read from the diary-based memoirs of Singapore Volunteer **Paul Gibbs-Pancheri** published in the 1990s and entitled, *'Volunteer!'* **Pancheri** mentions three late MVG veterans in his memoirs: **Michael's** father, **Geoff Mowat**; **Sonny Matthews** and **Richard Middleton-Smith**. In the reading he described the surrender of his unit and the insistence of senior officers that no-one should attempt to escape.

**Imogen Holmes** read from **John Hedley's** diary-based memoirs *'The Last Days of Freedom'* describing his escape with other Johore Volunteer Engineers from Johore to Sumatra, eventually becoming a POW at Padang. Later, **Imogen's** father, **Captain Kirkwood**, was medical officer to **John's** POW group at Acheh then on the Sumatra Railway.

**Alison Brierley** lead the prayers including a prayer for the people of Ukraine. **Sandy Lincoln** read **Margaret Dryburgh's** poem *'The Sanctuary'* and **Rosemary** read the Captives' Hymn, again so pertinent with events in Ukraine: *'May the day of Freedom dawn, Peace and Justice be reborn.'*

**Anthony Jackson** read from a letter written by **Father Gerard Bourke**, the RC Padre, Malacca Volunteer Corps/4SSVF to **Kathleen Reeve** about her husband **Lt. Eric Reeve**, **Rosemary's** father, who died in Chungkai camp hospital in December 1943. He described how Eric was *'one of the closest and most valued friends I had as a POW'* a practical and resourceful man who *'pulled his weight'* and never shirked his responsibility when others ducked difficult tasks. Ultimately, it was taking responsibility for 100 men in a terrible sub-camp near Kanu that led to his death.

**Keith Andrews**, the son of a Royal Artillery NCO FEPOW, concluded the readings with the poem *'Freedom'* written by **Gordon Highlander Lt. Robert Fletcher** in Kranji Camp in 1945. **Bob Hall**, whose father was a Royal Marine from HMS Prince of Wales and a POW in Palembang area camps, then led us in the Exhortation, FEPOW Prayer and Kohima Epitaph.

Led by **Ruth** and **Susan**, we then took the wreath from the Chapel to the MVG Garden Plot to lay it on the Memorial Stone and for final prayers. After the service we were ready for a good lunch and a very good chat at the NMA restaurant. It was good to meet two quite recent members for the first time: **Debbie Harris** and **Colonel John Moody**.

## **VICTIMS OF WW11 LONG NAWANG MASSACRE HONoured WITH MEMORIAL PLAQUE** **With thanks to Melissa Murphy**

In 1942, British Civil Servants from Sarawak were among those killed by Japanese troops in an attack on the remote Dutch outpost of Long Nawang in east Kalimantan.

On 21<sup>st</sup> July 2022, 80 years later, a memorial plaque in their memory was finally unveiled at the World War 2 Memorial Square at the Batu Lintang Teachers Education Institute in Kuching, Sarawak.

As a descendant of one of the Long Nawang victims, this plaque is the culmination of a long-held dream to honour the memory of my grandfather, **Desmond Vernon Murphy**. This began with my research about my missing grandfather, who was then serving as the Police Deputy Commissioner. His fate was unknown. My father, **Michael Murphy**, was only told that he was missing in action during the war. About 18 years ago, I started to investigate his disappearance and discovered rumours that he was killed in Long Nawang.

I hired a researcher in London, **Roger E. Nixon**, who eventually found records that my grandfather was among the victims of the Long Nawang massacre. Additionally, I found that the victims' remains were re-interred on Tarakan Island in North Kalimantan before being transferred again to Surabaya, in the Kembang Kuning Dutch War Graves Cemetery. It was closure for our family, especially for my father, to finally have confirmation of what happened to his father and his final resting place. Two months after knowing this, my father passed away after a short illness.

In the course of my research, I thought about erecting a plaque to commemorate the victims, but could not find a suitable location at first. During the Covid-19 lockdown, this idea was revived and I got back in contact with the Sarawak Tourism Federation (STF) heritage advisor, **Dato' Lim Kian Hock**, who later suggested the Batu Lintang site. I wanted the next generation to know what happened to the victims of Long Nawang. I believe that it is crucial for people to be aware of our history and to remember those who protected Sarawak, our land.

Sarawak Deputy Tourism Minister, **Datuk Sebastian Ting**, who unveiled the plaque, said it was fitting to pay tribute to the memory of the Long Nawang victims, and was proud to be invited to witness the historic event. ***"We are here today to remember those people who were massacred and those who fought for Sarawak. They were heroes that protected Sarawak and our people during the Japanese Occupation. We might not have that kind of quality of life or the standard of living we do now if it weren't because of these unsung heroes,"*** he said. **Ting** also expected the memorial plaque to be a significant attraction in the state's tourism industry.

The Long Nawang massacre is notorious as one of the worst brutalities of a brutal war, but unfortunately not known to many. Against the onslaught of Japanese forces advancing rapidly across Southeast Asia and the Pacific, crushing all that stood in their way, some British officials of the fallen Sarawak Government under the **Rajah Brooke** administration were compelled to escape into the jungle to reach the safety of the neutral territory of Dutch Borneo. **Andrew MacPherson**, Resident of Sibu and former Secretary of Native Affairs, had conceived a plan to escape from the Japanese and seek sanctuary at the tiny Dutch government outpost of Long Nawang on the Kayan River in Dutch Borneo. Before departing, **MacPherson** radioed **Sir Shenton Thomas** in Singapore, who replied, ***"Do whatever you think best."***

**MacPherson** and other Rajah officers, including my grandfather Deputy Commissioner Sarawak Constabulary **Desmond Murphy**, and Divisional Postmaster and Treasurer **Francis Lakin Mansel**, set off on their long arduous journey up the Rajang River towards Belaga on 26<sup>th</sup> December 1941. After a tortuous journey – 28 days later, they arrived at the Dutch outpost on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1942. Long Nawang had a pleasant climate, akin to that of a hill station. There was a four-bed hospital with a good supply of medicine and food. Arms and ammunition held in the fort were available for protection if need be. However, this safety net was not to be as the men and women of the group would only find themselves confronted with the brutality of a Japanese platoon.

On 20<sup>th</sup> August 1942, Japanese marines from the Yokosuka Special Naval Landing Force at Samarinda arrived at Long Nawang. They were heavily armed in expectation of resistance, but there was none. They had arrived unnoticed. The marines began their attack by firing a machine-

gun, which lasted for about two hours. A handful of **MacPherson's** party were killed and some of the women wounded. Six days later, on the 26<sup>th</sup>, the remainder of the men were executed on the hillside at the rear of the barracks. Their bodies were buried in two mass graves. The women and four children were held captive for 2 weeks. On 23<sup>rd</sup> September, ten Japanese soldiers put them in gunny sacks and carried them to the fort where they were bayoneted to death.

Witnesses related the macabre details of the killings of the children – too inhumane to believe. A five-year-old boy was stripped naked and forced to climb a pinang palm tree. The boy didn't want to climb down and the soldiers laughed at him. After tiring, he slipped down and a Japanese soldier plunged his bayonet into his rear end causing the child to die a horrifying and painful death. The last to be killed was a six-month-old infant who was playfully tossed into the air and then thrown into a clump of thorns of the 'jeruk' a local orange tree. As the child began to wail, the Japanese used a bayonet to silence the little one who was thrown into the shallow hole where his mother had similarly been mutilated minutes earlier. Australian **Bob Reece** included an excerpt of the witness's story in his book, "*Masa Jepun.*" (1998) The story was also published in the Sarawak Gazette, 1996 pp 123-6.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to **James Ritchie, Edward Mansel, Roger E. Nixon, Dato' Lim Kian Hock, Michael Pether, Ryan C. Rowland, John Tulloch and Dr. Julitta Lim** for their invaluable information, insight, knowledge and guidance.

Thank you to **Dr. Habids Buhigiba**, Head of the Mini Museum and administrators of the Institute of Teacher Education, Batu Lintang, for accepting the construction of the Plaque and assisting in allocating the best location for it. Thank you to Sarawak Tourism Federation (STF) for organising the unveiling ceremony.

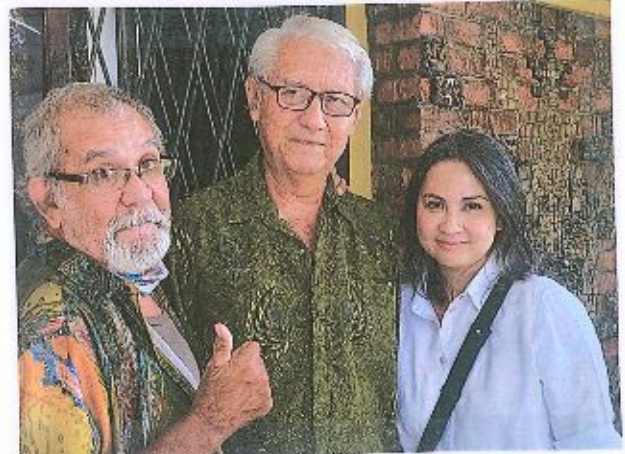
Lastly, my deepest gratitude to **Rosemary Fell** and the Malayan Volunteers Group, **Dato' Anthony Cooper** and the Sarawak Association, **Mr. Jason Brooke** and the Brooke Heritage Trust. I truly appreciate your generous contribution and confidence you showed in me for this project to succeed, without which the Memorial Plaque would never come to be.

**James Ritchie, Edward Mansel & Melissa Murphy**

**Dato' Sebastian Ting, (Deputy Tourism Minister)  
Edward Mansel and Melissa Murphy**



**Melissa Murphy placing the wreath on the Long Nawang Memorial**



**The Long Nawang Memorial Plaque**





## BOOK LAUNCH AND SECOND VOCAL ORCHESTRA CONCERT

10<sup>th</sup> July 2022

Report by Margie Caldicott and Barbara Coombes

### Women Interned in World War Two Sumatra, Faith, Hope and Survival

On a warm summer's afternoon, we welcomed almost a full audience to St. Paul's Church, Chichester, for the book launch of, "**Women Interned in World War Two, Faith, Hope and Survival.**" It was decided that in the light of recent events, it would be an opportunity to raise funds for the Chichester-based charity caring for refugees, '*Sanctuary.*'

**Barbara Coombes**, (author) and **Margie Caldicott**, (daughter of **Shelagh Brown**) met with invited guests at a picnic lunch in the garden of the church before the launch. Among the guests were: **Arlene Bennett** from Australia, (President of the Melbourne Nurses Memorial Trust), **Madelyn van Rijckevorsal**, (daughter of **Helen Colijn**), with friend **Tanja Beima** from Holland, **Rosemary Fell**, (Secretary of the MVG), **Yvonne** and **Ken Foley**, (friends of the late **Betty Pryce-Jones**), **Maurcen Francis**, (English teacher to the Charitas nuns), **Jeremy Allgrove**, (son of Australian Army Nurse **Mavis Hannah**), **Anthony Pratt**, (son of **D.F. Pratt** who died in Muntok), **Jancy Sheppard**, (whose grandmother, grandfather and great uncle died in Palembang and Muntok) and **Jane Neill**, (niece of **H.E.M. Mason** who died in Muntok).

The afternoon began with the Rector of St. Paul's, **Canon Simon Holland**, welcoming everyone and he was followed by **Tony Toynton** from '*Sanctuary*' who explained how the charity functions. We are delighted to say that the afternoon raised £850 for the charity.

**Margie** thanked **Barbara** for her work in getting her mother's story in print and opening the window on **Margaret Dryburgh's** early life, as well as focusing on the '**Garage Nine**' women. **Barbara** replied, explaining the motivation for writing a double biography of **Margaret Dryburgh** and **Shelagh Brown**. Although the two women were very different, there were many similarities and of course shared experiences. In her application to become a missionary, **Margaret Dryburgh** was asked if, "*...she had the spirit and energy to endure hardship and cheerfully meet difficulties and adapt herself to others?*" This she achieved in abundance.

**Shelagh**, a 'child of the colonies', who would have to become independent at a very young age spending time at school in England away from her parents, came from a strong faith and musical background. Interned with her mother, **Mary Brown**, they found themselves in '**Garage Nine**' along with **Margaret Dryburgh** and her colleagues. **Barbara** was delighted that the doll created in camp by **Shelagh's** mother, **Mary**, for **Celia** her granddaughter, was brought along by none other than **Celia** herself and was in remarkably good condition.

The characters we see during internment were moulded by their earlier lives and it is where we begin to see the origins of that tenacity, strength, fortitude and humour; it was their humour which drew me into this story when I first read some of their diaries; and it was these traits along with their steadfast faith that kept them going.

**Barbara** then welcomed the Vocal Orchestra who quietly entered along with musical director, **Chris Larley**, and narrator, **Paula Tinker**. Between the excerpts from the book, including the beginning of "*Alice In Internment Land,*" the VO sang selected pieces of **Margaret Dryburgh's** and **Norah Chamber's** arrangement of classical music for women's voices. The music never ceases to arouse the emotions of those of us listening; it is exceptional. The concert concluded with the VO singing "*The Captives' Hymn,*" almost 80 years to the day of its first introduction by **Margaret Dryburgh**, **Shelagh Brown** and **Dorothy MacLeod**. Whilst in the past audiences have been invited to join in with the singing, on this occasion **Barbara** read out the names of the '**Garage Nine**' women who did not survive and asked the audience to listen to the words of this wonderful hymn remembering not only the women from '**Garage Nine**' but all those women who died in these appalling camps.

**Barbara** thanked **Chris Larley** and the wonderful VO choir both, of course, had given their time to so many rehearsals, and thanked **Paula** for her narration. Although due to last minute printing there was only a limited number of books, **Barbara** signed the ones available whilst refreshments were served.

The book is now available from the Pen & Sword website, all good bookshops and Amazon in the UK and can be ordered from Waterstones in Amsterdam and Brussels. For those living in the States and Canada, it is available via Pen & Sword's distributor, Casemate. In Australia it can be ordered from 'booktopia.' **Barbara** is pressing Pen & Sword for the book to become available in Singapore.

**Barbara Coombes** and **Margie Caldicott** would like to thank all those who supported the launch; **Simon Holland** for the use of St. Paul's; **Chris Larley** and the VO Choir; the narrator **Paula**; and all those working in the kitchen preparing refreshments. We are both very grateful.

[Editor: It was a wonderful afternoon – the singing, narration and atmosphere magnificent. Thank you.]

## OVER THE SEAS AND FAR AWAY

With thanks to Dave Croft MA

**684 Squadron of South East Asia Command Photo-Reconnaissance [PR] Unit operated in the Andaman Sea, Bay of Bengal, Indian Ocean, Java Sea, South China Sea and the Gulf of Siam.**

In this article, where place names have now been changed, the names recognized earlier in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and as used in the 1943 National Geographic map of the Pacific Ocean for 1943 and the RAF navigator's map of Malaya 1953, have been retained.

**Introduction.** No.684 Squadron (*Invisus videns*[Not seen]).

The squadron was formed at RAF Dum Dum (near Calcutta) on 29<sup>th</sup> September 1943 and flew long range photo reconnaissance sorties during the Burma campaign to the Andaman Islands, Rangoon and the Burma-Thailand Railway. Squadron detachments were sent to the Cocos Islands, Ceylon and Burma until V-J Day when the squadron provided a high speed courier service within the Far East before moving to Bangkok in January 1946 to take on survey duties. The squadron disbanded in September 1946, being renumbered as 81 Squadron, based at RAF Seletar and RAF Tengah (Singapore) until 1970.

**1941.** Since the arrival of 67 and 243 Squadrons in early 1941, Air HQ Far East Command based at Sime Road, Singapore, had been requesting (from HQ Air Command South East Asia in India) photo-reconnaissance hurricanes from No.3 PRU RAF Dum Dum – without result! To overcome this two Brewster Buffaloes were withdrawn from the reserves in Singapore and converted at 151 Maintenance Unit, RAF Seletar. Both were stripped of guns and armour plating, aircraft W8136 being equipped with a single camera and W8166 modified with additional fuel tanks and three cameras. Both PR aircraft formed No.4 PRU RAF Singapore in December 1941. (*N.B. Some details relating to both aircraft are to be found in Apa Khabar, October 2021, P.23.*)

**1942. March, Bay of Bengal.** Seven (later another 18) Kawanishi H6K (Allied codename *Mavis*) long range reconnaissance flying boats of the Imperial Japanese Navy arrived at Port Blair in the Andaman Islands having been flown in from Sabang. These were later reinforced with three Mitsubishi A5M (*Claude*) fighters and Mitsubishi F1M (*Pete*) ship and shore based floatplanes for short range patrol duties. Later these were reinforced with additional ship borne reconnaissance seaplanes.

**1943.** Following the loss of Malaya, Singapore and Indonesia to the Japanese in 1942, there was a rethink in 1943 about how future long distance aerial reconnaissance flights were to be undertaken over Burma and Malaya from Ceylon and India. There was a need to replace the current airframe time expired PR B25 Mitchells of No. 681 (PR) Squadron based at Dum Dum with Mosquitos that had a similar operational range and speed. Air Ministry approval was again requested for the conversion of several aircraft already based in India to be converted into Photo Reconnaissance 'variants' which was eventually granted. Also three newly arrived aircraft (to India) were transferred to 681 PR Squadron and all five were fitted out with vertical camera mountings. This was an improvement over the initial situation regarding the Mitchells, but still not the same as the later models of PRU Long Range (LR) and, very much later, Very Long Range (VLR) Mosquitos designed to carry multiple cameras and additional fuel tanks. On 29<sup>th</sup> September 684 Squadron was formed from a mixture of fast twin engine reconnaissance aircraft that were originally on the 681 Squadron inventory. The first Mosquito, a PR (LR) IX, was delivered to the squadron on 18<sup>th</sup> October (the second crashed at RAF Ranchi with fatal results), followed by the arrival of another on 23<sup>rd</sup> October. On 21<sup>st</sup> October, the first of 33 PR survey flights was made over Burma by the first 684 LRR Mosquito flying over Rangoon and Magwe. On 24<sup>th</sup> October, the same aircraft carried out a reconnaissance flight over the Andaman Islands looking for Japanese shipping and flying boats ... 3 Japanese Army Ki-43 '*Oscar*' fighters attempted to intercept the Mosquito but failed. The same day an earlier PR 'converted' aircraft flying over Rangoon at 27,000 feet took photographs that were safely delivered back to base despite an attempted interception by Japanese fighters and anti-aircraft fire. A similar reconnaissance flight in another PR converted aircraft failed to return to India when on a flight over the Rangoon area on 2<sup>nd</sup> November. Two days later, the Japanese supply route from Moulmein to the Sittang Bridge was photographed by a LR Mosquito before all Mosquito flights were grounded on 12<sup>th</sup> November for inspection of possible structural failures.

9<sup>th</sup> December, 684 moved to RAF Comilla (East Bengal), where the unit CO and navigator made the first time reconnaissance flight on 15<sup>th</sup> December to Bangkok that revealed Japanese reserve positions and satellite airfields. The squadron returned to RAF Dum Dum (Calcutta) on 30<sup>th</sup> January 1944.

## 1944 – Part 1

The PR Force was formed in February 1944 with the amalgamation of 681, 684 Squadrons and the US 9<sup>th</sup> PRS (Photo Reconnaissance Squadron) and was now capable of covering distances of up to 1,000 miles. The 'Force' during this month also replaced the earlier Mosquitos with pressurized Long Range PR XVI's which also gave an increase in altitude over the earlier aircraft. Also, at the beginning of the month, 684 Squadron began a photographic survey of Burma with reconnaissance flights over the Indian Ocean which began in 1943. On 7<sup>th</sup> February there was a struggle with an enemy fighter over Port Blair (Andaman Islands). Two days later a long range PR aircraft on a flight to Mergui and Tavoy, was intercepted by 5 'Zeros' at 22,000 feet but without incident.

In order to increase the operating range of the Mosquito, one crew had been trialling a 90 gallon jettison tank fixed on the under fuselage of a long range Mosquito. Taking off from Dum Dum on 29<sup>th</sup> February they flew across the Bay of Bengal to the Andaman Islands and returned via Cox's Bazar, part of the flight being flown during violent weather. During the North Andaman part of the flight, Port Blair, Stewart Sounds and Port Bonnington were 'surveyed.'

During March, 684 Squadron made a number of flights to the Andaman Islands and over the Japanese Railway in Burma. On 22<sup>nd</sup> March, a crew flew south along the Siam-Singapore railway line without a specific destination being given ..... they reached northern Malaya, and returned from a flight covering 2,490 miles lasting nearly nine hours. *"This was the first sortie by an RAF aircraft over Malaya since the Fall of Singapore."* Five days later, a 684 Sqn. Aircraft flew a 1860 mile journey to photograph part of the Burma Railway and air fields at Bangkok and Hua Hin. Another sortie, by a different crew, went to the Nicobar Islands, covering Port Blair airfield on the Andamans and the radar site at Mount Augusta on the way. The final sortie of the month was of Car Nicobar Island, a first for photo reconnaissance.

April saw long range probing attempts to Khun Khaen in central Siam and Vientiane in Laos, mainly to test flying above monsoon weather. These flights were flown from Dum Dum until 13<sup>th</sup> April, and then from Cox's Bazar where the aircraft flew in the evening before so that an early morning start the next day would avoid monsoon cloud build up.

On 4<sup>th</sup> April, a Mosquito set out to photograph Mergui but was prevented by cloud. Instead, they were able to cover the gulf of Mokpalin and Sittanh Bridge on the Burma Railway. The sortie revealed that recent damage from a bombing raid had been repaired and the line was open between Martaban and Rangoon .... but not for long as RAF Liberator bombers returned on 8<sup>th</sup> April and a PR sortie on 10<sup>th</sup> April showed two spans had been destroyed in the attack. On 6<sup>th</sup> May a detachment from 684 Squadron took a reconnaissance flight from RAF Alipore to Nancowry Harbour (Great Nicobar) to check for any Japanese shipping in the port. The round trip, which included return to the advanced landing ground at Cox's Bazar, was 2256 miles, at the very extreme range of the Long Range Mosquito (with extra fuel tanks). Should the worst come to the worst the Royal Navy had placed caches of food and survival stores on some remote Arakan Islands... but the aircraft just made it back to Cox's Bazar with a minimum amount of fuel left.

Additional LR Mosquitos arrived during May and June, but a significant number of operational sorties were 'scrapped' during May and June because of monsoon weather. During July, 3 Japanese airfields were photographed on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

## 1944 – Part 2.

During August a squadron detachment was based near Bangalore to carry out aerial survey work. On 11<sup>th</sup> August another detachment was sent to China Bay, Ceylon, for combined operations with No. 222 Group (involved in long range bombing and mine laying operations as far as Singapore and Sumatra. The squadron's detachment job was to carry out the first aerial survey of northern Sumatra and associated islands and, on 15<sup>th</sup> August, a reconnaissance of Nancowry and Sabang Islands was undertaken followed by a flight on 25<sup>th</sup> to Sambang (We Island) off the northern tip of Sumatra and then onto Sibolga Harbour on western Sumatra. The following day, on another visit over Sumatra, a previously unknown Japanese airfield was discovered at Padang Tidji near to Sigli in the north-west corner of the Island.

Towards the end of August, due to the build up of monsoon conditions, PR sorties almost ceased. However, on a memorable low level flight on the 28<sup>th</sup> that covered a section of the Burma-Siam Railway south of Moulmein (Mawlamyine today), the aircraft was damaged by anti-aircraft fire, causing the crew to climb to 25,000 feet to avoid further damage before returning to base at Alipore. The PR flight resulted in a bombing raid a few days later that caused a massive mudslide, blocking the railway. Clearly, the Japanese hoped that the A.A. fire would deter attack from the air. In addition, however, they located a POW Camp (Tamakan POW Hospital Camp) in close proximity to the bridge which was a deterrent against further attacks.

When Lt. Col. (Dr.) T. Harrison, who was in charge of the POWs, requested the Japanese officer in charge to take all possible steps to protect the POWs against a bombing raid, the officer (with typical Japanese Army logic of the time) replied, *"We have given you guns right beside the camp to defend you against the planes!"* Following the bombing raid, PR activities from China Bay were suspended until mid September when a sortie was carried out over part of Sumatra, before all were again suspended until October. However, 684 Squadron Mosquitos based at Alipore used Cox's Bazar as a staging post for long range high altitude flights (using long-focus cameras) into Burma to photograph places of possible 'military' interest. One sortie even covered Victoria Point and Phuket. All Mosquito operations came to a halt on 12<sup>th</sup> November, due to the discovery of faulty wing spars in some aircraft, although a survey flight to Phuket did take place on 30<sup>th</sup> December.

1945.

In January, several return visits were made to Phuket as a follow up to the December trip, with complete coverage of Phuket made over a 2,286 mile-trip there and back on 5<sup>th</sup> January. The China Bay detachment made similar flights to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and the extreme tip of Sumatra, distances that included a journey of some 1,000 miles across the Bay of Bengal. For these journeys, Flt. Lt. T. Boughton wrote: *"We were kitted out with jungle survival suits,\* revolvers, booklets and cards in various Far Eastern languages, and bags of Maria Theresa silver dollars+ which were apparently everywhere. If we had trouble 1,000 miles from home, we should probably have done well to land on a beach and survive the best we could, for the Bay of Bengal was utterly empty of shipping, although there was a slim chance of being picked up by one of the Dutch Catalina flying boats from China Bay..."*

10<sup>th</sup> February.

5 Sumatran airfields were photographed and on 14<sup>th</sup> February a series of low level reconnaissance flights over the Burma-Siam Railway commenced. As part of the planning for the forthcoming Operation Zipper later in the year, long distance flights to Phuket were made to survey possible landing areas (Operation Roger) by the Allied Forces. Unfortunately, with the approach of the annual monsoon there were limits to the number and destination of flights. What is known as an inter-tropical front is described by one Mosquito member as: *"...a fearsome barrier of cloud which reached from the sea up above our cruising level, and causing heavy airframe and carburettor icing, forcing us to turn back."* An example of the effect such a weather front can have on an aircraft at the time is given by Frank Griffiths in his book, *"Angel Visits – from Biplane to Jet."* At the time of writing, he was an officer pilot with 62 Squadron. Flying with the whole squadron on a posting to RAF Tengah (Singapore) at the declaration of WW2, he was delayed for a few days in India when he encountered an inter-tropical front, which he describes vividly: *"We left Calcutta in the usual formation of 3 aircraft and were soon in trouble and had to break formation and climb for dear life. Huge cumulo-nimbus clouds were down to ground level and these gave us no alternative but to climb and fly through them. We hadn't any oxygen, so I levelled off at 14,000 feet. The turbulence was so bad that it was a question of keeping the artificial horizontal indicator level – a reasonably safe process when you didn't know whether you were going up or down or turning!"*

*I noticed the vertical speed indicator winding itself up at 3,000 feet per minute despite the fact I was, apparently, straight and level and it must have been right because the altimeter was showing 18,000 feet and driving snow was coming into the cockpit through the ill fitting window panels. We shivered in our shorts and open necked shirts, when suddenly we 'dropped' to 14,000 feet while still straight and level! Rulers, pencils, maps and various bits and pieces 'glued' themselves to the aircraft ceiling! Glancing back I saw that Leading Aircraftman Pidd had been levitated to the ceiling of the fuselage whilst sitting on a magic carpet of engine covers.'*

\* The specially designed jungle survival suits were the idea of RAF pilot 33419 Clive Vernon Beadon, son of Col. Verdon Beadon MC of the 9<sup>th</sup> Gurkhas. Sqn. Ldr. Clive Beadon of 215 Squadron was commissioned into the RAF in 1939 and flew in both the European and Middle East Theatres of war before moving on to Wellington and Liberator bombers in the Burma Campaign during which he was awarded the DFC on 17<sup>th</sup> August 1945. When attached to HQ Air Command in India, he was involved in the shared production of two aircrew survival booklets followed by the design and production of the survival 'Beadon Suit.'

+ Maria Theresa Thaler (MTT dollar). Despite being a recognised international currency, the British Royal Mint stopped producing the coins after some 5 million had been struck in 1938. Production resumed in 1940. Also, dies were shipped to Bombay where, between 1940 and 1942, some 19 million coins were struck. The coins provided stability in those countries where the occupying powers produced war time paper currency in large numbers leading to inflation. These 'silver dollars' proved to be acceptable where the SOE operated in Japanese occupied territories.

**N.B. Frank Griffiths** served on 62 Squadron at the same time as **Arthur Scarf VC** and **Harley Boxall**, the father of **Sallie Hammond**, now MVG Secretary for Canada and the USA.

Throughout the spring of 1945, despite the awful weather conditions, reconnaissance flights to Phuket and the Burma-Siam Railway continued, and even a 2,000-plus mile journey along the Bangkok-Singapore Railway to the south of the Malayan border.

Operation Dracula took place at the beginning of May, but without the presence of 684 Squadron PR aircraft which were grounded by severe weather conditions. These improved throughout the month and the Squadron Mosquitos were able to use Ramree Island as an advanced landing strip enabling an easier coverage of Bangkok, Phuket and the "Railway." On 28<sup>th</sup> May, flying from Ramree Island to take low level photographs of the St. Luke, St. Matthew and Domel Islands in the Mergui Peninsula and then Bangkok harbour, revealed two "Thai" vessels which were regarded as enemy shipping. These were the *SS Suddhadib*, a merchant vessel carrying fuel and other cargo from Singapore, and *HTMS (His Thai Majesty's Ship) Anghong*, being used as a submarine depot ship. A courtesy call was made by RAF Liberator bombers from India on 31<sup>st</sup> May and 1<sup>st</sup> June ... both vessels were sunk on the 1<sup>st</sup> June!

**June.** The PR Development Flight was formed in Ceylon for photo transparencies to be taken of beaches so that beach gradients could be analysed from wave patterns. This was all in aid of preparing for Operation Zipper. For this to take place, PR coverage of a planned stretch of the west coast of Malaya in the Port Swettenham region was required. This area was just out of range for the LR Mosquitos flying from India and Ceylon.

[To be continued in January 2023]

Mosquito of 81 Squadron



Clive Verdon Beardon  
Jungle Suit Designer



**From the Editor:**

On 8<sup>th</sup> August I received the above article from **Dave Croft**, my friend from the RAF Butterworth and Penang Association, and fellow editor of "Eastward", despite the fact that he had just been diagnosed with cancer, and was seriously ill. I received a note on 9<sup>th</sup> August about the various spellings of 'Mosquitoes' and 'Mosquitos' – which spelling should be used for the aircraft in the plural, and which for the insect of the same name. **Dave** suggested that the preferred version for the aircraft was 'Mosquitos' – saying that 'Mosquitoes' reminded him of a swarm of insects! – and I agreed with him in a reply on 11<sup>th</sup> August. That was the last e-mail I received from him.

Very sadly, we heard that **Dave** died on Friday 26<sup>th</sup> August, after a brave fight. His funeral service was held on Friday 9<sup>th</sup> September, in his home town. We send our deepest sympathies to his widow, **Margaret**. [His Eulogy is included below].

## AS TOLD AT DAVE CROFT'S FUNERAL

I have been asked to address you as Chairman of the RAF Butterworth and Penang Association (RAF BPA) about Dave's time in the Royal Air Force and as a member of the RAF BPA. As I didn't serve with Dave Croft during his RAF service, I have been reliant on his former colleagues for this aspect of the story and therefore plead not guilty if the story offends in any way!

Dave Croft, was a ground radar technician who trained at RAF Locking. In service jargon, he was a ground fairy whereas air radar technicians were known as "Airy Fairies". He served at RAF Buchan and other postings and in 1967 was posted to RAF Butterworth in Malaysia opposite Penang Island. Corporals Dave Croft and 'Chunky' Andrews were the two radar fitters on the Type 87 radar supporting No 33 Bloodhound missile squadron. They were known affectionately as the Laurel & Hardy of the Bloodhound Missile Squadron due primarily to their physical appearance, but also they were DEFINITELY a right pair of clowns and comedians. I'm not sure who was the fat one or the thin one, but I can guess!!

Dave was very well known for his love of wildlife and at Butterworth this was a very dangerous hobby with cobra and viper snakes often frequenting the monsoon drains around the squadron. Dave would appear with his snake catching equipment (a long, hollow pole with a loop of wire out of one end). He would catch the snake in the loop and set off to Sick Quarters or Georgetown Hospital where the snake would be milked of venom.

In those days the only way to cross the Penang Straits was by ferry which was always overcrowded at the start and end of the working day. If he was transporting snakes to the Georgetown hospital, people would ask what he had in the box? His simple response "Just a Cobra snake" would result in an evacuation and Dave would get the best seat on the ferry home.

Dave was also a diver and used his skills to help catch fish for the Tunku Abdul Rahman aquarium in Georgetown. One day he saw a poisonous Tiger seasnake and threw his net over the victim but lost track of the head so he just grabbed at the net - and got the head not the tail! The policemen in the launch keeping him company were not impressed either! There are many other stories of his time in the RAF and at Butterworth and no doubt these will be shared later today.

The RAF Butterworth and Penang Association was formed in 1996 on Penang Island at the end of our first reunion visit. Initially we struggled to cope with the vast collection of material that members wished to contribute to the Association. Dave Croft was by now the archivist for the RAF Seletar Association and became aware of the commonality of information and decided to join us and help out.

We soon realised the talents of Dave Croft. No longer the clown, but a conscientious and caring person who really knew his stuff regarding the history of the RAF in Malaya, latterly Malaysia.

A few example of the appreciation people have for Dave:

**Rosemary Fell says, "Dave was a very good friend to the Malaya Volunteers Group. His interest and outstanding research into wartime Far East RAF records resulted in many excellent articles for the MVG's quarterly newsletter, with numerous wartime photos and references to his material which were useful to other researchers. His last article entitled, "Over the Seas and Far Away" about 684 Squadron of South East Asia Command Photo-Reconnaissance Unit was**

completed on 8th August just a few weeks before his untimely death. This will be printed in 2 sections in forthcoming editions of the MVG newsletter"

We had an amusing exchange of e-mails over the following couple of days in August about the correct spellings of "Mosquitos versus Mosquitoes," both of which Dave had read in reference sources. Which spelling should be used in the plural for the aircraft and which for the insect? As Dave wrote: "Currently 'Mosquitos' (no 'e') is the preferred version, and that is what I have used..... 'Mosquitoes' (with an 'e') remind one of a swarm of insects." We agreed. It's a wonderful example of Dave's attention to detail.

Sallie Hammond from Ontario wrote "My first email to David Croft RAFBPA in 2013 was to ask him if he would be interested in knowing more about Squadron Leader Arthur Scarf, V.C. (RAF 62 Squadron Alor Star/Butterworth December 9 1941) because "Pongo Scarf" had been a personal friend of my parents. David responded with enthusiasm. David assisted me with writing presentations on Scarf VC for various associations and Rotarians in UK and Canada.

Another writes:

"My thoughts are of a kind and gentle man who was dedicated in his work for the RAFBPA. His advice and guidance in researching my father's national service history was always encouraging and I think he was just as pleased as I was when I managed to visit the Butterworth air base in January 2019. Between us both with my written words and Dave's editorial skills, I believe an informative piece of work was published the same year for the newsletter.

Member Peter Fowle wrote, "I first got to know Dave during the visit with the BPA to Malaysia. Dave was always kind and caring and ensured we really feel part of the group. We celebrated a wedding anniversary whilst in Penang and Dave and Margaret were very much part of making it into a joyful and memorable occasion for us.

I have received many other messages from people who can't be here today. I am honoured to be given this time to showing the collective thanks to someone so dedicated and caring.

Personally, I keep expecting Dave to call out "What about the Chairman's input for the next magazine?" Well Dave, it's already done – I have it here on the lectern ready for you!!!

I shall miss this stalwart of the RAF BPA; if ever there was a difficult act to follow, this is it. Dave has served us all very well and has even drafted the next RAF BPA Newsletter. Dave – this is not the time or place to sing you "Just One Cornetto!", but I'm sure that when I next get asked for a rendering, I'll dedicate it to you.

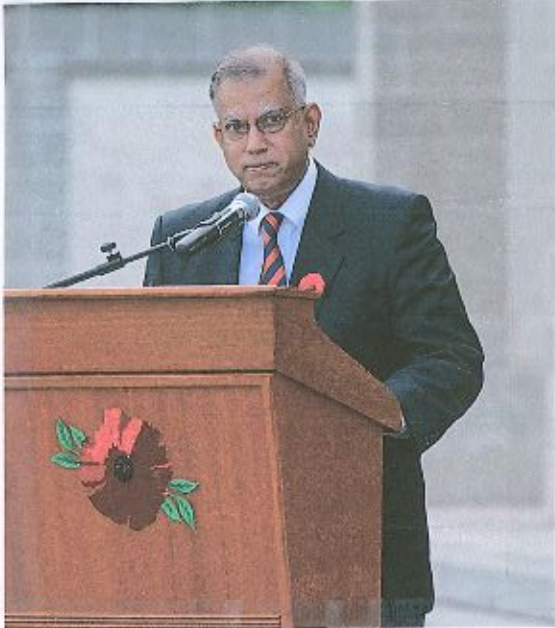
The RAF BPA had a great affection for Dave Croft and will be ever thankful for all his work.

Farewell friend and colleague. Rest in peace - we will all miss you.

Tony Parrini  
Chairman  
RAF Butterworth and Penang Association

## Platinum Jubilee Award of Honorary Member of MBE to Mr. Jeya Ayadurai in Singapore

Jeya giving a speech at the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
of the Fall of Singapore – 15<sup>th</sup> February 2022



**Jeya Ayadurai**, Singapore Historian and heritage entrepreneur, is now on an exclusive list of only a handful of his countrymen to receive the prestigious award of Honorary Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE).

The honour was conferred on him during the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations in June 2022, to mark her 70-year reign, recognizing his services to preserving Singapore, British and Commonwealth military history and war remembrance in Singapore. This award is given to non-British citizens around the world to those who have made significant contributions to advance Commonwealth and British interests.

**Jeya** joins not more than 10 Singaporeans in the Nation's post-war history to have received the MBE - joining **Lee Kuan Yew (GCMG)**, **Elizabeth Choy (OBE)** and **Paul Abisheganaden (MBE)**.

With thanks to the Singapore History Consultants Pte., Ltd. for the photograph

**Jeya** dedicated his award to Singapore and his team who have worked tirelessly to uncover and highlight Singapore's heritage, including its military past.

In 1995 he started the Singapore History Consultants Pte., Ltd., followed by Journeys Pte., Ltd., then Changi Museum Pte., Ltd., and more recently he has taken on Haw Par Villa Pte., Ltd.

**Jeya** said, *"We are dedicated to educating Singaporeans and the world about Singapore's history and conserving Singapore's heritage for future generations. However, I also recognise that history must be inclusive. Singapore's history includes a shared history with Britain and the Commonwealth, and any telling of our history must not exclude other countries who were joint participants with us, particularly in regards to World War II."*

For more than 25 years, he has tirelessly organised and called for Commonwealth Ceremonies to mark important war anniversaries and remembered the millions who sacrificed their lives for peace. From 2015, these Commemoration Ceremonies were the first in the world to bring together former WWII combatants such as Singapore, Japan and Commonwealth countries in a united message for peace. Since then, the Japanese Embassy has been included in other ceremonies in 2017, 2020 and this year 2022. SHC and Journeys specialize in reviving heritage sites such the Labrador Battery, Changi Museum, the Battlebox at Fort Canning Hill, Chinatown Heritage Centre and Haw Par Villa. All became award-winning top-ranked museum experiences. Changi Museum has now been transferred back to State agencies (the National Museum of Singapore).

### **Future Goals.**

These include building Museums and memorials at Kranji CWG Cemetery and other historical sites and the inscription of Haw Par Villa as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

### **Award Ceremony.**

The award of MBE will be conferred on **Jeya** by HM The Queen's Representative, British High Commissioner **HE Kara Owen** at Eden Hall – a historically significant black-and-white bungalow in Nassim Road.

### **IMPORTANT MESSAGE FROM SHAHAROM AHMAD (Malaya Historical Group)**

"As for now, all works and anything that is related to Green Ridge are completely halted. We have already removed the signboard as instructed by JKR and are now waiting for the best about the Green Ridge future time if the landowner wins the court battle and starts their working plan to develop the site.

It's very sad because we have already done our part to maintain the best we can to make sure people can visit easily. Now the site is abandoned and we cannot do more. We are now waiting for a miracle.



**Chapter 2 – WAR – 1939-1942**

We patrolled around Port Swettenham and had been joined by an intense young officer from Perak. Some Malay Volunteers, anxious about their families were deserting, and we met one on our travels. Our officer flourished his revolver on the cowering fellow as if he were a front line Japanese. Finally, we were ordered to Kuala Lumpur preparatory to evacuating south. I managed to see **Doy** who was soon to be evacuated, and then some news came of Slim River, very confused, and we started our trek south. Kuala Lumpur was a sorry sight with looting and fires, inhabitants on the roads with all sorts of household possessions in carts, on bicycles, on their heads even. We saw a society in dissolution and were rather numbed by the shock. Some of our A/Cars had been ambushed in Perak and had casualties. We were very raw. We retreated through Port Dickson with its memories of happier days. We were not much molested by Japanese planes, and we reached Malacca, where we stayed for a few days, in an idyllic spot by the sea. Again we set off in a big convoy through Johore via Segamat, near which on a side road my Irish driver incontinently and, I believe, out of sheer bloody-mindedness, ditched us in the dark down a bank. It was my command, and so sending the column on, I stayed with the car. When morning came there was a long string of ditched cars in the paddy fields beside the road, and planes came over and bombed us. An RASC unit came along and started pulling out cars but my car was too heavy for them. Whilst I was there units of the 9th Indian Division marched through to take up positions on what was to be the Johore line. **General Barstow**, later to be killed, passed, looked dismayed at the sight, and gave an order to clear the ditched cars still there. Our dispatch rider came back to me, and I went with him into Segamat to see if I could get someone to lift our heavy Lanchester. In the Rest House we met "**Daddy**" **Hawkins, MCS**, who had flown back from leave in Australia, and was now Quartermaster of a new guerrilla force known as **Dalforce**." I saw **F.F. Shepherd**, and a Forest Officer, festooned with parangs and God knows what, also one of the burgeoning irregulars. There was a Dutch officer with their old fashioned uniform and contingent from Java, and the Australians much in evidence now taking over. An Australian sentry was shooting with his pistols at, he said, "**boongs**" – looters. I got some food off **Hawkins** in the Rest House, interrupted by an air raid, and we had to take to a slit trench. At Police HQ **Paddy Flynn** was handing over a suspected spy to the Australian Colonel, and handing him the keys of the gaol. Then a raid and, I thought, a rather unseemly scramble for slit trenches, but the old Australian Colonel moved slowly and deliberately setting an example though not by word of mouth. How catching is panic. Finally I got in touch with an officer of the Indian RIASC, who went out and had a look at my ditched car and said he would get his heavy unit. Meantime, I spent a night with his unit on an oil palm plantation near Labis, and I felt I was really in things by now. An Eurasian "conductor" had a stock of looted wines and spirits but I could not stomach port when offered me. In the early morning we set out back and they got my car out. I had to get into it and guide it whilst it was winched out – quite a tricky operation. All the time, Indian troops were passing on their way up to their positions. I met some fellows I knew with an Indian battalion. Morale seemed to be good.

I am not sure of the sequence of events, for perhaps it was in the afternoon they winched out the car and took it to their HQ on the oil palm plantation where I spent the night. I think this was so, for it was next day we proceeded south and Australian troops wounded after their first engagement were passing in ambulances. Some careless Aussie driver banged into the back of our car and damaged it severely, so now I had to leave it in Yong Peng to be attended to, whilst I tried to contact my unit. At Yong Peng cross roads I had a shave in a kedai, and saw troops moving up to what must have been the crisis around Bakri where the 45th Indian Brigade, quite raw, were massacred and Australians had to be sent up. I remember a talk with a young officer, and then some Australians took me down the road to Rengat. At the cross roads, **General Heath**, Corps Commander, was conferring with his Staff, and just then several Japanese planes came over and dropped bombs, and we all took careful cover without haste in the belukar. Here it was that I caught sight of one of our managers, **Johnny Johnston**, of Lanadron Estate, and he told me how he had had to evacuate his estate on the Muar River to the 45th Indian Brigade at a moment's notice. I was trying to find my unit and think it was now I traced them and re-joined them, and was able to say my car was being repaired. I think **R.T. Mills** thought I had absconded! Fine fellow as he was, his eccentricities were increasing, and soon after we were all transferred to the main unit, in a hide in South Johore, and became engaged on patrolling up to Yong Peng. Here we saw for the first time some European reinforcements, the Norfolks, looking very green and bewildered.

At this stage without, I think, any premonition of what was to come, I had a feeling of glorious freedom. One was on one's own, and finding my way to Johore to my unit was a happy respite from rather dull work patrolling, and living in no great comfort, though often in abandoned planters' bungalows. On one occasion, I found myself with my car beside the Yong Peng turning and there a posse of red-banded officers, one clearly **General Percival** from his prominent rabbit teeth and receding chin, were conferring in the belukar beside the road. The crisis at Bakri was on. Just then a soldier came running

down the road from the Yong Peng crossroads, and told us that a truck had just passed and they had reported that the Japanese had broken through. He was in a bit of a panic but a staff officer came out of the confabulation in the bush and told him not to worry; we had just sent two platoons of the Loyals up. I thought – only two platoons! In any event it was one of the usual scares that take place and proved a canard. It did indicate, however, how exiguous were the forces we had to deal with the enemy. I seem to recollect we did a patrol up to the cross roads that night and all was quiet.

Our final move in Johore was south to an estate at Skudai, where the coast road branches off from the main road North. From here we operated patrols to Pontian Kechil and beyond where our troops were having a bad time as the Japanese closed in and outflanked them. During this time, two of our cars were ambushed and the crews, we thought, were killed, but in fact we found later they were unwounded and taken prisoner to Kuala Lumpur. In this ambush, the crew of one car managed to get out and back to base through the jungle. Here we saw the gallant little Gurkhas, and from here I was able to get into Singapore and pay what was to be a farewell visit to **Doy** who was evacuated together with the rest of the firm's wives on *S.S. Empress of Japan* on 31<sup>st</sup> January, assisted by **R.O. Jenkins** and **Norman Cummings** who then returned to their duties. Our rather antiquated cars were not involved in these affairs, and we saw no action.

The evacuation of the mainland was planned for the morning of 31<sup>st</sup> January 1942, and our section of four cars was informed that as we were lame ducks and expendable, we would be attached to the famous Argylls for the rear-guard at Johore Bahru, whence we now moved – to a hill and bungalow overlooking the Straits of Johore where the HQ of the Argylls was established.

Here on the 30<sup>th</sup> January whilst wandering in curiosity through the Argylls' lines, I saw for the last time my old friend, "**G**" **Gispert**, who fresh from leave in Australia had joined the Argylls as a platoon officer – his usual cheerful and delightful self. Here with the Argylls, we came into direct contact with the real army. Though much reduced after their disastrous experience at Slim, where they had lost two thirds of their number, they were, under their now famous Colonel, **Stewart**, still an effective fighting force and, with reinforcements, some fresh in from India, they numbered about 250 men. Their HQ was on a hill overlooking the Straits of Johore, when we joined them. Soon that day the Japanese planes came over and dropped their bombs on us. There was a move to the slit trenches and I heard one Jock calling to his pal, "*Dinna run, dinna run.*" Their colonel had enjoined that there was to be no scramble to slit trenches, but a solemn drill movement in normal time. Panic is so infectious it is easy to see the wisdom of this, and I noted it.

As I may have indicated, I was not a natural, nor a courageous soldier, but my back ground and upbringing had at least taught me to try to conceal fear.

My own fearless parents instinctively enjoined this, and I witnessed their courageous conduct under the "Blitz" in London. It might sound priggish to say so but my education, defective as it was, had at least instilled some sense of duty and discipline. **F.M. Lord Haig** in his diaries has a significant entry:

*"The King....(was) inclined to think that all our troops are by nature brave and is ignorant of all the efforts which commanders must make to keep up the morale of their men in war, and of all the training which is necessary ..... I told him of the crowds of fugitives who came back down the Menin Road (in 1914) from time to time during the Ypres battle, having thrown away everything they could, including rifle and packs, in order to escape, with a look of absolute terror on their faces, such as I have never seen before on any human being's face."*

The men of 1939/45 were not so different from those of 1914-1918, and a lot of nonsense is written on the subject, for which that great soldier, so often abused, provides a useful corrective.

In my youth, I was an avid reader of **G.A. Henty's** historical novels about the colonial wars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. **Henty** has recently been resuscitated and satirized but he represented the climate of his time.

So far in the Malayan Campaign the war for me had been on **Henty** lines – not much danger or discomfort or privation, and some fun, but all this was soon to change with the next two weeks before the fall of Singapore and the years of imprisonment under the Japanese in Singapore and Siam.

Meantime whilst we awaited what we thought would be a sticky rear-guard, it all turned out very peaceful. **Gispert** told me with a rueful smile he had got the job of leading the last platoon and had to lay an ambush, but contact with the Japanese was broken, and the Argylls retired without molestation.

On a bright morning of 31<sup>st</sup> January, 1942, feeling quite cheerful, we were ordered over the Causeway on to Singapore Island whilst Australian troops, forming part of the bridgehead garrison, marched over, as on peacetime manoeuvres, and the Australian Brigadier in charge, **Taylor**, waved us over. After us came the Argylls led by the pipers, and the Causeway was then blown.

We were sent to a harbour on the edge of Tengah airfield, below the Malfa farm bungalow where I had stayed in 1935 with the **Finchers** when the airfield was first being constructed. They had been happy days – for one month I worked on the airfield checking on the contractors and in the evening went into Singapore with the **Finchers**, great hosts and lovers of the high life. I saw Singapore as of yore when little bungalows stood on the Katong seashore where now there is Kallang

aerodrome, laid out just before the war. In the Malfa farm bungalow a genial Dutchman and Norwegian dispensed large hospitality, and the famous "Scots Consul," **Jock Carmichael**, with his beady eyes asked me anxiously as he drank and played the ukulele, "*was that a rat that ran across the rafters?*" Great days. What a contrast now and coincidence to be here. Here we were attached to the 22<sup>nd</sup> Australian Brigade under **Brigadier Taylor**, with an Australian Armoured Car unit attached. There had been some bombing of the airfield and surrounds, and in the bungalow were some rather demoralized ground crew, and a drunken Australian trainer, well known in Kuala Lumpur, who was later killed there when the Japanese landed.

We had some respite and went into Singapore, and there at the Raffles I saw my old friend, **Bruce**, about to be evacuated to Australia, as hale and hearty as a man of over 80 can be.

Soon the air raids were stepped up, and though we escaped we saw the flights of enemy bombers and heard the fatal thud of the bombs on some luckless creatures.

Early in the week before the Japanese landed, our regular **Brigadier** paid us a visit. He was an Argyll with a distinguished record in World War I, winning a DSO and MC, but had rather gone to seed with good living. Addressing our depleted and rather motley ranks he said we were a "*corps elite*," and told us what to do with the "*little yellow bellies*." I don't know what the Australians with us thought; they were a grand young crowd, and it is sad to think many were killed, one in Alexandra Hospital when the Japanese later broke in. I think we had no illusions as to the future.

An earnest young Australian Lieutenant was in overall command, and one saw how much attention they paid to their troops' comfort, for he promised us Mobile Baths and a visit from the Salvation Army who gave us comforts, the only goodies we ever got, but the Mobile Baths never materialised as the war overtook such amenities. It was a refreshing experience.

We were not to enjoy peace for long; soon the airfield came under increasing artillery fire, of which we had a grandstand view from our positions on a rubber estate alongside until suddenly the night before the Landing, it descended on us, and we dived for cover. I had been rather slack over slit trenches as the water table was high, but there was one large one, where we found shelter – about 5.30p.m. I think the shells struck the trees and scattered the shrapnel; only two chaps were wounded, and a tent by which I was lying fell down, and a young Scot said, "*Serge, I am pinned doon.*"

I must say that our party consisted of two cars, the other two having departed elsewhere, and two Australians. My friend "**Torch**" **Bennett** was in charge, and was at the time visiting the Colonel at the Jind Infantry nearby, I was his second in command. This first experience shook us all but we were lucky to escape injury.

As darkness descended the shelling increased and became a continual drum fire, likened by the old sweats to that on the Western Front they remembered in 1914/18. At about 10.30 p.m. 7<sup>th</sup> February 1942, landings began, and soon we heard machine guns rattling as the beach defences came into action. An Australian battery nearby started firing away continuously, and our bigger guns at Blakang Mati came into action, somewhat late it transpired subsequently, and great swishes of light zoomed over our heads on the way to the enemy. I had been handed for my squadron some hand grenades, and briefly instructed how to use them. I viewed them with some trepidation as young **Pike** in "*Dads' Army*" and placed them gingerly on the trench in front of us.

Soon after midnight an officer came up and told us there had been penetration. The firing came nearer and, as dawn broke, reinforcements arrived. The Australian two cars went off on patrol up the road – one of our cars had been peppered by fire and was useless. We were ordered in the remaining car back to the cross roads, where, when we arrived, we saw some Australians streaming across the airfield – I recall a plucky and solemn padre. There were Japanese planes overhead, and our young Scot cried, "*Let's get out of here; there's Hurricanes overhead; there'll be bugger all in a minute.*"

We were ordered back to Brigade HQ which had by now gone back to a point on the road to Bukit Timah, and we were then allotted to brigade defence, taking our guns out of the car. Soon soldiers were coming back, some with little on them, having swum the creeks, and declaring they were the last of so and so company. It was not a pretty sight. **Brigadier Taylor** was calm but very tired. As night came we took up our positions, and the Brigadier and his Staff slept. It was raining and very uncomfortable, but our morale was not too bad. I was left in charge, peering into the gloom, and expecting a Jap to loom up.

About midnight, the Brigade HQ stirred and started to withdraw, and we found our car firmly stuck in the mud of the rubber estate, and we had to dismantle it and render it useless. We marched off with the Brigade; it was raining. The Bukit Timah oil stores had been fired, and by morning we were all as black as ink. We moved through the Argylls, and as morning came were assembled along Bukit Timah road. It transpired later this withdrawal was a mistake through a misunderstanding of orders. The Brigade Major told us to go back to our own HQ. I was then in sole charge of our little group of four. I found our HQ at Thomson Road, and we were able to have a bath and some food, the first real bath (with a Shanghai Jar and dipper) for a week.

This inglorious denouement left us rather stunned but no doubt glad to be out of the schemozzle. Worse was to follow. HQ was about to move into Singapore and as we were packing about midday, two lorry loads of Australian soldiers streamed by,

with shouts that the Japanese were coming, and general panic. Our O.C. should have stopped but he gave the order to leave. Some of us were ashamed of this but finally, I regret, we went; however, we returned later and found all was peaceful, and an Australian Colonel cursing the men who had created a quite unnecessary panic.

In Singapore we moved around doing nothing of any use, until we ended up at Boustead's building on the front, and to do something I helped a Swiss Sister with some Indian wounded. Then I was asked to find three men and go out to Haig Road where there was an A/Car. I was glad to do this, but found difficulty in recruiting my men. I arrived out there to report to **Lt. Col. James**, then in command of a scratch brigade of Volunteers, Gordons and Manchesters, on the right of the line reaching the sea beyond Katong to Changi. He was his usual stubborn self, a real leader, and welcomed me. This, I think, was the Friday. His HQ had just had a heavy mortar attack. We started patrolling and took a stout, elderly Gordon Major down to his front line. We had under our command an A/Car with RAF personnel left behind when the RAF evacuated. The corporal in charge was splendid; the other two demoralized, as well they might be, left behind & nobody's baby, now ours. That night sitting in our A/Car, in a village I heard the radio from London reporting confusedly on Singapore. Some Volunteers were being ushered up to the line, Eurasian I think, with a Sgt. Major giving them a roughing up, get a move on, etc. "**Aren't there any regulars,**" I heard a plaintive voice say – they were quite unfit to put up against the Japanese Guards Regiments opposite (as we now know).

We were a section of three cars. One had in command, the Perak **Lt. Sly**, a sergeant who was a Selangor Planter, an accountant from K.L. **Tom Milbourne**, a most likeable fellow, and a young chap named **Conaghan**. I thought the latter rather done in and demoralized, and I offered to take his place. **Sly** said he did not want two sergeants in his car, and this, as it happened, saved my life. I joined the other car with **Corporal George Littleddyke**, a grand fellow, Scot and a great rugger forward, more of a leader than I. The other RAF car came under my command.

We were sitting in our harbour, when firing broke out and bullets landed in a canal nearby, and soon our excellent dispatch rider arrived and gave us orders to go into action – for the first time. We were to go down the Changi Road and fire across some open land with coconut trees dotted about, and **Sly's** car was to go left down the Payar Lebar road. I got the RAF car to join us and go up and down twice, firing across the scrub land, feeling quite excited to be in action. We got back to the village and were taking stock. There was much firing and Chinese running about – a Manchester Corporal asked us if his gun crew could be of any use. We then saw what we first thought was a Japanese crawling around the corner of the Paya Lebah road. **George Littleddyke** exclaimed it is one of ours, and we ran down and found poor **Tom Milbourne** from the other car with blood from his waist down. He gasped that they had been hit by mortars and all were finished. Just then, miraculously, an ambulance came by, and we got him in. He should soon have been in good hands but he had lost too much blood and died later. I know we should have gone down, but then our dispatch driver arrived and asked us to report back to **Lt. Col. H James**. We drove back and reported that there seemed to have been a breakthrough. He ordered us to go down again, and order the troops at the end of the Changi Road to retire to Kallang Bridge, where, we were told, a last stand was to be made. Mortaring was quite nasty, and **George** and I on one occasion had to crawl back to our car along a monsoon drain. All this was happening whilst, as we now know, negotiations for surrender were taking place.

My little Australian driver said as we set off that we would share the same fate as the others, but I was at least temporarily exhilarated by action, and even euphoric, and I patted him on the back and said we would be alright! It is a mood that can wear out!

After this, **Col. James** asked us to take him up to confer with the Manchesters in the line. I recall him telling an elderly major (later in the war officers commanding battalions had to be much younger) that he had ordered gunfire from the guns at Blakang Mati, and I also heard the major saying slowly that he understood the guns had been blown!

By now, rumours of surrender had begun to spread, and though denied, as evening came a silence at last fell upon Singapore, the first in a long week or more, and official word of surrender came to us with orders to lay down our arms and report back to our HQ at Boustead's Building. It was late evening by this time, and whilst there was some talk of trying to get a boat and escape I was by then physically and mentally exhausted. Some at HQ had had the time and opportunity to make arrangements and got away, but not all survived the attempt.

The likely impact of this disaster on our Empire and on Great Britain then made no impression at all on me. I must confess candidly that the end came with a sense of relief. I was whole and in one piece. I have told how by the merest chance I had escaped the fate of poor little **Conaghan**. After an extraordinary week with little sleep, tension had kept me going, and now it was relaxed. I could now get some untroubled sleep. Future perils might arise but for them I gave no thought. Sufficient unto the day...

Most certainly 15<sup>th</sup> February, 1942, was a most important milestone in my life.

Here I must stop. We marched into captivity at Changi, where before the War I had played football with the Army, and drank weak beer in their great Mess. I have related somewhere else the story of our captivity. I have tried to be accurate, frank, truthful and generous; whether I have succeeded I know not.

## CAPTION MISTAKE AT THE IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM

In July this year, it was brought to the notice of the MVG by Arlene Bennett, President of the Army Nurses Memorial Trust in Melbourne, Australia, that a photograph in the new WWII Galleries at the Imperial War Museum was displaying an incorrect caption. The photo was of women and children being evacuated from Singapore and the caption stated: *"Women and children evacuate Singapore shortly before the Japanese attack, 16 March 1942."*

We wrote to Dame Diane Lees DBE, Director-General of the IWM, pointing out the error and asking for this caption to be corrected and this is her reply:

Rosemary Fell BEM  
Hon Secretary  
Malayan Volunteers Group  
Millbrook House  
Stoney Lane  
Axminster  
Devon EX13 5EE



12 September 2022

Dear Ms Fell

Thank you for your letter of 29 August and for drawing our attention to the incorrect date given for the Fall of Singapore in the new Second World War Galleries.

I have asked the curatorial team to track this down and a photo caption in one of the interactive displays does indeed incorrectly state 'Women and children evacuate Singapore shortly before the Japanese attack, 16 March 1942'. This reproduces an error in the caption of the original Associated Press photo and you may want to draw it to their attention too:

<https://www.apimages.com/metadata/Index/Watchf-AP-I-MYS-APHS319653-WWII-British-Malaya-/d777310803d9468d81ef90253ab40238/1/0>

I am extremely sorry that this mistake slipped through the extensive proof reading checks carried out on the huge body of exhibition text and the curatorial team will contact the AV software company which prepared the interactive to have it corrected. Meanwhile I would like to assure you that the correct dates for the Fall of Singapore are referenced elsewhere in the interactive display and the incorrect March date is not repeated anywhere else in the galleries.

We always appreciate constructive feedback from our visitors and I must thank you again for highlighting this error so that it can be corrected.

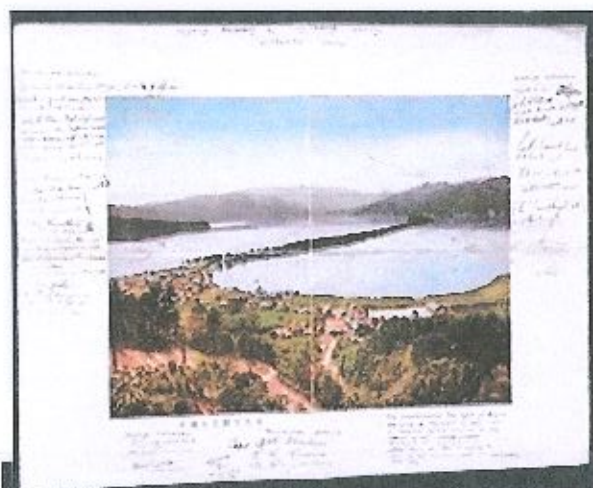
Yours sincerely



Dame Diane Lees DBE  
Director-General, Imperial War Museums



News that the tide had turned in favour of the Allies filtered into the camps via Japanese civilians who were much more friendly than the guards and this helped to maintain morale and discipline between officers and men. After heavy air raids and fire bombing of Osaka and Kobe by American aircraft in February 1945, the Japanese became worried that discipline might break down and in all camps across Japan men were separated from officers, many being sent to far away camps. My father was reunited with the two other officers from the original party of 750 men who had endured the long sea journey from Singapore and sent by passenger train to the west coast of Honshu accompanied by a guard to an established camp containing Australian, American, Dutch and British officers, 38 in all. The camp was on the outskirts of a village called *Oeyama* in an area known as "The Amonohasidate" which means "The Gate of Heaven." [Ed: This is the title of Richard Yardley's book, copies of which may be obtained from Rosemary Fell - price £5]



**This picture has been signed by all officers at the camp.**

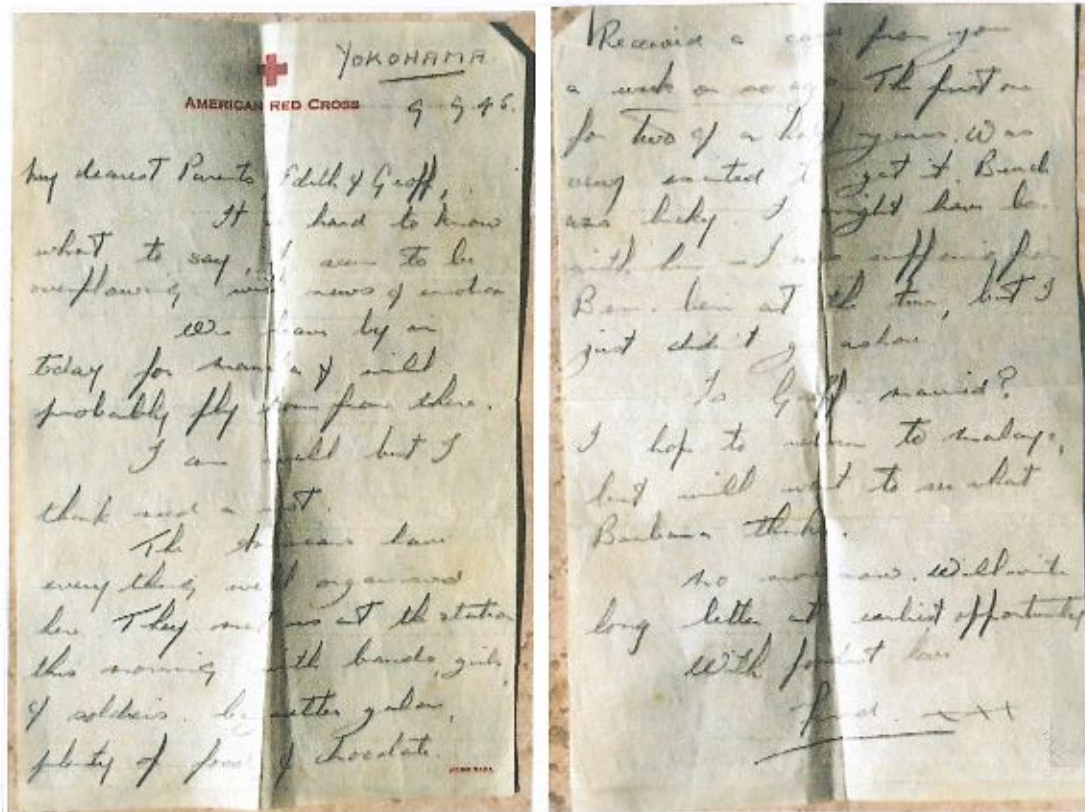
Richard writes, "We knew the end was near when the Canadians in the adjoining camp were not marched out at dawn and we saw the Japanese guards facing the sun with tears streaming down their faces and listening to Emperor Hirohito telling them that an Armistice had been agreed. Excitement was intense, the prisoners sung the National Anthem and popular patriotic songs, and a Thanksgiving Service was held.

On 26<sup>th</sup> August an American B24 Liberator flew over the camp releasing dozens of parachutes carrying large oil drums which we guessed contained food, clothing and medical supplies but every one fell into the sea and could not be reached. The pilot flew back to drop a small container with a note promising to return next day and, true to his word, two B24s dropped food, clothing medical supplies, cigarettes and special news sheets before dipping their wings and returning to base."

With two other officers, my father was to be returned to the Amagasaki Camp to resume command of the men for whom he was responsible during the sea journey from Singapore, but the camp had been destroyed and they ended up in an American POW Camp. He was ordered to locate the Japanese officer commanding prison camps in the Osaka and Kobe areas, Lt. Colonel Muriyama, and escort him to the care of the Americans.

"When I entered his office, he removed his belt and sword and laid them upon his desk in an act of surrender. The sword was two handed, heavily decorated at the hilt and was obviously a proud possession. Unaccustomed to this situation, I merely left it on the desk, unaware that I should have accepted it as part of the formality."

Orders were soon given for the movement of POWs and my father was transported to Osaka railway station to embark for Yokohama where officers and men were stripped of all clothing, showered and inoculated in the buttocks by Australian nurses, the first white girls they had seen for almost four years. Few men weighed more than 7 stones. Nothing was spared by the Americans, but doctors advised against over-indulgence. Entertainment was provided by Gracie Fields and Vera Lynn.



They travelled by air to Luzon in the Philippines and then on another aircraft to Manila and it was rumoured that they would sail on the Empress of Australia for Melbourne, but several officers became separated and found themselves in a tent with three American Army officers involved in camp administration. With knowledge of troop movements, they were aware that the USS Yarmouth would soon be sailing for San Francisco with 9,000 US servicemen and it was agreed to release one 9-berth cabin to British officers and my father was fortunate to be selected to travel.



ARRIVED MANILA BY AIR PROCEEDING SOON POSSIBLE  
 HEALTH GOOD VERY EXCITED

"Again there were no bounds to the generosity of the Americans and, after a voyage of 3 weeks covering 6,000 miles, we sailed under the Golden Gate Bridge with bands playing, 'California, here I come' and other popular tunes. The welcome home scenes displayed by the Americans for their returning troops were unforgettable and the nine FEPOWs lapped it up although the welcome was not really meant for us."

Met by a British Army officer, they were issued with British battle-dress, badges of rank, the 1939/45 Star campaign ribbon and a few American dollars before journeying across the USA on the Santa Fe Railroad arriving in Chicago 4 days later. Accompanied by American Red Cross nurses, they joined a train for New York and escorted by British Red Cross nurses and Army officers to a military camp on Manhattan Island.



"On 21<sup>st</sup> October, we embarked on Cunard's White Star liner 'Queen Mary' with returning diplomatic, civilian, military and Red Cross personnel, some 1,250 in all. Each of the nine FEPOWs was allocated a most luxurious first class cabin to himself on the upper decks.

The 'Queen Mary' arrived in Southampton Water on 26<sup>th</sup> October in thick fog and, unable to dock, I resigned myself to another day or more on board. However, a Canadian Major-General was due to attend an important meeting in London and a tender was sent to the ship to take him ashore. He invited the nine FEPOWs to join him! It was over four years since I had last stood on English soil and we were taken to an army camp on Southampton Common where we were to remain overnight. Telephone numbers had long been forgotten so there was no communication with relatives and, furthermore, Standing Orders quite categorically prohibited relatives from visiting camps to meet repatriated personnel.

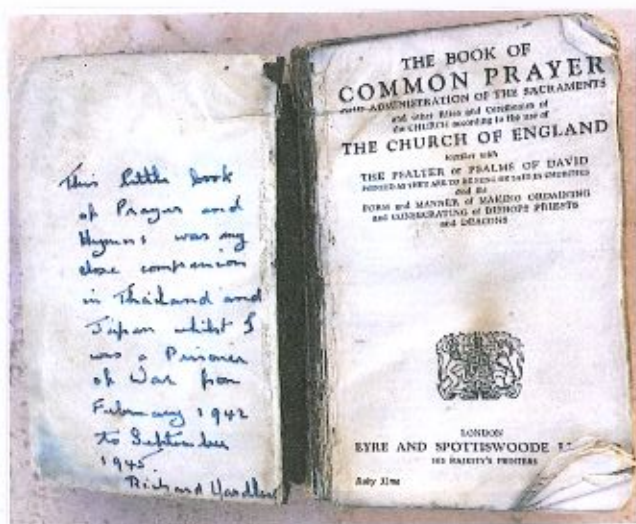
Meanwhile, the London evening papers carried headlines that some FEPOWs were on board the 'Queen Mary.' My wife, unaware that the ship had been unable to dock, decided to break regulations and travel to Southampton by train. She was in army uniform, not yet having been discharged from the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY) but on learning of the delay returned to London. There she read on placards on Victoria station that nine FEPOWs had been brought ashore after all and promptly returned to Southampton arriving at the camp guardroom at 11pm to find herself detained by the duty sergeant. I was still in the Mess bar and when a call was put out for me to report to the guard room I wondered whatever must have happened. I was told to wait a moment or so and suddenly my wife appeared – the first time we had seen each other for over four years.

After some awkward minutes, I returned to the Mess and Barbara was sent to female accommodation on the camp. I was given a travel warrant the next morning and we returned to Chelmsford to be met by Barbara's family, my parents, sister, brother and his wife, having travelled from the north of England that morning."

My father returned to Singapore with my mother after discharge from their respective services and after six months leave, to complete his service contract with the Colonial Office. I was born in Singapore in November 1946, and, as a family, we returned to England twelve months later. Throughout his captivity, he carried a number of small items including a photograph of his wife, Barbara, and a prayer book which became 'his close companions' through jungle, sickness, monsoons, shipwreck and typhoon. His cheque book, which he also carried with him, was used as an address book and contains the names and addresses of about fifty fellow officers, and also contains a schedule of allowances received at Amagasaki Camp. He managed to overcome his hatred for the Japanese and was able to forgive, though not forget, his captors for their inhuman treatment.



Barbara and Dick – October 1945.



## BOOKS

**"The Taste of Longing: Ethel Mulvaney and Her Starving Prisoner of War Cookbook."** By Suzanne Evans. Paperback 306 pages. Published September 2020 by Between the Lines.

Half a world away from her home in Manitoulin Island (Canada), **Ethel Mulvaney** is starving in Singapore's infamous Changi Prison, along with hundreds of other women jailed there as POWs during WWII. They beat back pangs of hunger by playing decadent games of make-believe and writing down recipes filled with cream, raisins, chocolate, butter, cinnamon, ripe fruit – the unattainable ingredients of peacetime, of home, of memory.

In this novelistic, immersive biography, **Suzanne Evans** presents a truly individual account of WWII through the eyes of **Ethel** – mercurial, enterprising, combative, stubborn, and wholly herself. "The Taste of Longing" follows **Ethel** through the fall of Singapore in 1942, the year of her internment and beyond. As a prisoner, she devours dog biscuits and book spines, befriends spiders and smugglers, and endures torture and solitary confinement. As a free woman back in Canada, she fights to build a life for herself in the midst of trauma and burgeoning mental illness.

Woven with vintage recipes and transcribed tape recordings, the story of **Ethel** and her fantastical POW Cook book is a testament to the often-overlooked strength of women in wartime. It's a story of the unbreakable power of imagination, generosity, and pure heart.

**"Dragon."** By Rose Gan. This book is Volume 1 of **"Penang Chronicles: Francis Light, the enigmatic Martinha, and the island of Penang,"** and featured in a webinar by Rose Gan entitled, "East Indiaman: The World of Francis Light," held at the Heritage Centre, Badan Warisan, Malaysia in K.L. in November 2021.

**"Pearl."** This is Volume II of **"Penang Chronicles"** by Rose Gan. It tells the story of **Martinha Rozells**, the eponymous pearl who embodies the diverse heritages of the Strait of Malacca in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. From her birth in Phuket to her childhood at the court of Kedah, the story enters the fascinating world of a well-born woman of the Indies. Meanwhile her new husband, **Francis Light**, is still the Dragon in search of his elusive pearl: a British Settlement on the Straits of Malacca. From the courts of Siam and Kedah, to capture by the French and Dutch, from the salons of Calcutta through the gun-running in the Straits, **"Pearl"** takes the reader on an astonishing journey culminating in the attainment of a dream on the island of Penang.

## WEBSITES

<https://www.insiderecent.com/singaporean-historian-awarded-honorary-member-of-the-mbe-51776.html>

The award of MBE to Jeya Ayadurai in Singapore in June during HM The late Queen's Platinum Jubilee. [See Page 11]

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1H02mPqKzFuLeIP6hTStb9g33hneAI0EN?usp=sharing>

This is the link video of the wreaths and flowers placed at Tanjong Kalian, the Peace Museum, Mr. Bowden's Memorial and the Catholic Cemetery in Muntok on Banka Island in February 2021.

**Judy Balcombe** adds: The lady with the petals is **Hanni** from the Timah Museum, **Mr. Fakhrizal** is in the orange shirt and the PMI (Muntok Red Cross) man is **Dery Aryandi**.

## GRAVE OF LADY SOPHIA RAFFLES

While attending his sister's wedding in August, at St. Paul's Church in Mill Hill, **Jonathan Moffatt** found in the Church grave yard the grave of **Lady Sophia Raffles**, second wife of **Sir Stamford Raffles**. She died in 1858, thus outliving her husband and their daughter **Ella** who died in 1840 aged 19.

This Church was also frequented by **Thomas Stamford Raffles** and his friend **William Wilberforce** during their lifetime.

During the service the congregation sang "Amazing Grace" written by **John Newton**.



**Jonathan Moffatt at the grave of Lady Sophia Raffles**

## FEPOW Memorial Locomotive Appeal

**"Rocks-by-Rail"** is the Living Ironstone Museum in Rutland which owns the Far East Prisoner of War locomotive, **'SINGAPORE.'** This is a small volunteer-run museum in Cottesmore which also acts as an educational charity. The loco was built in England in 1936 and supplied to the Royal Navy Dockyard in Singapore. On 15<sup>th</sup> February 1942 it also became a prisoner of war, and often worked alongside parties of prisoners unloading ships in the dockyard. It was repatriated to Chatham Naval Dockyard in 1953 and was retired in 1972. Since 1979 it has been preserved in Rutland and is a registered War Memorial to FEPOWs. In 1998, it was restored to working order and last steamed in 2008. Funds were being raised to overhaul the loco once again as a working war memorial, but the work was halted after thieves stole parts of the loco's valve gear. The museum plans to continue with its restoration plans despite the cost of manufacturing the stolen replacement parts, and has launched a public appeal to help raise the funds for this work to restore the locomotive to steam rather than it remain a static exhibit.

A target of £40,000 has been set and any donations by cheque should be made out to **Rutland Railway Museum** and sent to: RBR Treasurer, FEPOW Memorial Locomotive Appeal, 4, Main Street, Stanford on Soar, Loughborough LE12 5PY.

## Fred and Jane Landon's escape from Singapore in February 1942: Part 2

*Sgt. Fred & Jane Landon at Kluang, Johore, Malaya (late 1941?)*



This is the story of the escape from Malaya and Singapore of my parents, Fred and Jane Landon, at the beginning of 1942, told in their own words in various letters and notes. Fred was a forestry officer posted at Kluang in the north of Johore state. He had been a member of the Volunteers, A Coy, 2nd Selangor Battalion F.M.S.V.F., since 1933. He was appointed head of the Observer Corp in Johore but had been moved to Singapore by the end of January 1942.

The July 2022 edition contained extracts from Jane's diary notes of her escape to Western Australia via Batavia. This edition includes notes written by Fred of his own escape.

## Written notes in Fred's handwriting over the period 14<sup>th</sup> February to 1<sup>st</sup> March 1942

### **Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> February**

In the early hours of Saturday, 14<sup>th</sup> February, 1942, I was taking my turn of sentry duty where the East Coast road from Singapore crosses the Siglap drain, the foremost man in this part of the line. I was standing behind a brick wall on which I rested my 'Tommy' gun a few yards from the road block, and my fire was to be the signal for the machine gun behind me to open fire down the road. Our retreat from Changi had been so rapid that the Japs had not yet had time to follow it up, but they were to be expected at any moment, and their appearance would have placed us in a sticky position as our machine guns were without proper infantry support.

Shortly before 4 a.m. a lorry drove up from the rear and I was recalled from my post and driven away with several other men of our platoon 'for a special duty'. We were taken to the F.M.S.V.F. Headquarters on Leonie Hill, where our names were checked and where we found the rest of the party already assembled. We had little luggage with us, since we had been told to come along just as we were, but some, like myself, were lucky enough to have haversacks or packs ready filled, and these we were able to take with us.

We were bundled into one lorry, twenty three of us in all, and driven what seemed an interminable distance through the streets and dockyards of Singapore. During this journey in black darkness we gradually began to recognise the voices of friends and acquaintances, and I was delighted to find, among others, Maurice Murphy, "Squirrel" Green, Stephen Taylor, and "Barney" Walton, now a lieutenant. Captain Frisby, the only other officer with us, was in charge, and other ranks numbered twenty one. There were numerous speculations as to our destination, the only point of agreement being that we were to leave Singapore. There had been a strong rumour that day that an American force had landed at Port Swettenham and Port Dickson and had even retaken Kuala Lumpur, and several of us were convinced that we were to be attached to that force as interpreters and experts on local knowledge.

At last the lorry stopped and we were marched a little further and halted by the roadway to wait our turn. As the first faint light of dawn appeared shells began to fall nearer and nearer to us, and we were moved to a slightly healthier spot where we lay down on the grass and waited. Then the word came round that the ship had sailed without us and we were marched to the town, and, thence wearily to the Y.M.C.A building.

We were installed on the top floor of the rather old and flimsy-looking structure, where we felt uncomfortable, not only as regards bombs, but even more about the shells that were aimed at Fort Canning and went whizzing overhead. Gradually we drifted downstairs and found a room near where the meals were served, and most of the rest of the day was spent eating and drinking and trying to sleep on the floor. Several engineers from our numbers were taken away to the docks to put the engines of a launch in working order, and we were told during the afternoon that we formed part of a body of men specially picked from various units to form the basis for building up a new army in case Singapore should fall. We could none of us understand on what basis we had been chosen, but each man regarded himself as individually very fortunate.

We had been warned to be ready by five o'clock, but the lorries did not arrive until 6.15 and meanwhile the shell-fire was coming close enough to cause us considerable uneasiness. We learnt later that the building was struck by 3 shells about 9 the same evening and that 11 were killed and 11 injured. There was more delay at the docks, where we used the air-raid shelters to protect us from shell fire, but at length we made our way singly to where a harbour launch, the "Celia", was moored. She was a well-made launch with twin diesel engines, but only 50 feet long and 10 feet in beam. Nearly sixty of us were packed aboard her. Once we started off in the twilight, only to return to fetch a map. A second time we were hailed back and took on board Brigadier-General Paris and his staff, making 65 men in all, out of which we volunteers numbered 23.

The drive through the streets of Singapore had been depressing enough with rows of bombed and shell-scarred houses, but the view from the sea was gloomier still. At the docks not only the warehouses but the timber wharves and piles were flaming and smouldering. Behind was a ring of fires from ammunition and fuel dumps and the like, while the islands of Pulau Berani and Blakang Mati across the water were a mass of flames. It was there that most of the remnants of the Selangor 'A'(s) Coy [Fred's unit]. were stationed, and we felt sorry for them indeed.

We had no naval personnel on board and were ill-equipped for a sea voyage. Major Macdonald was in general charge of navigation and had Captain Blackwood (alias 'sleepy Michael') to assist him. We had no plan of the minefields, but Captain Blackwood had some knowledge of the mine field and we trusted to luck and our small draft of about 3 feet to carry us over the outer field. We had no charts, but only a map on a scale of about 100 miles to the inch to guide us. We had been given a bearing of 210° to take us to the mouth of the Kampar estuary, an estimated distance of 80 miles, but we had nothing but a small pocket compass in which a torch had to be shone at night. It was not until the error was about 5 degrees that any deviation from the course was noticeable, and the steering was so difficult that we often swung off considerably more.

While we were still among the mines in sight of Singapore and passing close to a blazing ship that had been beached on a small island, our engines failed, and we had visions of being caught by daylight in this exposed position. After an hour or two, however, our engineers got one engine going and we carried on with that, the steering being then even more difficult. There was no moon and the pall of smoke from Singapore made the night inky black. More than once we looked back and saw silhouetted against the flames a rocky island that we had just missed blundering in to.

### **Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> February**

An hour or two before daybreak we sensed land ahead and the water seemed shallow, so we anchored and waited for the dawn, rolling uncomfortably in a heavy swell. When it was light we found ourselves in a bay with no outlet ahead of us. We had strayed considerably northward from our course and there was nothing for it but to turn southwards, skirting the islands until we got back to the proper channel.

Having no chart we failed to identify the channel and went too far east, but seeing a ship ahead of us, we made for it hoping that it might be a Dutch patrol boat from which we could get help or information.

The ship proved to be a burnt out wreck but it was close to an island that looked inhabited. We had no dinghy, but some of us swam ashore and got in touch with some Malays from a Coastguard Station. They gave us charts and we found that we were on the South Brother Island. The nearest part of the mainland was at the mouth of the river Kataman, and they said that we should be able to make our way from there by land to Rengit, on the Indragiri river. We steered for the river mouth and there we came across

a launch with a number of employees of the Asiatic Petroleum Company from Singapore on board. Their engines had failed and they were aground. They told us that we could get no help at Kataman, which was just a fishing village, and suggested that we should continue southwards and up the Jambi river to the town of Jambi, where there was an A.P.C. depot from which help could be sent to the stranded launch. This we agreed to do, and we took on board a Dutchman from their company and a 65 gallon drum of Diesel fuel.

Our course took us close to the land as far as Tanjung Datuk on the equator, and thence for 60 or 70 miles across the open sea to the mouth of the Jambi river. It was 8 p.m. when we saw the dim outline of the headland and knew that we were crossing the equator. From there we had to steer by our little pocket compass, a task for which intense concentration was needed. Murphy, Green and I took turns as helmsman, and, after several almost sleepless nights, the strain was almost too much for us.

### Monday 16<sup>th</sup> February

It was nearly 5 a.m. before we felt that land was near and anchored in shallow water. At daybreak we were surprised to find ourselves only about a quarter of a mile from the buoy marking the entrance to the Jambi river, a veritable triumph of navigation in the circumstances.

We saw two small ships approaching from the sea, and they proved to be coastal trading boats making for Jambi, so we followed them across the bar and up the river, making slow progress. We passed one small town where there was a Customs House and a water boat from Singapore anchored in mid-stream, and later on met a British Naval launch travelling downstream. The river meandered through low and often swampy country, rather like the Endau and Rompin rivers of Malaya, but on a larger scale and with more frequent villages. We soon reached fresh water of which we drank freely, having been strictly rationed for the past two days. At dusk the other boats anchored in mid-stream and we tried to do likewise, but the anchor would not hold against the strong current, so we tied up alongside the larger ship and made more room by transferring half our men to it. They had a fireplace on board, and how we enjoyed our tea, the first hot drink since leaving Singapore!

### Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> February

Next morning we were too impatient to follow the other boats, but used our superior speed to press on towards Jambi, which we reached after 3 or 4 hours. The view that met our eyes was not a cheering one – burnt out launches and barges and smoking oil tanks. It was soon obvious that the cause was not bombs but demolition and we feared bad news. Sure enough, we learned, not only that Singapore had fallen, but that the Japs had taken Palembang, the next big town to the south, between us and Java. Our only way of escape was north-westward to Padang, the chief port on the west coast of Sumatra. No road transport was available as Jambi had already been evacuated by the Government and all petrol stocks destroyed, but we learnt that we could take a launch to Moeara Teboh, estimated at 2 or 3 days journey upstream, where there was a military camp.

The District Officer, who had been left at Jambi, was very helpful. He gave us plenty of tinned food and biscuits and allotted a paddle steamer for our use. A party of Australians had swollen our numbers to 81 and of these about 50 were transferred to the paddle steamer, while we 23 Volunteers manned the Cella, together with General Paris and some of his staff, Major Macdonald & Captain Blackwood. Before we left we found the main shop opening its doors to the populace to take away what they liked, and we were allowed to help ourselves to such articles as razors, tooth brushes, soap, hand-towels, vests and beer. We continued upstream for the remaining 2 hours of daylight and tied up to the bank for the night, a rich harvest for mosquitoes.

### Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> February

We left again at daybreak and spent the whole day following the interminable bends of the river until we came to the town of Moeara Temberi about 5 o'clock. We should have taken longer had not the high level of the water permitted us to follow the inside of the bends where the current was slacker. We thought of continuing our journey all night, but the abundance of floating snags brought down by the flood made the risk too great. It was a dark moonless night and it began to rain at dusk, so we were very glad when we were told we could be accommodated at the Rest House. For the first time for weeks we lay on beds and mattresses. It was quite difficult at first to get used to such luxury.

### Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> February

We rose early on a damp and misty morning and left as soon as daylight permitted. The current was less strong at first, but in the afternoon it was worse than ever and we made very slow headway. The scenery was more interesting than on the lower reaches of the river. There were a few hills to be seen in the background and villages were numerous, some of them extending for 2 or 3 miles continuously along the bank. It was our fifth day on the "Celia" and we were impatient for a change, although the voyage had been much pleasanter since our numbers had been reduced to about thirty. Food was sufficient though monotonous, a normal meal consisting of a tin of herrings among four or bully beef among six men and a few biscuits each. Having no stove on board, we could make no tea or any hot drink, but had to make do with water drawn straight from the river. There was some doubt as to whether the engines would stay the course, as they had been running flat out for two days, and one of the shafts was affected by a bent propellor blade, but the stout efforts of the Joice brothers kept them going.

We had expected to reach Moeara Teboh about sunset, but it took us more than two hours longer. Steering in the darkness was a great strain and the helmsman had to be relieved at frequent intervals. As we neared our goal Major McDonald said that Michael [Captain Blackwood] had better take over the wheel as he had made a study of the place. So Michael was awakened and took us up the wrong channel to a raft that proved to be the public lavatory, and there we tied up for the night. We were close to the barracks and the Javanese troops brought us hot drinks and curry, but we slept on board as there were no quarters ready for us.

### Friday 20<sup>th</sup> February

Next morning we moved into an empty barrack room and were fed by the garrison. Brigadier Paris spoke to us before leaving for Padang himself, and said that transport was being sent for us to follow him there. Padang was over 200 miles away across the mountains, and was the only port from which we had a reasonable chance of getting away to safety. We spent the rest of the day waiting with nothing to do but wander about the town and spend some of the five guilders that had been issued to each man.

### **Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> February**

Next morning was the same and we began to fear that we might after all have to march that 200 miles to Padang, but at mid-day Lt. Walton made some enquiries on his own initiative and found that a convoy of 4 buses and 2 lorries that had arrived empty the day before was meant for us. We set off early in the afternoon, about 80 of us, including those who had travelled up river in the stern-wheeler and the crew of the gunboat. There were three ferries to cross, which delayed us a good deal as two of them could only accommodate one bus at a time. We had expected to travel well into the night, but to our disgust were halted at sunset just beyond the third ferry in a field between a village and a rice swamp, while the lorries and buses were parked on a narrow section of road already half blocked with stacks of road metal. After a meal and hot drink we were left until daybreak to protect ourselves as best we could from the ravages of mosquitoes.

### **Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> February**

In the morning we drove on through hilly country until we came about mid-day to Sawah Loentoh, a mining town beautifully situated in a hollow among the hills. We were taken to a large hall where tarpaulins had been spread over straw to make a soft floor for sleeping, and handed glasses of iced water as we walked in, followed by a hot meal soon afterwards. In the afternoon we had leisure to bath and shave and walk around the town. It was at Sawah Loentoh that we met the main stream of fugitives from Singapore, who had come up the Indragiri river to Rengit, many of them after much more adventurous voyages than ours. They included many of the jungle patrol unit who had had permission to leave Singapore on the same night as we did, and others who had escaped from the Sunday night after the surrender until as late as the Tuesday morning. Several hundred had already passed through on their way to Padang, about 200 more arrived during the afternoon, and there were many more to come. The Dutch authorities performed wonders in coping with this flood of refugees and providing them with transport, food and lodging.

### **Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> February**

We were awakened at about 3.30 a.m. and marched to the Railway Station to continue our journey by train. We travelled very slowly but through interesting country, climbing up to a mountain pass through numerous villages and terraced ricefields, which extended for two or three thousand feet up the mountains, as they do in Java. We descended even more steeply through a wild and precipitous valley down to the plain of Padang. We reached the town at mid-day and had to march for nearly two miles in blazing sunshine, with loads that had become gradually heavier since we left Singapore with gifts and purchases and goods salvaged from derelict ships. We were accommodated in a school building and kept there until five o'clock, when we were allowed to wander round the town and spend another five guilders. We naturally expected to stay at least one night in Padang, but at supper time we had orders to move and at nine we left by train for the docks which are about seven miles from the town. With us Volunteers, whose numbers had been increased at Sawah Laentoh to over forty (nearly half officers), there were Australian troops and a naval contingent, but not the regular soldiers with whom we had travelled from Singapore. Our ship was still coaling and was not ready to receive us, and we had to get what sleep we could in the crowded train.

### **Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> February**

The Volunteers were the last to be taken on board and we were put at first on the boat deck with our officers, but later in the morning we were sent down to find what spaces we could on the already crowded after decks.



Our ship, the S.S. Dumaer van Twist was an old coal-burning K.P.M. ship of about 2000 tons that normally plied between Padang and Batavia. She had never carried troops before, and on this occasion was given practically no notice and no extra supplies other than tins of coarse bully beef. This with tinned herrings from her cargo, enough bread for three meals, tea without milk or sugar, and rice, was all the food available for us. At first we queued up eagerly for our food, but the monotony of the diet was such that by the fifth day we could hardly bring ourselves to eat it. To keep clean was impossible, especially as the use of fresh water was restricted after the first day, and many of us wore the same clothes the whole time.

We set sail at daybreak on the 24<sup>th</sup> January, expecting from the start that Tjilatjap, on the south coast of Java would be our first port of call. At noon, however, we reduced speed to dead slow, and later in the afternoon a boat was sent ashore to a cable station, while we cruised round in circles.

### **Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> February**

All night and all next day we continued cruising in the vicinity, waiting, it appeared, for orders. At about five in the afternoon the orders came at last and we resumed our journey southwards down the coast of Sumatra, keeping close to the shore, so that we might have a chance of swimming to safety if our ship was sunk.

### **Friday 27<sup>th</sup> February**

We passed the entrance to the Sunda Straits, the most dangerous part of our journey, during daylight on the 27<sup>th</sup>, and were most thankful to see the shores of Java. The ship made only about 10 knots against steady headwinds, and our expected time of arrival kept on being put forward, to our acute disappointment, until we at length arrived off Tjilatjap late on the evening of 28<sup>th</sup> February and entered the harbour the next morning. We learned later that several ships had been sunk on the 28<sup>th</sup> in the vicinity and we might well have run into trouble ourselves if our speed had been greater.

### **Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> March**

The harbour looked very beautiful and peaceful in the early morning light and we were full of excitement at the thought of going ashore after the discomfort of our voyage. There were several big ships at anchor and we hoped that one of them would take us still further away from danger. We had heard that the invasion of Java was imminent and were afraid that it would soon be overrun. Our ship berthed at 9 a.m. At 4 p.m. we were still detained on board, we had heard of the Japs' landings, and it was rumoured that we were to be sent away to a rest camp in the interior as there was no accommodation in Tjilatjap. Our luck held, however, and a few minutes later we were marched to another wharf, put on a barge, and ferried across to a large Dutch liner, the Zaan Dam, of the Java-Amerika line. We were installed on the starboard side of the deck surrounding the forward hatches, the port side being occupied by Indians. The presence of these Indians and the taking on board of many packages labelled "Columbo", caused some concerns to those of us who hoped to join our wives in Australia, but it was not long before we learnt that we were indeed bound for Fremantle.

### **Afternote:**

The Dumaer Van Twist, which took Fred to Tjilatjap, was captured by the Japanese soon after it left that port:

<https://www.awm.gov.au/visit/exhibitions/alliesinadversity/seafaring/shipdetails>

Three of the regular army officers who left Singapore with Fred on the "Celia" – Brigadier Archibald Paris, Major Charles Macdonald and Captain Michael Blackwood – were killed on their journey from Padang, when their ship, SS Rooseboom, was sunk by a Japanese

submarine on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1942: [https://www.roll-of-honour.org.uk/evacuation\\_ships/html/s\\_rooseboom\\_passenger\\_list.htm](https://www.roll-of-honour.org.uk/evacuation_ships/html/s_rooseboom_passenger_list.htm)

Fred and Jane escape from Singapore Feb 1942 - MVG pt 2 shorter

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## LONG FORGOTTEN, LONG OVERDUE

### The Saga of Alfred Bird and the Singapore War Crimes Trials. In Essay By Aimee Liu 7/09/2020

Seventy five years ago in September 2020, in one of the last official surrender ceremonies of World War II, Singaporeans gathered in their city centre, in front of the grand façade of the Supreme Court Building, to witness Japan's formal return of Singapore to British colonial rule. Singaporeans, like other Asians, had suffered innumerable atrocities and privations under the Japanese, and even the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) initially welcomed the British back as liberators. All were eager to see the enemy brought to justice for the suffering they had inflicted during the war. So it was that, three months later, British War Crimes Trials commenced in this same Court.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1946, the Straits Time reports:

Military personnel, Allied observers, news cameramen and reporters jostle among members of the public in the courtroom's gallery... The accused enter the dock, bow, and stand to attention. They wear identical khaki pants and short sleeved shirts. They have signs numbered from one to ten for identification. At the bench, three British military judges take their places. Two judges are British, and one judge is of Indian ethnicity. The presiding judge calls the court to order and declares that the accused will be treated "*in accordance with the principles of British justice.*"

This was the first of 131 war crimes trials prosecuted in Singapore between 1946 and 1948, which in turn accounted for more than a third of the 330 trials in total that the British conducted throughout Asia. Yet, as **Lim Jia Yi**, a research fellow with the Singapore War Crimes Trials Project (SWCTP) told me, these trials have largely been forgotten today. One reason for this historical neglect is that Japanese suspects tried in Singapore and elsewhere were lower ranking "Class B" and "Class C" suspects, unlike the 28 notorious "Class A" military and political leaders prosecuted at the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal. As compared to the Tokyo and Nuremberg Trials, according to **Ms Lim**, "the class B and C war crimes are relatively under-researched and lesser known" even within Singapore. The SWCTP seeks to correct the record and restore this chapter of the war to our collective memory.

My own introduction to these trials reflects the difficulty of unearthing this history, as well as the human price of losing it. About a decade ago, while conducting research for a WWII novel set in India's Andaman Islands, I learned about a British civilian named **Alfred Bird**, who was murdered early in the Japanese occupation of the Andamans. His case proved in several ways to be representative of the Singapore War Crimes Trials.

The Andaman archipelago had marked the western front of the Pacific Theatre during the war's final years. Located in the middle of the Bay of Bengal, some 990 miles northwest of Singapore, the islands were mostly wild except for the colonial capital of Port Blair, which featured a strategically desirable airstrip.

The port originally was built as a penal colony for Indian and Burmese independence fighters in the late 1800s. With hundreds of miles of water in every direction, no prisoner ever escaped. By 1940, however, after a succession of hunger strikes and the intercession of **Mahatma Gandhi**, most of the political prisoners had been repatriated. Port Blair's remaining population consisted primarily of released convicts and descendants who chose to stay on. The Indian Independence League had a strong foothold here, and **Alfred Bird** numbered among the local British who supported the Indian freedom movement. **Bird** also was one of the handful of British officers who had surrendered Port Blair on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1942.

Born and raised in India and a veteran of the Indian Army, **Bird** had lived in the Andamans for twenty years, working as a supply officer and deputy commissioner. He'd raised five children in Port Blair, and by all accounts, he was liked and trusted by the local population, with one critical exception.

**Pushkar Bagchi** was not a political prisoner. He was a thief who'd been jailed after **Bird** testified against him. One of the first acts of the Japanese was to release all the port's remaining prisoners – including **Bagchi**. No sooner was he freed than **Bagchi** arranged to have pieces of a wireless set planted in the house where **Bird** was now being held. He accused **Bird** of spying, and just six weeks into the occupation, the whole town was summoned for a public show trial. **Bird** was quickly convicted, then surrounded by Japanese soldiers.

Historian **Rabin Roychowdhury** describes **Bird's** horrifying final moments in his book, "*Black Days in Andaman and Nicobar Islands.*"

*"...his ankles were broken, his arms twisted and shoulders crushed... Someone showered hicks at his back and others punched blows on his stomach. His body was turned into a lifeless lump of flesh and blood... When his plight was ineffable (sic), convulsion started, the old men (sic) yearned for water but all in vain. To the contrary his head was severed in one stroke to quench the thirst of the earth."*

Although the story of **Alfred Bird's** death is well documented in Port Blair, it never reached his widow and children, waiting for news in England. They had last seen **Bird** the day they were evacuated, just one week before the Japanese invaded. **Bird** expected to follow them with the last of the Indian troops, but his ship never arrived.

It took nearly sixty years for **Bird's** grandson **Chris Pratt-Johnson** to discover the relevant archives in Port Blair. In all that time, the British Government had told the family nothing about **Blair's** fate. Even when **Pratt-Johnson** informed the Commonwealth War Graves Commission of his findings, they refused to add **Bird's** name to the Roll of Honour, citing insufficient evidence to support a ruling that his death was '*a direct consequence of the war whilst detained by the enemy.*' [To be continued.]

[Editor: Yet another example of the CWGC's disgraceful refusal to acknowledge civilian deaths whilst prisoners of the Japanese, unlike the Dutch who removed all their civilian POW dead to the Dutch War Graves' Cemeteries in Java.]

## **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

### **LONDON – Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> October 2022. Annual Reunion and Luncheon at the RAF Club, Piccadilly – 12 noon - 5 p.m.**

We are delighted that James Wilson has agreed to give a talk about his father, entitled, "Bishop Leonard Wilson. A son's reflections on a famous father."

James says: "Bishop Leonard Wilson's biographer commented that his religion and his humanity went hand in hand, each deriving strength and depth from each other. His experiences of torture in Changi Prison by the Japanese had a profound effect on his Christian faith and the power of reconciliation. As his youngest son, I want to reflect on how his faith and his humanity inter-connected both as a Bishop and a Father."

The Lunch this year will take place in the usual venue of the Sovereigns' Room. Please let Rosemary know by 30<sup>th</sup> September if you wish to attend, together with the names of any guests you would like to bring, and any dietary needs. The menu this year is one of the RAF Club's "All Round Favourites" – Starter: Baked Goats' cheese encased in pistachio nuts and served with quince and pear chutney. Main course: Roast breast of chicken, mushroom, asparagus and tarragon veloute sauce, served with seasonal vegetables and sautéed potatoes. Dessert: Vanilla and raspberry crème brulee, served with lemon sable. Followed by coffee or tea and petit fours. The cost is £45 per person, and payment is due by 30<sup>th</sup> September. Please remember to bring a draw prize with you. The money raised from the draw will be put towards paying for the electricity in the Muntok Peace Museum, which the MVG sponsors.

### **LONDON – Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> November 2022. Cross Planting Ceremony and Cenotaph Parade.**

The Cross Planting Ceremony at Westminster Abbey's Field of Remembrance will go ahead as usual. By kind permission of Revd. Pauline Simpson, FEPOW Padre who co-ordinates the FEPOW Plot, the MVG's 8" Poppy Cross with our logo and the Cross bearing the SSVF badge will be planted in this plot. Visitors to the Field of Remembrance can find the plot from the number listed on the board at the entrance. Small poppy crosses are available from the RBL stall near the entrance into the Abbey, for those who wish to plant a cross in the plot for their relative.

It was decided last year that the MVG would no longer march as a Group on Remembrance Sunday. Instead we would attend a Service at St. Martin-in-the-Fields, the FEPOW Church in Trafalgar Square, and lay a wreath there.

However, several members decided that they would like to march again this year, and tickets for the Parade were ordered from the RBL in June. Those who wished to march have now had their ticket applications accepted, and these will be e-mailed to them together with the instructions in October.

### **CANADA - Armistice Day Services - 11<sup>th</sup> November 2022**

A wreath will be laid on behalf of the Malayan Volunteer Forces in Ottawa.

### **MALAYSIA – Remembrance Sunday - 13<sup>th</sup> November 2022**

The Service will take place as usual at the British High Commission in Kuala Lumpur, with breakfast afterwards. We hope a wreath will be laid by a member of the MVG on behalf of the Volunteer Forces.

### **PENANG – Remembrance Ceremony – 20<sup>th</sup> November 2022 at 07.00**

Richard Parry will lay a wreath on behalf of the Volunteers at the Cenotaph on the Esplanade in George Town.

### **NMA – 10<sup>th</sup> December 2022 – Service to commemorate the sinking of HMS Repulse and HMS Prince of Wales.**

We thank Bob Hall for representing the MVG at this annual service.

## **2023 DATES**

### **MUNTOK – 16<sup>th</sup> February 2023. Radji Beach Service**

**WYMONDHAM – Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> May 2023. 77<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Relief of Rangoon in the FEPOW Church at 12.30p.m.**

**NMA – ALREWAS. Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> August 2023. V-J Day Service in the Chapel and MVG's Plot at 12 noon.**

**LONDON - Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> October 2023. Annual Reunion & Luncheon – RAF Club 12-5. Speaker – Michael Yardley**

**LONDON – Cross Planting Ceremony, Westminster Abbey and Cenotaph Parade – 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> November 2023.**

More details on all these events will be given in the next newsletter.

## **MVG'S ANNUAL ACCOUNTS**

Once again we are very grateful to Miss Sara Haines for preparing the accounts for the MVG, which she does without payment. These accounts include our Australian and Malaysian income and expenses as well as those in the UK. We also thank Elizabeth Adamson and Richard Parry for sending details of their income and expenditure for inclusion in the annual accounts. The Income and Expenditure sheet is included with this newsletter. If anyone would like to have a copy of the full set of accounts, please contact Rosemary Fell and send an A4 sized stamped envelope.

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