

APA KHABAR

Patron: Her Grace The Duchess of Norfolk

www.malayanvolunteersgroup.org.uk



**73rd EDITION
JANUARY 2023**



**Richard Parry, MVG Secretary in Malaysia and Singapore,
after the wreath-laying ceremony at the Cenotaph
on the Esplanade in George Town, Penang.**

APA KHABAR

Patron: Her Grace The Duchess of Norfolk

www.malayanvolunteersgroup.org.uk

73rd EDITION
JANUARY 2023



THE MVG FACES A NEW AND EXCITING YEAR AHEAD WITH A CHANGE IN LEADERSHIP. A RECORD BREAKING ANNUAL REUNION AND LUNCH. MEMBERS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD LAY WREATHS ON ARMISTICE DAY AND ON REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY

WITH VERY BEST WISHES FOR A HAPPY NEW YEAR AND

A SUCCESSFUL 2023

Importance Notice to all Members.

Enclosed with this newsletter are the details about the changes to the administration of the MVG which will take place during the course of 2023. Please read this notice carefully as it deals with the important changes to the way in which subscriptions are to be paid for the year April 2023-2024.

The annual subscription is being raised to £30 per family membership payable on 20th April – the first increase for several years. We are asking members to pay by Standing Order if possible, and to make sure that the changes to existing Standing Orders are made before April. The new HSBC MVG account will be opened on 1st January 2023, so that members can make the changes from January onwards and make payments into the new account if they wish. In the meantime, the bank account held in Barclays Bank in the name of **Mrs. R.A. Fell Malayan Volunteers Group**, will remain open until April and then the account will be closed and the funds transferred to the new Account.

We thank **Roger Willbourn** very much for all his work in setting up the new account and for taking on the job of Hon. Treasurer, and we are indebted to **Colin Hygate** for agreeing to take on the role of Hon. Secretary of the MVG from April.

Annual Reunion and Luncheon.

The return to the Sovereigns' Room at the RAF Club for our lunch, on Saturday 15th October, was appreciated by all who attended. We were delighted to see so many members, some of whom were attending for the first time, and to welcome our Patron **Her Grace The Duchess of Norfolk**. We thank her very much for her support at our annual luncheons.

Our speaker this year was **James Wilson**, youngest son of **Bishop Leonard Wilson** who suffered so badly at the hands of the Kempeitai after the 'Double Tenth Incident' during his wartime internment in Changi prison. **James's** talk is included on pages after the full report on the lunch. See pages 5 & 6.

Further Mistakes made at the Imperial War Museum about the Far East Theatre of WW2.

It has been brought to our notice, once again, of the inexcusable and glaring mistakes made by the Imperial War Museum about the events surrounding the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. The following text was posted on a military site on FB:

*Hi all,
I am seriously disappointed with the Imperial War Museum (IWM). They are commemorating the attack on Pearl Harbour, but have not mentioned that the Japanese attacked Malaya at Kota Bahru 90 minutes before Pearl Harbour. The 11th Indian Division and Hudsons from the RAAF were already engaging Japanese forces at this point. I have left a comment on the article on their page. Yes, an RAF Catalina was the first victim of the Japanese attack on the 6th December 1941. It just annoys me that Pearl Harbour has taken away the sacrifices made by the British and Indian troops and Australian airmen 90 minutes beforehand, leading to the popular belief the Americans were attacked first, which is incorrect. I am not trying to undermine what happened at Pearl Harbour, but trying to highlight what happened in Malaya 90 minutes beforehand and the sacrifices that were already being made. All for the simple fact of the International Date Line (IDL), as it was the 8th in Malaya but 7th in the UK and Hawaii.*

It is signed: Jase.

We thank **Judy Balcombe** for bringing this to our notice – and for suggesting that the MVG should write to the Imperial War Museum once again to point out this error. [Editor: This will be done].

Happy Birthday to Bert Warne.

We send our warmest greetings to **Bert** on the occasion of his 103rd birthday on 10th December. As reported in our October edition, Bert was awarded the Freedom of the City of Southampton in November 2021. He is one of the last living survivors of the Thailand-Burma Railway and MVG's oldest member.

Armistice Day and Remembrance Sunday.

Wreaths were laid on behalf of the MVG at the ceremony on Armistice Day, 11th November, in Ontario, Canada. With thanks to **Sallie Hammond** for arranging this. We also thank **Liz Moggie** for arranging an MVG wreath to be laid by the British High Commission in the CWG Cemetery in Taiping on Remembrance Sunday, and **Richard Parry** for attending the Ceremony arranged by the Penang Veterans' Association and for laying a wreath at the Cenotaph on the Esplanade in George Town. We are grateful to **Richard Brown** for attending the Cross Planting Ceremony at Westminster Abbey on Thursday 10th November, where two MVG crosses were planted in the FEPOW Plot. Five members of the MVG marched in Whitehall during the Cenotaph Parade on Remembrance Sunday, and handed in a wreath. See the report on P 7.

Lynette Silver MBE.

We are delighted to report from Australia that historian and author, **Lynette Silver**, has been awarded the honour of an honorary member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE). She was notified of this award in a letter, dated 20th October 2022, from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, and signed by **HE Vicki Treadell, CMG, MVO**, the British High Commissioner in Australia. The letter said:

Dear Mrs. Silver,

I write to inform you that, on the advice of the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, prior to her recent sad death, Her Late Majesty The Queen appointed you as an honorary Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. This honour is conferred on you in recognition of your services to British personnel who died in the Second World War and their families.

It is usual for recipients of honorary awards who are resident in this country to have the insignia of their award presented by His Majesty The King's representative. The initial liaison point for arranging this is Ms. Rachel Holmes, who would appreciate confirmation from you that you have received this letter. She can be contacted by e-mail [not given here]. She will be happy to answer any questions you might have on the announcement and presentation of the award.

In the meantime, you may put the letters MBE after your name with immediate effect.

Many congratulations.

Yours sincerely,

Signed:

HE Vicki Treadell CMG, MVO

British High Commissioner.

[Editor: To date we have not heard when the presentation of this award took place.]

Newspaper articles from Malaysia.

In an excellent article about the Taiping War Cemetery by **Alan Teh Leam Seng** in the *New Straits Times* (1), in which he mentions **Lt. Adnan Saidi** of the Malay Regiment (who died heroically in the last battle between the Allied forces and the Japanese in Pasir Panjang), and **Sybil Medan Kathigasu GM**, (a member of the passive defence resistance) he writes about five gallant local Taiping men whose graves can be found in this CWG Cemetery. In the Christian part of the cemetery there is only one local Malayan grave – that of **Corporal Chan Kam Weng** of the FMSVF, who was killed in action on 15th February 1942. In the section reserved for those of other faiths including Muslim, Gurkha and non-Christian Chinese Servicemen, the graves of **Corporal Ong Kim Sai**, **Private Tang Bee Choon**, **Lt. Sergeant Khoo Heng Peng** and **Private Lim Poh Aun** can be found. **Corporal Ong** was uncle to MVG member **Alex Teoh**. The article also praises the heroism of those who enlisted with the Volunteers during the late 1930s as the winds of war started blowing over Europe, and gave their lives when the Japanese invaded Malaya.

During the post-war Victory Parade in London in June 1946, **King George VI** and **Queen Elizabeth** are pictured with the Malayan Contingent.

In an article in the *Star* (2) the sad state of the World War 2 Pillbox at Permatang Damar Laut in Bayan Lepas, Penang, was reported. Due to erosion of the beach on which it was built by the British in the 1940s, the sea now submerges part of it at high tide, and the structure has started to lean over. It has been regarded as a landmark by fishermen and used as a look out point. There is a move to restore this and other pillboxes on Penang, including one on the mainland, by Penang Tourism. The work is to be carried out by George Town World Heritage Incorporated (GTWHI).

“Our history is often lost when the people who should have documented it, preserved it, and then passed it on fail to do so. This is the major failing of our young country – that we are sometimes so focused on the future that we forget to document our past.”

So wrote **Dr. Shazalina Zainul Abidin** in the *New Straits Times* (3) in November 2022. She went on to say:

“Our grandparents would tell us the stories of how the kampong used to be, which swath of land was previously just an overgrown jungle, which family used to live across the road or what they did when the Japanese troops came marching through.

We listened to these stories first in extreme awe. Then, as we grew older and we heard the same stories, we listened to humour them. Little do we realise that their stories are the retelling of history, and if we listen closely, we will know the route the Japanese army took on its way to Singapore.”

From Robert Gray WA.

Robert has sent the following interesting information about the film, *“Paradise Road,”* which can also be seen in the link:

<https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/journal/32/nelson>

A map to Paradise Road: A guide for historians. Australian War Memorial

This paper (see link) appeared in the *Journal of the Australian War Memorial, Issue 32, April 1999*, written by **Hank Nelson** from the *Research School of Pacific Studies at the Australian National University*. It is a very well researched and interesting analysis of **Bruce Beresford's** 1997 movie *“Paradise Road”* comparing and contrasting the movie's script and visual content with the actual conditions and experiences of the captured Australian Army Nurses and civilian POWs confined in very harsh camps on Bangka and Sumatra Islands in WW2.

In the process, the paper also explores the challenges and problems for writers and film producers in creating works in the currently very popular genre of 'Historical Fiction.'

ANNUAL REUNION AND LUNCHEON – RAF CLUB, LONDON - 15th OCTOBER 2022

Under the watchful eye of Her Late Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, in a wonderful portrait of her, 62 MVG members and guests gathered in the Sovereigns' Room at the RAF Club, 128, Piccadilly for our annual Reunion and Luncheon on Saturday, 15th October 2022. It was good to be back in the spacious surroundings of this elegant hospitality room, formerly known as the Ballroom, after the confines of The Battle of Britain Suite last year. We were delighted that our Patron, Her Grace The Duchess of Norfolk was able to attend this year. We also welcomed members and guests from as far away as New Zealand, Malaysia, Canada, France and Denmark. We are grateful to **Nick Johansen**, cousin of **Liz Moggie**, and **Stella McKernan** for manning the entrance desk as members arrived. Also, our thanks go to **Imogen Holmes**, **Penny Dembrey** and **June Jackson** for their help with flowers and selling draw tickets; to **Liz Moggie** for her help with badges and other matters; and to **Anthony Jackson** and **Christine Cavender** for helping to fold the draw tickets.

Everyone seemed happy with the table arrangements and we sat down to a delicious starter of deep fried goats' cheese, followed by roast chicken and vegetables and a crême brulee dessert. As coffee was being served we stood for the Loyal Toast to His Majesty, The King, for the first time, followed by a Toast to the Volunteers which was given by **Colin Hygate**.

The afternoon provided a good opportunity to introduce our new secretary, **Colin Hygate**, and Treasurer, **Roger Willbourn**, who will be taking over the running of the MVG next April. It will be a new and exciting chapter for the MVG and our role in preserving and perpetuating FEPOW history, both military and civilian, which we must strive to keep alive.

It was also time to thank **Jonathan Moffatt** for his remarkable and detailed research into the Malayan Volunteer Forces, without which the MVG would not have succeeded - nor would it have become the well thought of group it is today with a sound historical background. The MVG owes **Jonathan** a huge debt of gratitude for his work in raising awareness of the Volunteer Forces and for his support and sound advice for all MVG's activities. He has been able, through his database of information, to help countless numbers of people with their research into their relatives' wartime record.

The MVG has continued its work to support Far East projects and memorials during the year. We are pleased to report the unveiling of the Long Nawang Memorial in Kuching in July, to which we donated funds. It was researched and organised by **Melissa Murphy** whose grandfather was one of the civilians massacred by the Japanese in a remote Dutch outpost in Borneo. We also raised a great deal of money, £21, 500, to help keep the TBRC afloat during the Covid lockdown, and we continue to send money to Muntok's Peace Museum for their electricity costs.

After lunch we settled down to listen to our speaker, **James Wilson**, talk about his father's life. Entitled, *"Bishop Leonard Wilson: A Son's Reflections on a Famous Father"* **James** gave us a fascinating insight into his father's upbringing and early life which gave him the strength to withstand the beatings inflicted on him by the Japanese while he was a prisoner of war. This sadistic treatment only served to strengthen his faith in God and in humanity. [James's talk follows this report.]

During the question time which followed the talk, **Ginny Fitzwilliams** gave a detailed account of her family's wartime experiences, including her mother's escape from Kuching with her younger sister, via Pontianak on the west coast of Borneo. The vote of thanks was given by **Dr. Nigel Stanley**, whose father died as a result of torture by the Kempeitai during the same "Double Tenth" interrogations endured by **Bishop Wilson**. **Nigel's** book, *"Twists of Fate"* was mentioned by **James** in his talk.

Once again, there were many wonderful draw prizes on offer this year, thanks to you all. Included among the prizes was a very generous and exciting offer of, *"A Day at Windsor Castle"* hosted by **Lt. Col. John and Annie Moody** who live at the Castle. It was decided that this prize should be auctioned at the beginning of the draw. The bidding was fast and furious – ably managed by **Roger Willbourn** wearing his Auctioneer's hat. It seemed that our 2 final bidders were determined to outbid each other, but eventually the hammer went down at £270 – a wonderful result for a future day to be remembered. Then the draw numbers were called out by **Rosemary Fell**, assisted by **Imogen Holmes** and **Liz Moggie**, whose help was much appreciated. A record amount of £381 was raised from the sale of draw tickets. This, together with the Auction sale of £270, made a grand total of £651. Some of the proceeds will go to our Peace Museum in Muntok to cover the cost of electricity.

It was good to be back in the Sovereigns' Room once again, and we look forward to our next Reunion on Saturday 14th October, 2023, when the speaker will be **Michael Yardley**.

A DAY AT WINDSOR CASTLE

TO INCLUDE

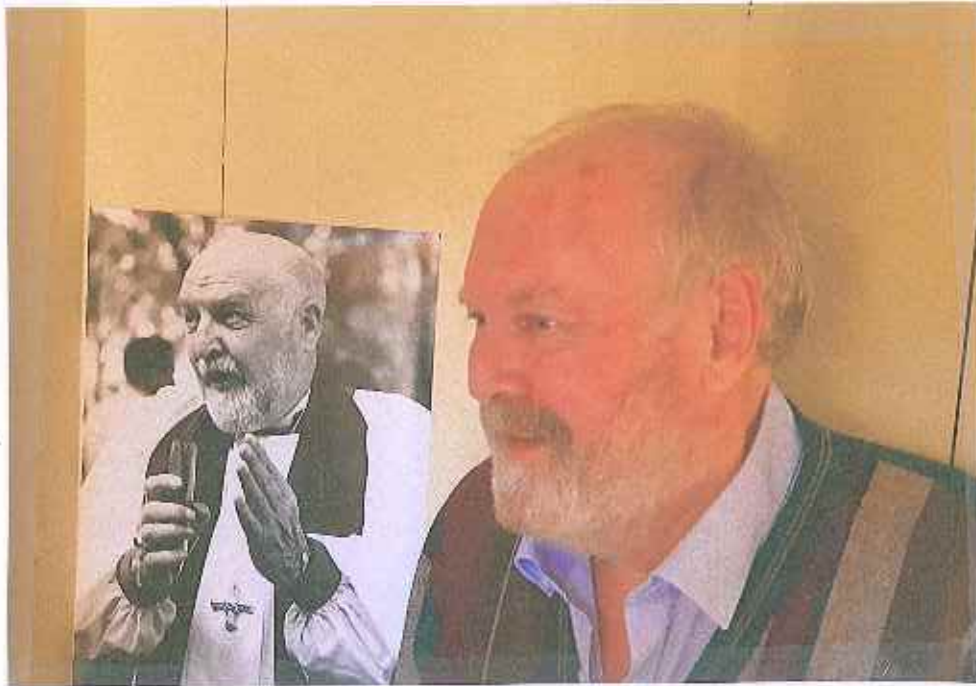
- **FREE ENTRY**
- **WATCH THE CHANGING OF THE GUARD**
(from a private area)
- **GUIDED TOUR OF ST GEORGE'S CHAPEL**
(to include paying your respects at the final resting place of Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II)
 - **ESCORTED TOUR OF THE STATE APARTMENTS**
- **AN INFORMAL LUNCH WITHIN THE CASTLE**

Hosted by Lt Col John Moody and his wife Annie who live in the Castle

For up to four people on a date decided between hosts and recipients

(John Moody is a Military Knight of Windsor and MVG Member)

BISHOP LEONARD WILSON: A SON'S REFLECTIONS ON A FAMOUS FATHER By James Wilson



Before I talk about my father, can I provide a bit of context for my presence here today. I was contacted by my computer guru, **Mike Maccoy**, telling me that another of his clients, **Ann Potter**, lived just up the road in Charmouth, and knew a lot about my father. She had been evacuated from Singapore in February 1942. Through her, I was introduced to **Rosemary Fell**, who, as you know, is responsible for us meeting here today. I discovered that **Rosemary** was actually on the same boat out of Singapore as my mother and my three siblings. I was also on that boat, but only as an embryo! That explains why I was born in Australia in September 1942 and didn't meet my father until after the war in 1945.

My father was sent to a boarding school, St. John's Leatherhead, at the age of ten. He hated it. He was bullied by his fellow boarders and treated badly by the masters. Following a BBC Home Service broadcast in 1946, in which he spoke about his experiences of internment and torture by the Japanese, he had a letter from his old headmaster, **Downes**, asking, "Are you the **Wilson** I used to beat?" My father replied that he was the self-same **Wilson**, and that he was most grateful to the school because his experiences at St. John's had enabled him to withstand the tortures of the Japanese. **Downes** replied, "I'm glad we had our uses." Subsequently, **Downes** invited him to dinner and calling for the wine list, said, "Now, **Wilson**, what are we going to drink? Beaune, I think. You can't beat Beaune." My father replied, "Can't you? It must be almost the only thing you haven't beaten." Nevertheless, he renewed his links with the school after the war and went to several annual dinners as well as preaching there. He was a very good preacher as many people have testified, and I agree with them. I even got brownie points on the occasion that he came to preach in the chapel at my school, Winchester.

I am the youngest of five children. None of us ever met our eldest brother, **Christopher John**, who died of meningitis in 1934, just before his third birthday, and nine days before my sister **Susan** was born. All her life, she had to compete for my father's love for his eldest son. We all did in a way. My mother never spoke about the death of her first child, but my father, like many other families, had lost two of his brothers before he was eight, and his own mother had died when he was just twelve. He would often talk about **Christopher John** to whom he always felt very close. He died of a stroke in 1970, aged 72, just a year after retiring as Bishop of Birmingham. I was only 27 when he died, so I had very few years to get to know my father as an adult.

He was born in Gateshead, the son of a clergyman, but in 1928 he went out to Cairo, having accepted the Church Missionary Society's offer to take over as Principal of the Old Cairo's Boys School. For reasons that are too complicated to go into here, he fell out with the CMS authorities and with the Bishop of Cairo, but with the help of the Bishop of Durham was able to get a job back in the north of England. The only good thing to come out of his time in Cairo was that it was there he met my mother, who had been born there in 1903. So, I can quite truthfully say that I had an Egyptian Mummy!

The Christian calling ran deep in the **Wilson** family. As well as my grandfather, both my uncles were

ordained, and my aunt married a clergyman. My sister and my older brother were also ordained. I followed a different path, my principal job was as a Chartered Surveyor being the Chief Executive of the Bournville Village Trust in Birmingham.

My father was very competitive and loved winning, whether it was playing bridge, cricket or croquet with the family, or winning an argument. He always found it difficult to admit that he was wrong. My brother, **Martin**, told me of an occasion when he told Dad that he would be catching a particular train back from London – let's call it the 4.45. Dad, who prided himself on knowing his **Bradshaw's** railway timetable backwards, told him that there wasn't a 4.45. **Martin** checks that there is a 4.45, and brings the timetable to show him, to which my father replies, "The timetable must be wrong!" That story, in many ways, encapsulates how human my father was. His Christian faith was what enabled him to survive what his Japanese torturers put him through, but his utter conviction that he was right about his beliefs carried over into his conviction that he was right about everything else. Reconciliation with those who took a different view did not come easily to him, and even when there was reconciliation after an argument, he often left the other party feeling that they were, somehow, to blame for the argument in the first place.

I know that many of you here today see the Japanese in a different light because members of your family died as a result of what they experienced from their Japanese torturers, and it has also been said to me that a Japanese apology for their actions doesn't cut the mustard. I suspect that if my father had been killed by the Japanese, I would have different feelings about them as a nation. And I do think it is very important to tell future generations about exactly what happened. In his book, "**Twists of Fate**," **Dr. Nigel Stanley**, tells in forensic and graphic detail, of what happened to the civilians at the hands of the Japanese. In his final chapter, he explores the many different and conflicting views people hold about forgiveness for what the Japanese did to family and friends. My sister was asked to preach at the Lambeth Conference in 1998 on Hiroshima Day, after the Japanese Church had offered an apology for the suffering inflicted by Japan during the war. I was there with both of my brothers, and she gave a very moving account of my father's experiences in Changi and the importance of forgiveness. She reminded them of the occasion when my father, on his return to Singapore in 1946, found himself baptizing and confirming one of the military policemen [**Ed**: Kempeitai] who had beaten him with a rope, looking threatening and sadistic. In his words, "I have seldom seen so great a change in a man. He looked gentle and peaceful, even though he was going back to prison to serve a ten-year sentence." And it wasn't just beatings. My father was forced to kneel with a metal T-bar behind his knees, while his Japanese guards jumped up and down on his thighs to try to get him to admit he was a spy. No wonder that he refused to wear gaiters at Bishops' meetings and got permission from the Archbishop of Canterbury not to do so!

For me, the need to please my father and win his approval was paramount, so there is an irony that what success I had occurred later in life after his death. I failed to win a scholarship to Winchester but just scraped in. I failed to win a choral scholarship to Queen's College Oxford (my father's college) and it took until 2007 before I got a degree in English Literature from The Open University. But what I get from my father is my love of travel, of maps, yes, of railway timetables and railway journeys around Europe, especially Switzerland. From him I get my passion for watching cricket and rugby. We had holidays all over Britain, made possible by my father acting as the Locum for the local vicar. I spent twenty-four years working in Birmingham, so I had plenty of opportunities to learn in how much affection he was held by so many people, especially when there were no authority issues. I inherited from him the need to be in control up until retirement twenty years ago, which is why my CV was full of chairmanship roles, be it Pro-Chancellor of what is now called Birmingham City University and President of the General Practice of the RICS. I thought I would miss all that when I retired, but it was bliss to become invisible.

My father hardly ever talked about his experiences at the hands of the Japanese, but it was that experience of knowing that God existed, and not just believing that He existed that made him the man, and the father, that he became in the second half of his life. He revelled in all his various roles as lord of all the manors that he oversaw, whether that was taking the Festival of Remembrance Service in The Royal Albert Hall each November, or as Prelate of The Order of St. Michael and St. George at their annual service in St. Paul's Cathedral.

His biographer, **Canon Roy McKay**, concludes my father's story, reflecting on the Memorial Stone in Birmingham Cathedral that refers to my father as Confessor for the Faith. He writes, "Both the place and the words are fitting. A love of home and family and friends was deep-seated in his heart, and he was, in truth, a confessor for the faith. His religion and his humanity went hand in hand, each deriving strength and depth from the other. Both were simple in character and quality, rich and spontaneous in feeling, vivid and warm in expression. He knew in his own experience the strengths and weaknesses of human nature, and he saw both as falling within the circle of the divine grace. He had a wholeness of vision, and if at times he felt sad and frustrated when it was blurred and broken by events, he never lost hope in the triumph of the Christian faith and of the truth which would make men free."

REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY – 13TH NOVEMBER 2022

Report by Rosemary Fell

LONDON

Despite our plans after the march past in 2021 to attend the Service in St. Martin-in-the-Fields Church on Remembrance Sunday this year, members expressed a wish to attend the Cenotaph Parade once more, and 10 members signed up to represent the MVG. It was, therefore, disappointing that there were only 5 marchers on the day for various reasons. However, the RBL's organisation was very much better this year and we didn't have to wait for entry onto Horse Guards Parade. We found our sign board and place in Column D without any problem, between 2 much larger groups - the St. Nazaire families in front of us and the Aden Veterans behind us.

We were able to watch on a huge TV screen in Whitehall, the wreath laying by King Charles for the first time in his reign, followed by other members of the Royal Family, The Princess Royal, The Earl of Wessex and The Prince of Wales, watched from the Balcony Window at the Foreign Office by The Queen Consort and the Princess of Wales. After all the wreath laying by the Prime Minister, members of the Government, Opposition and Diplomats, the short Service followed in the same tradition as in previous years.

The crowds who clapped us as we marched past the Cenotaph and handed in our wreath, were bigger than ever this year. We were pleased to have been able to lay a wreath commemorating the 80th anniversary of the Fall of Singapore as well as in memory of our brave Volunteers and civilians who were captured by the Japanese on that fateful Sunday – 15th February 1942.

The salute at the end of the Parade was taken this year by the Earl of Wessex, and we lined up once again on Horse Guards until all the columns had completed the march.

Afterwards we walked to St. Martin-in-the-Fields where we had an enjoyable lunch in the café down in the ancient crypt of the Church.

ARMISTICE DAY - CANADA

Message from The Hon. Doug Ford – Premier of Ontario

ONTARIO'S CEREMONY OF REMEMBRANCE

Friday, November 11, 2022

Starting at 10.45 am

Queen's Park, Toronto

On the front lawn of the Ontario Legislature stands a 30-metre-long granite wall, etched with scenes from Canada's military history. The Ontario Veterans' Memorial is dedicated to every man and woman who has served with courage to protect our freedom in times of war and in peace.

On 11th November we will once again honour our veterans by remembering their selfless courage and commitment during Ontario's Ceremony of Remembrance held at the Ontario Veterans' Memorial. I am glad to welcome you back to Queen's Park after two years of virtual ceremonies.

You may wish to purchase a wreath from the Royal Canadian Legion to place at the memorial. If you purchase before the deadline, your wreath will be delivered to Queen's Park. If you are not able to attend, you can watch the ceremony live at Ontario.ca/Remember or [Premier's official YouTube channel](#)

We thank Sallie Hammond for ordering a wreath and arranging for it to be laid during the Ceremony.

PENANG - REMEMBRANCE DAY, SUNDAY 27TH NOVEMBER – Report by Richard Parry

Terry and I attended the Ceremony this morning. It was very well attended indeed, maybe because it was the first 'normal' such event in three years. Well organised by the Penang Veterans Association. Unfortunately we were asked not to take photos during the Ceremony, partly due to the number of people, and partly because the PVA had their own 'official' photographers and will circulate their photographs. Terry managed a few though and I've attached three. As more come in from the PVA I'll send a selection on.



Richard and Terry Parry centre

CROSS PLANTING CEREMONY – GARDEN OF REMEMBRANCE WESTMINSTER ABBEY

This ceremony always takes place on the Thursday before Remembrance Sunday. This year it fell on Thursday, 10th November. The Royal British Legion's Poppy Factory in Richmond is responsible for laying out the numerous plots and for planting the thousands of small red poppy crosses and the larger 8 inch black crosses, many of which bear the logos/badges of the various regiments and associations represented.

We are very grateful to **Revd. Pauline Simpson** for allowing the MVG to plant 2 large crosses in the FEPOW Plot, one bearing the SSVF badge and the other (now painted gold) bearing the MVG logo. We also thank **Richard Brown** for attending the ceremony on behalf of the MVG.

The Ceremony was conducted by the Dean of Westminster and attended by Her Majesty The Queen. We are delighted that, as she made her tour of the Garden, she stopped at the FEPOW plot to speak to **Pauline Simpson**, and so did the Dean.



Her Majesty The Queen chats to Pauline



The FEPOW Plot with the SSVF Badge Cross and the MVG logo Cross

MALAYSIA

This year, in a change from the traditional ceremony at Tugu Negara in Kuala Lumpur, the Remembrance Sunday service took place in the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery in Taiping, in the European part of the cemetery. Although no-one was available from the MVG to lay a wreath on behalf of the Malayan Volunteer Forces, we thank **Liz Moggie** for arranging for the British High Commission to lay a wreath. A YouTube video of the ceremony was made by **Shaharom Ahmad** member of the Malaya Historical Group and the MVG. The video is available to watch – (1) [Remembrance Day 2002 at Taiping War Cemetery – YouTube](#) (N.B. Date as given in the YouTube title). **Liz** said that it was disappointing to find no report about the ceremony in the national newspapers. We thank **Shaharom** for the excellent video which starts with 2 Gurkhas playing the bagpipes.

Mary Seah, AM, The Angel of Changi (1905 – 2000)
With thanks to the Sydney Morning Herald, 14th March 2000

[Editor: It seemed appropriate to tell this story during 2022, the 80th anniversary of the Fall of Singapore.]

She was only 150cm tall, with an innocent Chinese face, shy manner and soft voice, but **Mary Seah**, who died, aged 94, was also a determined and resilient woman, not to be underestimated. She was a heroine of WW2, the woman known as the Angel of Changi, by all those whose lives she helped to save. **Seah** sneaked food and medicines to the prisoners at the Japanese camps, risking her life; she could easily have been executed by the Japanese and was tortured by them on several occasions.

She was born in Singapore; her father left home to seek work in China when she was three and young **Mary** grew up in a boarding school, where she learned very quickly to fend for herself. She was betrothed by her parents when she was 17. **Seah** followed her mother's career of midwife and social work. She was sharp enough to realize that it would be a good idea to be fluent, and literate, in several Asian languages as well as in English.

When Singapore fell in 1942, **Seah**, then 36, was single-handedly raising nine children aged between 5 and 18 (she walked out on an irascible husband) by working up to 22 hours a day. Then her 16 year old son, **Kim Tee**, was taken by the Japanese. She would search endlessly for him at various camps but found no trace of him.

What she did find were the many prisoners crammed into Singapore jails. She decided it was her job to do her damndest to help them. She knew they needed food and medicine if they were to survive the overcrowded incarceration in Singapore's hot and humid weather.

To the Japanese, she was the hawkler who sold coconuts, and the like, to prisoners. When the guards weren't looking, she would quickly pass food (from her own family rations), medicines, radio parts – whatever the prisoners needed. Eventually, she fell under Japanese suspicion and she was tortured. She was beaten from 1am (pm?) to midnight, or left to dehydrate in the sun. A Japanese officer pricked her neck with his sword, while threatening to behead her on the spot. She persuaded him that she could relieve the irritating sores on his face.

Her cure worked and the delighted Japanese officer granted whatever she wanted. She modestly asked for a pass for the camps.

After the war, **Seah**, then 40, reinvented herself, making money in real estate, and kitten breeding for a former Sultan of Johore, who became a great family friend.

Two decades after World War 2, she accepted an invitation from grateful POWs to visit Australia. A quiet holiday, catching up with old friends in Perth, Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney produced widespread coverage and many functions in her honour.

As political and racial instability increased in Singapore in the 1960s, she thought more of living permanently in Australia, eventually arriving on Christmas Day in 1967, and settling in Brisbane. There, she shared her modest home for 30 years with three granddaughters, their mothers being tied to jobs in Singapore. Eventually they wound up those jobs and were reunited with their children, while **Seah** became an Australian citizen.

She was often at Anzac Day events, and various POW bodies were keen to have her made an OBE for her wartime bravery. She declined, arguing that she had merely tried to help people, not to seek glory for herself. Those who owed their lives to her, worked quietly, and on Australia Day 1966, she was made AM.

Seah frequently foiled continued media interest in her by pretending to be the maid, who could only comprehend a little English, when reporters were on the phone. She agreed to one TV interview where the reporter discovered that this shy, demure lady was quite stubborn. She would not take off her sunglasses! **Mary** was survived by 8 children.

OVER THE SEAS AND FAR AWAY – Part 2

With thanks to the late 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.

Reconnaissance of Malaya – at last! To prepare for Operation Zipper full PR coverage of a section of coastline in the region of Port Swettenham was required. The latest PR version of the Mosquito, the Very Long Range PR34 became available in small numbers (4) and, if based on the Cocos Islands, reconnaissance missions to Malaya became a 'comfortable' possibility. Four PR34s were flown from the UK on 29th May and were taken charge of by 684 Squadron on 9th June.

On 28th June, the new Mosquitos took off from Alipore, via Ceylon, to transit to the Cocos Islands (see Note below) to form a detachment covering Malaya. The first reconnaissance flight took place on 3rd July and covered Port Pinto, Morib and the Port Swettenham area via Gedong and then Sumatra. On 4th July, another crew photographed the airfields at Kuala Lumpur and Port Swettenham, returning to the Cocos Islands via Fort de Kock airfield.

Note: The Cocos group of 27 largely uninhabited islands is sited approximately 1760 miles from Ceylon and some 1040 miles from Singapore. In early 1945, in preparation for the forthcoming Operation Zipper, an airfield was constructed and occupied by RAF aircraft. In the earlier days, shipment of materials, construction vehicles, fuel etc. was by surface vessels with long range aircraft later being flown in from Ceylon to Brown's West Island. The Cocos group appeared on maps as a 'speck', miles away from anywhere in the Indian Ocean. Finding the island group after a long flight from Ceylon required an accurate homing system.... any navigation errors would be disastrous! To overcome this, radar array designer, Frederick Edward Lutkin, inventor of the CH Lutkin Aerial Array, arrived on the island group during the build up of the Allied Forces and proceeded to change the role of one of the RAF radars (with the radar team) to provide a navigation system that was specific to the unique geography of the islands. Known locally as LORAN (Long Range and Navigation) B, it required little addition to the standard LORAN receivers in use by RAF aircraft at the time and these additions would have been completed before the main flights to the island group. The first test flight of LORAN B took place on 6th/7th June 1945 and was successful, as was the return flight two days later.

On 16th July, photographic coverage of Singapore and Johore Bahru was undertaken. Further coverage was made on the 22nd July on Japanese held mainland airfields at Batu Pahat, Yong Peng and Kluang in Malaya, followed on 26th July by a visit to Sumatra, Changi and Tebrau, then again to Batu Pahat and Lumut on the Malayan west coast. By the end of July, 25 PR sorties had been completed. This was followed by operational shut downs in early August over the proposed invasion beaches due to weather and high tides on those beaches. **After the Japanese Surrender.** The role of the PR Mosquitos changed after the unconditional surrender of the Japanese in mid-August 1945. On 20th August, Penang Island and Taiping were photographed on a return trip of 2600 miles, as were the Palembang oilfields on Sumatra.

31st August. A Cocos PR 34 Mosquito, tasked to photograph Singapore, developed an engine fault requiring a risky landing at Kallang airfield, Singapore. Here the crew was courteously received by the Japanese who arranged for a POW RAF engine fitter (most likely from one of the Hurricane Squadrons ground crews captured in Java in 1942) and an RAF engineering officer to get the engine successfully serviceable again.

With the situation in S.E. Asia now changed, the role of the VLR Mosquitos also changed. A high speed courier service was now in force and survey work over parts of Burma, Indonesia and British North Borneo, flown from Singapore, was undertaken. The Borneo detachment was memorable in that the aircraft used flew into a typhoon over Burma and ran low on fuel – insufficient for returning to Singapore. The crew crash landed in a padi field and took 10 days to return to the squadron!

19th October. In response to a revolt against the French in Indo-China a demonstration was flown over Dalat. 6 VLR aircraft left Alipore for the Saigon area to provide PR and survey duties. On route, the weather was bad enough to cause the aircraft to be diverted to Bangkok, with one Mosquito crashing at Mingladon, while another was assumed to have crashed in the Bay of Bengal, as it was never located.

In November, the remainder of the Cocos Islands' detachment moved to Seletar in Singapore for survey flights over Malaya and the East Indies. It was on this move that (sadly) the CO of 684 Squadron and his navigator were lost during the transit flight.

1946. In January, 684 Squadron moved to Don Muang (Bangkok) for survey duties, later to be followed by the Seletar detachment. During May, another detachment was sent to Kemajoran (Java) where Indonesian rebels were in action. This was to make a topographical survey of Java before the Netherlands East Indies Army took control from the British. The Squadron returned to Seletar in August and was disbanded. It was renumbered as 81 Squadron, taking on sole responsibility for photo reconnaissance and aerial survey flights throughout S.E. Asia.

1954. "The Purple Plain" by H.E. Bates (1947) was released as a film in January 1954, starring Gregory Peck and 2 VLR PR34 Mosquitos (RG177 and RG238) on loan from 81 Squadron. Filming was mainly based at RAF Negombo in Ceylon and the aircraft were 'adjusted' to resemble Mosquito VI fighter-bombers. They were returned to RAF normal operational status before being handed back to 81 Squadron.

1955. The last 81 Squadron Mosquito mission was flown from Seletar on 15th December 1955 on a *Piredog* sortie over Malaya.

"THREE STAYED THERE" – the wartime diary of Dorothy Potter
By kind permission of her daughter-in-law Ann Potter

If only I had heeded the gypsy's warning given to me way back in the Australian mountains in the year 1941, how very different my life during the latter years, and that of my husband and small son, would have been. Wars, financial worries, yes and even famine were all foretold, but how could one take such fantastic tales seriously in the midst of a lively party of friends on a gorgeous autumn (sic) day in July?

We were spending the last few weeks of our furlough in Australia before leaving for Shanghai, in time for my husband to take up his duties with the Chinese maritime Customs, in whose service he had been employed for over twenty years.

I'm glad we had such a care-free holiday, as it was a bright spot to look back upon in the coming troublesome years.

Our boat left Brisbane in the beginning of October, and the second day at sea our troubles commenced by **Anthony** developing measles. This meant our being confined to our cabins and missing the usual jolly time one has on board ship.

However, we were out of quarantine by the time the ship reached Manila and, apart from a very rough passage for two days, we sailed into Hong Kong harbour without mishap.

What a marvellous sight, this fairyland harbour, especially in the early evening with the passing fishing junks with colourful sails of red, brown and blue and the gaudily painted eyes in the front of the boats. "**No can see, no can savee,**" says John Chinaman and so he goes prepared, even to the fishing grounds.

Our boat sailed along into the main harbour with the towering hills guarding it and the fairy- lights, rows and rows of them, beginning to twinkle on the distant roads of the Peak. The water-front was already aglow with light. Naval craft, ocean ships and coastal craft with their strings of lights, added to the brilliance of the picture. It was a beautiful sight.

We were all packed up and ready to go ashore after the final passport examination by the Hong Kong police, a new formality since Britain had been at war.

When my turn came, the examining officer asked for my pass from Canberra, to permit landing in Hong Kong. As we knew nothing of this new regulation and had not been informed by the shipping company in Brisbane, I had to admit that I had no permit. The result, of course, was that I was not allowed to land and was told that I would have to return with **Anthony** to Australia on the same ship.

This was a great blow, but I felt it was useless to complain. Regulations are made to be kept, not broken. In great dejection, I unpacked my suitcase and put **Anthony** to bed.

One other lady passenger was in the same fix. Like ourselves, she was destined for Shanghai but had to land in Hong Kong to book a passage up the coast and remain there until she could get a ship. She stamped and raved and ended by completely losing her temper, but all to no purpose. Eventually, we were the only two women left on board.

My husband tried to cheer me up by suggesting that he would chase around and hunt up people to try for a permit for me but I was not very hopeful.

I was leaning on the ship's rail, feeling very depressed, when the police officer tapped me on the shoulder. "**I thought you were a real brick,**" he said, "**over your disappointment, so I'm going ashore to see what can be done about it. I'll let you know in the morning.**" With this feeling of "*friends at court*" I went to bed in a happier frame of mind. True to his word, a permit arrived and was delivered to my cabin before breakfast. This was followed by two others, one from my husband and the other from friends there. I lost no time in getting ashore lest new regulations came into being!

During my time there, very few women were actually supposed to be in the Colony. In fact, only those doing absolutely essential work were allowed to be there, but quite a few had by various means filtered back, thinking that after all there was no war coming off with Japan. There must have been several hundred women in Kowloon and Hong Kong when I passed through. Husbands were holding indignation meetings and writing to the press in their effort to force the government's hand. Nineteen divorce cases were pending in the courts what week alone

and, altogether everyone seemed thoroughly disgruntled. I often wondered how they all felt when the Japs did arrive!

After a week of parties, trips around and shopping, we left for Shanghai by coastal steamer arriving there on 28th October (1941), to find instructions that my husband had been transferred to Tientsin.

Really, it seemed as though the hoodoo had got a good grip, as this meant giving up our furnished flat in Shanghai and selling everything except necessities, undoubtedly at a good loss too, but the freight and packing costs for another thousand mile sea journey absolutely forbade any other course.

It was at this stage that my husband remarked, "*When I want really cheering up, I'll read a few chapters out of the Book of Job,*" but he little knew what frolicsome, evil spirits can do when they really get started.

After two hectic weeks of sorting and repacking interspersed with one or two lively interludes such as getting trapped in a burning shop in the celebrated Nanking Road, and standing next to a young patriot who decided at that moment to send a collaborator to the "*happy hunting grounds*" with the aid of a well flung bomb, we found ourselves, one cold morning in November, on the Bund ready to sail up North.

We had managed to cut down our essential baggage to twelve cases, containing our collection of curios and pictures, together with our linen, cutlery and kitchen requisites. Many of our friends were there on the wharf to see us depart and our cabin was filled with baskets of gorgeous flowers, the traditional parting gift in the Far East. With the good wishes of our friends still ringing in our ears, we steamed down the Whangpu River. Past the huge buildings on the Bund, Custom House, Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, the new premises of the Bank of China, a delightful combination of the old Chinese and modern style of architecture, next the Garden Bridge over the Soochow Creek where the smaller junks and sampans congest that narrow waterway, filled to overflowing by the crews and their families, and the huge mass of the Broadway Mansions, an ultra-modern apartment building, towering behind. Past the oil installations until by devious twists and turns the vessel finally arriving at Woosung and the open sea.

I don't remember much of the next two days as the China coast is none too kind to poor sea travellers, but when we anchored at Chefoo, we were inundated with Japanese officials of the Customs and gendarmes, all equally unpleasant. They insisted that the Captain order the stewards to bring them tea, soft drinks and cigarettes. None but the best brands were acceptable to them. They monopolized the first class saloon to the exclusion of the passengers and sprawled with feet on tables or as the fancy suited. They bawled, laughed and spat to their hearts content, a law unto themselves.

A few of these so called Customs officials searched the ship and later, when going into my cabin, I found one of them interesting himself with one of my suitcases. I was more than annoyed and told him a few home truths and finally that my husband was an employee of the Customs. On receipt of this information, he bowed from the waist down and hissed what appeared to be an apology. We were later approached with the offer of a launch in case we needed to go ashore. We tactfully declined. If the port officials' attitude on the ship was anything to go by, we had no intentions of doubling the dose.

Our next encounter with these overbearing gentry was when we landed at Tangku at the entrance of the Haiho River to Tientsin. As before, the Japanese boarded the boat and issued instructions that we were to queue up outside on the deck with our passports, other documents and hand baggage. It was a bitterly cold morning and there was absolutely no reason why passports' examinations could not have taken place in the saloon, but officialdom was out to be cussed and cussed it was. I admired the Captain of our boat for the way he kept his temper under control. It must have been a stupendous effort. Steerage third class passengers and the Chinese crew preceded the first class passengers and the Captain came last! Our tempers were decidedly frayed when the ordeal was over. The usual nonsensical printed questionnaire had to be answered, "**Where were you born? Who was your grandfather? Where did you go to school?**" I thought the young gentleman who completed the school question by inserting the name of that well known reform school, Borstal, was looking for trouble!

At 3 o'clock we were gracefully permitted to board the launch for the long trip up the river to Tientsin. We arrived there late in the evening and disembarked on the Bund of the British Concession into a barbed wire cage arrangement for a further interrogation by the Japanese military and gendarmerie. The signs and portents, we thought, were none too favourable.

The next week was spent in house hunting, and eventually we managed to rent a partly furnished place and had brought sufficient carpets and furniture for our needs. We then proceeded to unpack the cases brought from Shanghai. Imagine my horror in finding everything smashed to smithereens. The cases must have been thrown on to the launch to produce such results. When the servants finished emptying the fragments on to the floor, I just stood by my treasures and wept. Apart from never being able to replace lots of them, china and glass was very expensive at the time and difficult to get.

I had managed to get some very good Chinese servants, so we settled down to a normal life once more so we thought!

My husband commenced his duties at the Customs House and **Anthony** started in the kindergarten at the British Grammar School, but Alas! ... this peaceful existence was very short lived.

On the morning of 8th December, **Jim** went off to the office and amah took **Anthony** to school, but in less than half an hour **Jim** was back again, very perturbed as the Custom House was surrounded by Japanese soldiers who would not allow him to pass. A few minutes later the amah came in looking very worried. She said she had put the young master in school and when she came out, plenty of Japanese soldiers were around the school. I scampered out of the house in search of a rickshaw to take me to the school, and arriving there found my entry blocked by sentries with fixed bayonets. By this time, a number of anxious parents had congregated around the main entrance, but attempts to enter the school were thwarted. About noon, a Japanese officer drove up in a car and I requested his permission to remove my small son. He just nodded and replied in pidgin English, "**can do.**" Before he had time to repent, I raced up the drive and into the school, grabbed **Anthony** and bolted outside. The older pupils were kept there until after 5 p.m. - what for, nobody knew, and I doubt very much whether the Japs knew themselves. The school was later commandeered as a military headquarters.

By the time I got home, a number of friends had dropped in to discuss the situation. We knew by that time that we were at war with Japan. The news of Pearl Harbour had also got through but we pooh-poohed it. We were as yet unused to the mental process of "*sifting the grain from the chaff,*" but we had plenty of time in which to learn!

We were all a trifle dazed by the turn of events and were busy discussing probabilities when a friend dashed in to say that a Jap military truck had driven up to the house and her husband had been taken away but where she didn't know. It was not until three weeks later that we tracked him down in a former municipal gaol where he was confined in a cell usually reserved for hardened criminals. There were a number of other men beside our own Nationals. The gaol was without any form of heating and with the outside temperature below freezing point, they suffered miserably from the cold besides other indignities. They were released after a period of about six weeks but were compelled to sign a statement saying that they had been decently treated.

We realized by the nature of these arrests that the Japanese must have been planned very well in advance, and a very comprehensive black-list existed of those not in good odour. The British Commissioner of the Tientsin Customs was arrested and conveyed to a Chinese gaol in Peking. He had a particularly trying time. The head of the Municipal Police and the manager of the leading American oil company were also arrested and gaoled. The bulk of our own Nationals were confined in the old American Marine barracks on the Racecourse Road.

For some unknown reason, my husband's name and those of three other colleagues must have been omitted from the list, as they were not molested in any way. To this day, we cannot think how or why they escaped prison. The mental worry, however, was very bad in spite of the liberty they enjoyed. Every day, the Japs entered the house under all sorts of specious pretexts, either from the front entrance or the rear, and one never knew whether that particular interview would end up by his being escorted to gaol. A suitcase was always kept packed for such an eventuality.

The only other incident on the first day was when two Japanese soldiers marched into the house demanding to see the radio. We took them into the drawing room and showed them our Marconi. This was sealed by pasting a flimsy strip of paper across the control knob. This strip could be gently eased off when we felt it was comparatively safe to listen in, but later we found it too risky and had to desist, but the temptation to do so was very hard to resist. On reflection it was, perhaps, as well that we could not hear the news. It was not particularly

cheerful in the earlier phases and we might not have been as cheerful as we tried to be. But however bad things appeared to be, we kept our faith in our own people and their allies. Nothing shook our conviction, whatever happened, that we could win out in the struggle. The possibility of our losing never entered into our heads. Another particular cause of anxiety was an old radio-gramophone belonging to the previous tenant. By appearance, it must have been one of the very first of these machines on the market. The back was open revealing a wondrous assortment of wires, valves, transformer units and the various gadgets making up the contraption. The wave length was found by moving a wooden knob along a marked scale. It never uttered a squeak during our tenancy but functioned as a plant stand. It must have been reported on during the sealing of the Marconi for one day whilst I was alone, in marched a Japanese officer and two soldiers with fixed bayonets. He stationed these two at the door of the room then shouted to me in English demanding to see the machine and to know where I had sent messages. In vain I tried to explain that it was not a transmitter, but to no purpose. Oh! wasn't I glad when my husband came in. Somehow he had a way with Japs as he generally managed to calm them down. He fetched out drinks and sent to the kitchen for tea for the sentries. Gradually the tension seemed to lessen and he got down to the job of persuading the officer to believe in the uselessness of the object under suspicion. Things seemed much easier when we offered to surrender it for their examination. Our only desire was to get the beastly box of tricks out of the house. They left shortly afterwards but apparently not fully satisfied as a number of so called experts pestered us during the following week for continued probes in the innards of the machine. In the end it was removed with the Marconi and we breathed easier.

Our first big problem was money as we only had a few local dollars in hand, intending to go to the bank on Monday, but the first thing the Japs did was to take over the banks, hotels and all British and American administrative buildings. Luckily for us, the next door neighbours happened to have a surplus of cash on hand and loaned us fifteen hundred dollars. I immediately called the servants and paid their monthly wages and asked them what they intended to do as we could no longer afford to employ them. Cook and Amah decided to return to the country, but the Boy decided that he would like to remain with us as long as we could provide him with food. He was not interested about wages as he fully understood our position. I was very touched by this and so he stayed and shared equally with us whatever we had. I taught him to cook and we had a fifty-fifty sort of arrangement which worked very well.

The Japs issued us with bright red arm bands on which were stamped the two Chinese characters, "Ying-kuo" meaning British or, more correctly, English National. These bands had to be worn on all occasions under threats of dire penalties. No more than three of us were now allowed to congregate in the streets at a time. We could shop in the Concession but only in certain places. Orders were issued concerning blackout arrangements in case of air raids. A large earthenware jar containing water had to be placed outside the front gate in case of consequent fire. This was a source of amusement to us as immediately it was placed outside, the water froze solid.

English road and shop signs were removed and replaced with those bearing Chinese characters. The use of the English language was forbidden either when addressing shopkeepers or to our servants. This order was honoured in the breach.

An amusing incident happened about this time during a public ceremony of raising the Japanese and puppet regime flags on the former Gordon Hall. Thousands of Chinese were watching the event. They dearly loved a show of this sort. The military forces were called smartly to attention and **Wang-keh-Ming**, the head of the puppet regime walked forward to pull the string. For some unknown reason the flags stuck. **Wang** tugged harder and flapped wildly with the rope. There was an ominous crack and down came a shower of tiles on his head, knocking him senseless to the ground. He was borne to his car to the cries of "ai-yah" from the surrounding crowd. To the Chinese present, it was a very bad omen.

Another amusing angle concerning the denial of the English language was the fact that the Japanese in the meetings with their Axis partners, the Germans and the Italians, had to resort to the forbidden tongue in order to be understood. This was told to me by a German journalist whilst I was on a visit to some neutral friends.

A very important Japanese General was to visit Tientsin, so it was agreed by the Japanese authorities to throw a party in his honour, inviting all the noted German and Italian residents together with their wives. The party was to be held in the Astor hotel (formerly owned by the British). On the night in question, a silver shield was presented to the General and a huge basket of flowers to his wife. After dinner the General stood up to thank everyone and he spoke in broken English as very few folk understood Japanese. *"Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish to thank you from the bottom of my heart,"* and with a beaming smile towards his wife continued, *"and also from my wife's bottom."*

Periodically we were made to attend the Gordon Hall, the former Municipal Offices of the Concession, for interrogation concerning our financial resources, property, and other such information as suited our gaolers. All sorts of ridiculous questions were asked such as how many coats or pants we possessed and not forgetting the old chestnut of grandfather's origin, which by this time had begun to pall. The whole thing from our point of view was meaningless and was meant possibly as a form of irritation. It succeeded admirably if this was the intention. Vaccination and inoculation were also compulsory, usually at intervals of three months. Japanese made serums, and vaccines were issued to the small, temporary British hospital and administered by our own doctors. For that we were particularly grateful although we had some misgivings on the standardization of the Jap products. This sort of life went on for about fifteen months, with all of us trying to live as normal a life as possible under very trying circumstances. The schools were closed and eventually our church. The last mentioned as the altar was desecrated by some Japanese soldiers. It had been used as a lavatory. We held small services in several private houses by dodging the sentries. On entering or leaving, we limited numbers to two persons only. Others followed at intervals.

All this came to an end in March 1943 when we received orders to pack ready for a concentration camp situated at Wei-hsien in Shantung province. We were instructed that we could take one bed, one trunk and one suitcase each. Children were not included in their calculations. Parents had to cram in what they could for their use. On no account was anything to be packed into beds. We then began the hectic planning of what to and what not to take.

On the evening of 29th March, we left our home after handing the keys to a waiting gendarme who took possession of everything we owned other than those few things we were carrying with us. That was the last we saw of everything we had accumulated during our twenty years in China.

It was a bitterly cold evening and we had to wait outside the old Volunteer Drill Hall to have our suitcases examined by the Jap guards who just tipped everything out on the dirty ground. They poked into our pitiful belongings, emptied thermos bottles, trampled on packages of foodstuffs under the pretext that it was not necessary, confiscated scissors and any knives they found and generally made themselves as obnoxious as possible. We were then ordered to repack our cases and be ready for the march to the railway station, about two miles away, by nine o'clock.

Old people and babies were graciously allowed to ride in rickshaws providing, of course, that one had funds enough in hand to pay for them. The rest had to march through the streets lined with grinning Chinese, German and Italian nationals. If it was the intention here to humble our pride, it failed miserably. We had no intention of allowing that, least of all the Japanese. Most of us adopted a don't-care-a-damn attitude and ignored the grinning faces at the kerbsides.

We arrived at the station around eleven o'clock and stood there until midnight when we were bundled unceremoniously into coolie trucks on the train. A disgusting toilet was at the end of our compartment. Accommodation was strained to the bursting point. It was beyond the bounds of possibility to try to move about, so we sat cramped together for two nights and a day before the train crawled into Wei-hsien. It was a nightmare journey to say the very least of it and we arrived in an exhausted condition. It was with a sense of relief that we arrived at the camp, a series of compounds, roughly in all about forty acres in extent. It was owned by the American Presbyterian Mission and formerly used as a missionary training centre for Chinese students. It had a brilliant red gate and high surrounding walls and could accommodate the two thousand odd prisoners of war which eventually were interned there. It suited the Japanese admirably for the purpose they had in mind. A number of our Peking friends who were already there were waiting to welcome us.

[To be continued in April 2023.]

Man of peace – Shidehara Kijuro (1872 to 1951)

Note: Japanese and Chinese names are quoted in the native fashion, surname first

Japan sidles up to democracy

Shidehara had a conventional upbringing, born in Osaka to a wealthy landlord family. He went to school in Kyoto and in 1895 graduated in law from Tokyo university, quickly passing into the imperial foreign service with postings in Korea, Tokyo, USA and Europe. In 1903 he married Iwasaki Masako, a daughter of the head of the Mitsubishi zaibatsu. In 1915 he was appointed vice foreign minister and served three cabinets until 1919 when he became ambassador to the USA. The First World War had greatly increased Japan's economic power and nationalism was buoyant. As a result of the civil war in Russia, the former Western Allies had sent army contingents into Siberia: Britain, France and Japan to support anti-Bolshevik forces, the USA to act as peacekeeper. Japan being close to Vladivostok had sent by far the largest contingent. President Wilson was suspicious of the imperial Japanese army (IJA) designs on territorial gain not only in Siberia but China where it had taken part of Shandong province in 1915. Japan's populist premier, Hara Kei, wanted to be friends with Wilson and was prepared to hold back the military expansionists. So Shidehara's job became one of prime importance. He was a firm supporter of Hara's policy of good relations with the West and peaceful co-existence with China.

Part of the fruit of his diplomacy was the Washington Conference of 1921 to 1922. On the agenda was the limitations of the navies of great powers: the USA, Britain, Japan, France, and Italy, but principally the first three – and also China where Shidehara led for Japan. In November 1921 Hara was assassinated by right wing-extremists, but his policy continued. Japan agreed to move its forces out of Shandong, after a strong plea by the Chinese government and approval in the West.

1924 seemed the dawn of a more democratic era in Japan when the Kenseikai (constitutional association - broadly liberal) took office in June. Shidehara was named Foreign Minister to continue a policy of peaceful coexistence with the West and China. For much of the previous decade relations with China had been tense as Japan used her economic and military power to wrest political and commercial concessions from a weakened China.

By 1924 the Chinese government in Beijing was powerless over most of the country. A shifting kaleidoscope of warlord regimes ruled or misruled nearly everywhere. In Canton Sun Yat-sen and General Chang Kai-shek struggled to create an alternative Nationalist government. In 1922 Japan had taken a more internationalist stance, prime minister Admiral Kato Tomosaburo had ended occupation of Shandong province and eastern Siberia by the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA). Officers led by general Tanaka Giichi were incensed but powerless. At the Washington Conference, Kato agreed with the USA and Britain to limit naval expansion in the ratio of 5:5:3 for tonnage of battleships and battlecruisers. The ratio for aircraft carriers was very similar, Japan agreeing to the three on the basis of having only a one-ocean navy.

By treaty, Japan had the right to station forces in various parts of China mainly, the three north-east provinces (often called Manchuria or Guandong). This included the Japanese owned South Manchurian Railway, a vital artery in the region. In 1925, Zhang Zuolin, warlord governor of Fengtien, Manchuria's most populous province, faced a revolt by Guo Songling, one of his more progressive generals. Guo quickly prevailed and Zhang turned to IJA's Guandong Army to avert defeat. It forbade Guo from using the railway and intervened with troops. As a result, Guo lost out and was killed. This incident was over before Shidehara could intervene, but he resolved that

nothing similar should recur; Zhang used his reprieve to expand his rule to all Manchuria. In 1927 there was a power vacuum in Beijing. Zhang entered and proclaimed himself grand marshal of the Military Government of China. He even introduced ancient imperial rituals at his court.

Shidehara's attitude to China was consistently fair. The Chinese had long sought tariff reform from 19th-century treaties imposed by Western powers and Japan. These were viewed as unfair in China. Shidehara was keener on reform than his Western colleagues. In 1925 a customs conference was convened in Beijing, but it was disrupted when warlord factions clashed in the capital and the Chinese government lost control. The matter was shelved for five years, by which time Japan's attitude to China had hardened as Chiang Kai-Shek had consolidated his power.

In 1927 Chinese Nationalist forces entered Nanjing and unruly elements attacked foreign consulates and settlements. Britain and other Western nations wanted to send an ultimatum to general Chiang Kai-Shek backed by naval vessels sailing up the Yangtze. The Chinese would be taught a lesson, it was claimed. Shidehara disagreed, in favour of a more graduated approach. For this he was much criticised in the right-wing press in Japan - for weakness. A sign of the future.

The Meiji Constitution of 1889 gave the people certain rights. There was an elected House of Representatives. In 1925 the Kenseikai won an extension of the vote to all adult males, but the House of Peers was appointed by the Emperor (in effect, his senior advisers) and he retained extensive powers, including supreme command of the army and navy. The chiefs of the army and navy staffs would sometimes, from 1930, claim that 'the right of supreme command' gave them licence to oppose the policy of the government. What the emperor thought on these occasions could only be surmised as he never made public pronouncements.

In 1927 the Kenseikai government resigned after a dispute with the Privy Council over financial reform. General Tanaka, leader of the Seiyukai (Friends of the Constitution party - broadly conservative) became Prime Minister. He was concerned to check Chiang's troops from advancing into north China and unifying the country. But he faced a more immediate problem - the economy was heading for recession, there were problems with the banks and popular discontent was growing. Tanaka's response was to go on the attack. The Kenseikai (now the Rikken Minseito - Constitutional Democratic Party) were 'decadent' liberals, tolerant of socialists and extremists. He used the very Peace Preservation Law enacted by the Kenseikai, which abjured 'dangerous thought' to harass and arrest leading leftists.

Japan had the right to station troops on the Qinan-Qingdao railway until 1937. As the Nationalist army advanced into Shandong province and Zhang's warlord allies fell back, Tanaka claimed the IJA there was needed to protect Japanese citizens in Shandong. A few Japanese were killed in the turmoil but Tanaka greatly exaggerated the casualties. However, the emperor and his chief adviser Prince Saionji thought the Nationalist conquest of north China was unstoppable. Indeed in 1928 Japan recognised Chiang's government as de jure ruler of China.

The IJA in general now regarded Zhang Zuolin as a spent force. In June 1928, the Marshal left Beijing by train for Manchuria. Some officers of the Guandong army decided to kill him on the basis he was now a hindrance to Japanese influence in the region. Along the way, an explosion destroyed him and his railway carriage. It was hoped by the conspirators that disorder would follow his demise and the Guandong army would intervene to restore the peace. But there was no reaction locally; in Tokyo feelings were mixed. After all, the Marshal was a nominal head of state. The emperor and Saionji demanded the assassins be prosecuted. But the IJA leaders were obstructive. Tanaka could not fulfil the imperial order, so he resigned in July 1929.

The Minseito returned to power under its leader, Hamaguchi Yuko, with Shidehara back as foreign minister. He was determined to restore good relations with China. He was helped by Zhang's son Xueliang, who took over his father's domains and army, but made instant fealty to Chiang Kai-shek. The Guandong army was furious but helpless - for now.

Meanwhile the recession in Japan had deepened. Popular dissent spread, and the government made disastrous decisions to deal with it - raising taxes, cutting public expenditure - leading to greater unemployment and lower wages. Militant nationalists, painting democracy as bankrupt, gained a larger following.

In 1930 Shidehara was mainly engaged in the London Conference for the extension to smaller warships of the naval treaty of 1922. Shidehara and much of the Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) leadership were in favour but a large faction led by the chief of the Navy staff, Admiral Kato Kanju regarded the 5:5:3 ratio agreed for heavy cruisers as an insult to Japan and wanted at least 10:10:7. Unlike in 1922, the matter caused great excitement among militant nationalists. Wakatsuki Reijiro, head of the Japanese delegation, with Shidehara's backing won some concessions for the IJN - 10:10:7 for light cruisers and destroyers and maintaining parity with the USA and Britain in submarines.

Back in Tokyo, Seiyukai leaders led a fierce attack on the government, claiming it had no authority to overrule the chief of the naval staff on matters of national defence, an argument used much later by militarists. But Hamaguchi, backed by Saionji and the Minseito majority in the Diet, stood firm. The nationalist ire generated was a probable cause, in November 1930, of the attempted murder and severe wounding of Hamaguchi (died April 1931). Shidehara became acting PM, but ceded the top job to ex-PM Wakatsuki in April. Wakatsuki was not, however, a strong character like Hamaguchi. The political class was aware of discontent and rumours of plots within the army officer ranks, but was divided and hesitated to confront the problem.

Since 1928 Xueliang had taken a conciliatory approach to Japan, but it did not save him from the displeasure of the Guandong army. Manchuria was seen not only as a source of expansion for economically stricken Japan, but also as a bulwark against the USSR. Two IJA officers, Ishiwara Kanji and Itagaki Seishiro (later generals) concocted a plan and cleared it with key figures in the army ministry and army general staff.

The Mukden Incident of 18 September 1931

Ishiwara and Itagaki arranged for a covert IJA unit to blow up part of the South Manchurian Railway. Fighting between Chinese troops and Japanese railway guards ensued. IJA Guandong forces intervened to 'restore order'. Quickly they were spreading over south Manchuria after capturing Mukden, Xueliang's capital. He retreated, fearing defeat by the IJA. Shidehara persuaded a divided Cabinet that the invasion had to be localised and stopped. The army general staff objected that this was a violation of the right of supreme command. However, with imperial backing and a promise to negotiate a new treaty with China over Japanese rights in Manchuria, the General Staff retreated. The invasion was very popular and the government's stock was low. Shidehara had halted an IJA move on the important cities of Chinchow and Harbin, but Saionji warned him that he could no longer hold the line. Shidehara was isolated. On 13 December 1931, the Wakatsuki cabinet resigned. The IJA resumed its advance north to Chinchow. Use of an imperial rescript to call a halt was proposed by the new prime minister, Inukai Tsuyoshi - but this was dismissed, since if it were flouted the loss of face to the emperor, a god-like figure, would be deeply damaging to society.

In January 1932, Inukai faced a new crisis. There was a large Japanese quarter in the International Settlement at Shanghai. Infuriated by the Mukden incident, Chinese citizens became vociferously anti-Japanese. Clashes broke out between the two communities, partly fuelled by Itagaki's cash. Outside the Settlement, Chiang's 19th Route Army clashed with Japanese troops. In Tokyo the IJA demanded reinforcements go to Shanghai. Very reluctantly, Inukai agreed to the despatch of two IJA divisions. But the 19th Route Army offered stiff resistance. Some IJN bombers destroyed part of a densely populated area of the Chinese city. The Mukden incident had caused shock in Western foreign ministries but the strife in Shanghai was observed by numerous Europeans and Americans. Reports were made by journalists, photos taken, film shot. Japanese aggression was vivid and shock in the West intense and widespread.

The consuming news story of the time in the USA was the kidnapping of the Lindbergh baby. Even allowing for this, reaction to Japan's aggressions was adverse. United States Secretary of State Henry Stimson strongly condemned Japan for breaking the non-aggression Treaty of Paris 1928, which it had signed. He was adamant that Japan should be punished, but President Herbert Hoover was consumed by the problems of the economic depression at home. He backed Stimson in words, but not deeds. The British government was similarly preoccupied. US, British and French businesses in Shanghai felt their interests threatened, but in 1932 the Foreign Office warned His Majesty's Government that British defence in the Far East was fatally weak. Britain echoed Stimson but batted the matter to the League of Nations.

In May a truce was brokered in Shanghai between the Chinese and Japanese forces. IJA hotheads wanted the battle to continue, but General Shirikawa obeyed the government. It didn't benefit Inukai - he was murdered on the 25th. As leader of the Seiyukai, he was in no sense a radical, but his attempts, however moderate, to restrain the militarists condemned him. They remembered that for decades Inukai was an energetic fighter for universal male suffrage (enacted 1925). He was the last party leader to be prime minister until 1945.

Saionji proposed the emollient Admiral Saito Makoto as premier. Liked by all, it was hoped he would heal rifts in the body politic. But the Guangdong army pressed ahead with their project for Manchukuo, a puppet state covering Manchuria. Despite League of Nations condemnation of Japan's actions, in September 1932 Japan recognised Manchukuo. The League's solution was an independent Manchuria devoid of both Chinese and Japanese troops. This infuriated both Chinese and Japanese governments. The IJA busily established Japanese administration in Manchuria. In February 1933 they reached the border with China. Chiang was having problems securing his rule against communists and rival warlords. The Guangdong army made him an offer he could not refuse, recognise the Japanese occupation of Manchuria and Rehe province of Inner Mongolia to the west and the demilitarisation of an area to the north of Beijing and Tianjin. The Tanggu Truce of May 1933 created a pause, but one that allowed Japan to be a permanent threat to north China, and Chiang not to recognise Manchukuo and retain the theoretical support of the Western democracies.

But in Tokyo the IJA met a problem. Takahashi Korekiyo, a Keynesian, was a successful finance minister who was restoring the Japanese economy. He was keen on an extension of trade rather than war, and held the army's budget under severe restraint. He also angered the IJA by strongly opposing Japan leaving the League of Nations, unsuccessfully. During a failed coup attempt in Tokyo in February 1936 by an IJA faction, Takahashi and other dignitaries were assassinated, including the amiable Saito, ex-Prime Minister. Prime Minister Okada only survived because his brother-in-law, mistaken for him, was killed.

The journey to Pearl Harbor was a spasmodic one, interrupted by many checks and hesitations by Japanese leaders. From 1931 to 1935, its investment in armaments increased by two-and-a-half times, chiefly for the Navy. The IJN was vital to an island nation seeking to be a great power, and rivalled the IJA in political influence. Both had their own air arms.

In March 1934 the US Congress passed the Vinson Act permitting the Navy to increase its fleet to the limits imposed by the naval treaties. Although this was legitimate, Japan saw, or chose to describe, this move as aggressive, intended to be the start of US domination of the Pacific. The naval treaties were due to expire in 1936. In 1935 Japan announced it would not seek renewals. This suited the IJN very well. In 1934 it had made plans and stock-piled materials for super-battleships that would outgun and outrange any existing or likely Western opponent. It was also developing a naval air service that would be the best-trained in the world in 1941.

But the Guandong Army pressed ahead with their project for Manchukuo, a puppet state covering Manchuria. Despite League of Nations condemnation of Japan's actions, in September 1932 Japan recognised Manchukuo. The League's solution was an independent Manchuria devoid of both Chinese and Japanese troops. This infuriated both governments. The IJA busily established Japanese administration in Manchuria. In February 1933, they reached the border with China. Chiang was having problems securing his rule against communists and rural warlords. The Guandong army made him an offer he could not refuse: accept the Japanese occupation of Manchuria and Rehe (Jehol) – the province of Inner Mongolia to the west – and the demilitarisation of an area north of Beijing and Tianjin. This Tanggu Truce of May 1933 created a pause, but one that allowed Japan to be a permanent threat to north China, and Chiang Kai-shek not to recognise Manchukuo formally and retain the theoretical support of the Western democracies.

The zaibatsu, or big business, were wary of militarism, but eager to profit from its orders. Every strengthening of this military industrial complex made war with the West not inevitable but more difficult to avert, especially as militarism retained a large popular following. As late as early 1937, Prince Saionji asked General Ugaki, a former long-serving war minister, to be premier, but Ugaki had to give up, as no general would serve as war minister and nobody else was eligible. Army officers distrusted him as an equivocator, intimate with politicians. Up until autumn 1940, IJN leaders generally held to a policy of neutrality with Britain and the USA, especially the latter, as long as they tolerated the rape of China. Then the hotheads took over but that is another story told by many scholarly historians and by me and others in the pages of *Apa Khabar*.

Shidehara survived the war. As one of the few statesmen with any credibility left, he became the first prime minister of post-war Japan in October 1945, a bitter victory indeed. In May 1946 his party lost the first election.

After 1931 Shidehara remained as a member of the House of Peers in political isolation. In October 1945 General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander Allied Powers (SCAP) appointed Shidehara Prime Minister, then leader of a new Progressive Party and untainted by militarism. Under the direction of SCAP, Shidehara enacted many reforms – land reform, women's rights, economic democratisation, recognition of trade unions and rights and benefits for workers. In the May 1946 election, the Progressives came second and there followed a chaotic period of two-and-a-half years of short-lived Liberal (conservative) and Socialist-led governments, but SCAP remained in control in this time of social unrest.

The Socialists distrusted Shidehara as affiliated to the Mitsubishi concern, and he was repelled by their Marxist policies. In 1948 he joined the Liberal Party, and in 1949 became Speaker of the House

of Representatives during a Liberal government. There he remained until his death. Reforms had been enacted under the old constitution, and Shidehara believed a new one was not needed. But SCAP insisted on a fresh start.

Shidehara was an economic conservative, but radical on the question of war. General MacArthur gave him the credit for the idea that formed Article 9 of the new Japanese constitution: that Japan would not be armed for aggressive war. It was renounced as a sovereign right of the nation from May 1947. Shidehara's wife, Masako, was a Quaker and his critics often accused him of being one. Whether he was or not, he was unlikely not to be influenced by her.

Afterword

On finishing what I thought was the final draft of this article, my friend Tim May sent me a new source by the eminent historian Herbert Bix, 'Hirohito and the making of modern Japan' (2000), which cast a subtly different light on the Mukden incident.

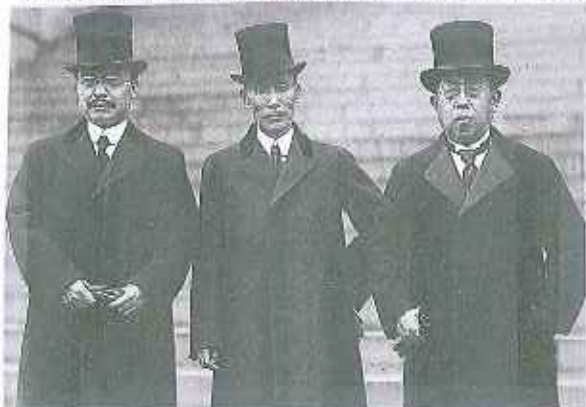
As we have seen, the emperor did intervene to pause the invasion of Manchuria. He had a good idea of what was going on from his top advisers. The army minister, General Minami, knew of the Guandong Army's secret plans, told the emperor about discontent in the officer corps over government policy towards Manchuria, but pretended he had matters under control. Minami did in fact secure a short delay in launching it from senior officers privy to the plot in the army ministry and general staff. But his emissary to Mukden, sent to secure the delay, was in cahoots with Ishiwara and Itagaki. The emperor had the power to halt the invasion at any time. He did not promote it but was content to let it happen, Bix argues, as it expanded his empire. Others agree he feared to rouse the widespread nationalist fervour by intervening decisively to stop the aggression.

Unfortunately, Shidehara's action in the crisis were not entirely consistent. He firmly criticised the Manchurian invasion within a divided government. The Home Minister even openly supported the invasion. In October a plot by general staff officers in the secret Cherry Blossom Society was foiled, which must have reinforced to him the danger he was in. Only five months before the incident, his former boss, Hamaguchi, had died of wounds murderously inflicted, a traumatic event indeed.

As Foreign Minister, Shidehara defended Japan to the Western world, claiming that it was acting in self-defence, upholding the sanctity of treaties. Perhaps he thought this was the price he had to pay for remaining in the Cabinet, potentially influencing events.

In 1945 the question of Hirohito's war guilt was raised by the Truman administration, Allied governments and many Japanese citizens. As prime minister Shidehara sought to quieten the debate, aware that was what MacArthur wanted. Reduction of the emperor to a powerless symbol was enough for him. After all, many of his former enemies were to be punished by death sentences or imprisonment.

This article is dedicated to John Martin Rowley, 1944-2021, late trustee of the Gandhi Foundation



Left to right: Baron Kijuro Shidehara, Admiral Kato Tomosaburo and Prince Tokugawa Lesato on 3rd November 1921 at the Washington Naval Conference.

LONG FORGOTTEN, LONG OVERDUE – Part 2

The Saga of Alfred Bird and the Singapore War Crimes Trials. In Essay By Aimee Liu 7/09/2020 Then, in 2017, Pratt-Johnson received a note from Lim Jia Yi. She wanted to know if his grandfather was the same person whose case she was researching for the SWCTP. It seemed that two of the men who participated in Alfred Bird's murder had been convicted at the War Crimes Trial 71 years earlier – even though no-one in London had ever recorded Bird as a casualty.

Lieutenant Hiram Mitsui and Egami Masao were tried for Bird's killing over five days in June 1946. They were low-level naval officers. According to the SWCTP case summary, witnesses testified that the men had enjoyed the execution. *"For example, the accused had laughed."* Nevertheless, they had been acting on orders of a superior – a superior who most likely was Bird's actual executioner. Records in Port Blair named Bird's killer as Colonel Bucho, but Ms. Lim told me that Bucho's name never appeared in trial documents. *"The beheading of Major Bird was also not mentioned during the trial."* The two lieutenants were each sentenced to ten years in prison.

The truncated nature of these proceedings was typical of the Singapore trials. Junior officers were prosecuted, Ms. Lim said, while *"lowest and highest-ranked soldiers tended to escape punishment."* In some cases, junior officers were charged as representatives of their units, thus sparing the court from a scale of mass litigation that would have been untenable.

British authorities did their best to conduct free and fair trials with what was available, she explained. *"Investigation teams were dispatched all over South and Southeast Asia to collect information, and Japanese lawyers were also provided with translators, guidance and information."* But conditions in post-war Asia were hardly conducive. The Japanese had destroyed most of the necessary records before surrendering, and few witnesses survived.

Chaos in post-war Singapore, meanwhile, pressurized the trials. In an overview for the Singapore Law Review, SWCTP co-founder Cheah W.L. wrote, *"Prisoners of war (POWs) had to be located and repatriated. There was a severe shortage of food, basic necessities and housing. In addition, the British faced increasing resistance to continued colonial rule."*

After six months under British Military Administration, civilian government resumed, but the British Military remained on guard as *"the MCP reverted to its pre-war anti-British stance, demanding more political power and organizing mass strikes."* Other groups, including trade unionists and student activists, opposed British rule as well. This meant, Prof. Cheah noted, that the opposition no longer belonged to the elite. *"After the war, political activity and defiance took on a 'youthful, militaristic face'."* As the protests mounted, it didn't help that the BMA's corruption was earning it the nickname *"Black Market Administration."*

It also didn't help that the trials threatened to remind Singaporeans of Britain's failure to protect her colonies early in the war. Like Alfred Bird, thousands of British subjects were abandoned when the U.K. surrendered Singapore, Rangoon and Port Blair, all within five weeks of each other and without any official acknowledgement of the true danger the local populations faced.

With this debacle in the rearview mirror, Ms Lim said, *"an element of performance" crept into the trials, "directed towards the colonized population in particular (especially to re-assert British power in the region) but also to the Japanese participants (asserting Allied power)."*

This performance element may help to explain why the Bird case, along with other crimes committed in the Andamans, was prosecuted in Singapore. Port Blair, located in one of the last and most badly battered territories to be liberated, had no infrastructure to host war crimes trials, so Bird's case couldn't have been heard there. But it could have been tried closer, perhaps at the war crimes tribunal in Rangoon. I found it odd that crimes committed in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands represented more than a third of all the Singapore trials (more than were committed in Singapore itself). According to Prof. Cheah, the reason may have had to do with the history of the Independence Movement in Port Blair.

During the war, the Japanese had made a great show of raising the flag of Free India over the Andamans, even as they rounded up and executed most of the Independence League members. For propaganda purposes, all of Asia was told that the Indian National Army was 'based' out of Port Blair and supported by the Japanese occupation forces. So, Prof. Cheah speculates, when anti-colonialists started beating the drum for independence in Singapore, *the British probably believed it was politically important to show that the Japanese had committed crimes against locals in these islands."* This implicitly cast the British on the side of liberation.

New political realities, however, complicated the performance aspects of the trials. Not only were the British

wrestling with Communism and anti-colonialism, Ms Lim said, but they were *“treading a thin line between local appeasement and maintaining cordial relations with Japan,”* who was now an American ally and military dependent. It was awkward, to say the least, to jail mid-level Japanese soldiers for war crimes without raising the inconvenient truth of atrocities inflicted on civilians by America. ***The atomic bombings were most certainly war crimes but yet no one has been prosecuted for them.*** **[Editor: I have not edited this controversial sentence which may not be the view of members.]**

As a result of all these factors, most cases were dispatched with haste. Trials lasted, on average, just six days. All in all, according to Prof. Cheah, the Class B and C war crimes trials *“would contravene many of today’s human rights standards.”* But this conduct reflected the political exigencies in East Asia at that moment.

“The very fact that the trials were conducted was an important statement,” Lim Jia Yi acknowledged. As part of a very delicate political balancing act, they were *“also intended to be a quick end to the WW11 chapter.”*

To that end, the convicted prisoners were jailed locally, but within a few years most were repatriated to serve the remainder of their sentences at Sugamo Prison in Tokyo. By this time, the Cold War had descended, adding another layer of obscurity to the record of Singapore’s post-war trials.

Given the mounting Communist threat from Korea and China, the Allies now were intent on forging an unbreakable alliance with neighbouring Japan. This required burying the last traces WW11 hostility as quickly as possible. *“On a government level,”* Ms Lim explained, *“the 1950s was basically marked by a race between the Allied governments to pardon and release war criminals in Sugamo.”*

The last prisoner convicted at the war crimes trials was freed on the first day of 1957, less than a decade after the trials ended.

As far as families like Alfred Bird’s were concerned, case files from the Singapore War Crimes Trials were sent back to London and became publicly available – but only if one knew where to look for them. Even today, though searchable through the International Criminal Courts and National Archives websites, the documents still can only be read by visiting the archives in person. Whether intentional or not, this bureaucratic filing system has amounted to a cover-up.

Despite having had access to all the necessary records for seven decades, the War Graves Commission only consented to recognize Bird as a war casualty after his grandson presented them with the evidence supplied by the SWCTP. Finally, in 2017, Alfred George Bird was added to the Civilian War Dead Roll of Honour 1939-1945.



Indicted Japanese war criminals standing to attention in the dock of the Singapore Supreme Court at the beginning of the trial – 21 January 1946. From Wikimedia Commons. Source: IWM Collections IWM Photo No: CF 1051. Post-Work: User:W.wolny. Licence: Unrestricted in due to IWM

THE BATU KAWAN ESTATE – Part 1
LETTER FROM RICHARD RYAN TO HIS WIFE ELIZABETH, OCTOBER 1941.
With thanks to David Man (grandson of Gordon REIS)

On 5th March 1941, forty-year-old **Richard Ryan** joined the Australian Army at Tamworth (approximately half way between Brisbane and Sydney) and after a short period of training, was assigned to 2/3 Reserve Motor Transport Company and embarked for service in Malaya. After six months training and enjoying the sights of Malaya, including a visit in October to Batu Kawan Estate, located close by to Penang, **Sergeant Ryan** was soon caught up in the Japanese invasion of Malaya in December 1941.

Ryan was wounded near Ipoh whilst '*getting some Argyles (sic) over the river.*' His leg was badly shattered below the knee, and he was withdrawn to Singapore. He regained consciousness just as he was being prepared for surgery and refused to have his leg amputated by the English doctor attending, reportedly yelling, "*No Pommy bastard is taking my leg off!*"

The following is taken from the [Australian War Memorial Museum](#) and has been slightly edited:

Ryan was still in hospital when the Japanese entered Singapore on 14th February 1942, and he later related to **Tim Bowden** in an interview recorded in February 1982 (see AWM sound collection S02941) that he was rolling a cigarette when a Japanese soldier stopped at the end of his bed and demanded the cigarette and made him make three more for the other soldiers with him. **Ryan** complied: "*They said how lovely they were. Of course they were made of Australian tobacco. They sent me three packets of Japanese cigarettes. That was alright. But the same day Japs came in and murdered one doctor in the ward, killed the bloke on the table and wounded another doctor.*"

He also relates that: "*They took a hundred and three walking patients and orderlies away from the hospital and they bayonet practiced on them that night. One bloke got away and ran for his life and he was absolutely like a lunatic.*" [Presumably **Ryan** is referencing here part of the massacre at Queen Alexandra's Hospital.] **Richard** always wore a built-up boot and walked 'with a hobble' because of refusing to have his leg amputated.

After three weeks, **Ryan** was moved to Changi prison where he remained for the next three and a half years, surviving as best he could, working in the vegetable gardens.

Ryan had an elder son, **William (Bill) Barry**, who enlisted with the RAAF on 17th August 1941 in Sydney, NSW. He was killed when the Wellington bomber, in which he was rear gunner, ditched in rough seas following engine failure over the target of Leghorn, Italy, on 17th April 1944.

Upon liberation, **Richard Ryan** was repatriated to Australia. During his recovery, he made a doll while he was in hospital. Materials and patterns for this type of rehabilitation work were supplied by the Red Cross.

In October 1941, a few months before his capture, **Richard Ryan** wrote a letter to his wife **Bess (nee Elizabeth Innes)** reporting on his visit to the island estate of Batu Kawan, which was managed by **Gordon Reis**. [Ed: **David Man's** grandfather].



Batu Kawan Estate House, circa 1935

On an internet search conducted in March 2022, one of **Ryan's** granddaughters found a web page that contained some biographical details on **Gordon Reis**, and she contacted the page's editor who happened to be **Reis's** grandson and who was able to provide some detail as to what happened to **Reis** and his wife after **Ryan's** visit.

The date of **Ryan's** visit is hardly surprising, being only a couple of months before the Japanese would land at Kota Bahru in Northern Malaya, some 220 miles from Penang, in early December 1941.

Reis and his wife managed to get down to Singapore in the interval where they were reunited with their daughter who had been on holiday in Australia. In January 1942, mother and daughter were evacuated from Singapore, along with hundreds of others on the *Empress of Japan* and they reached Durban, South Africa, some weeks later. There they spent the duration of the war, returning to Penang in 1946.



Richard Ryan with his sons Frank and Bill

Gordon Reis remained in Singapore and was on one of the last boats, the *Giang Bee*, to leave the island on the 12th February 1942. Unfortunately, the *Giang Bee*, as it approached Bangka Island, was soon surrounded by Japanese naval ships and all on board were ordered to abandon ship; after which the boat was shelled until it sank. Of this incident, **Reis** later wrote in a diary kept in captivity:

*"We then got orders to assemble on the life boat deck as following some signalling were apparently ordered to abandon ship. What a feeling it is - but everyone was majestically calm and peaceful and resigned. I went to my bay and collected a jacket and after slipping into the water was later pulled into a lifeboat. Fortunately, this was one of the good lifeboats for I believe two of the large ones sank - one having been damaged by bombing early in the day and the other broke its back, probably due to overloading. After getting into the lifeboat - even with my damaged hand and with the assistance of the officer in charge, Morton, an engineer - we steered a SW course and about 10.30 p.m. the *Giang Bee* ship was lit by searchlight and then shelled. We therefore had plenty of time to get away from the ship, but there must have been as stated say 270 casualties finally."*

Those few who survived this ordeal were later captured and interned at Palembang and Muntok on Bangka Island, where on 2nd November 1944, **Reis** died of beriberi brought about by malnutrition.

With the permission of one of **Reis's** granddaughters, the letter describing **Richard Ryan's** visit to the Batu Kawan Estate in October 1941 is transcribed below. The letter has been edited somewhat to make it more readable.

October 1941, Malaya. [Dick to **Bess**. 57, King Street, West Tamworth, NSW.]

After addressing some family issues between himself and his wife, **Ryan** then writes:

"... You can rest assured there will be no fighting here until February at the earliest as the wet season holds it all up here, so that is a few month's grace, and by that time let's hope it's all over.

Sunday. Darling. I went for my trip yesterday to the island estate [Batu Kawan] and what a day we had. Five of us left here at 9 a.m. by lorry and went 9 miles to a primitive ferry. The lorry came back and we went over in a small sampan to the island. Vehicles are taken over by a ferry punt, one vehicle at a time, propelled by long oars or sweeps. Three men do the rowing. On arrival at the Island, a syce (driver) met us in a beautiful Woolsey [sic Wolseley] Car and up we went about 2 miles to the Homestead of the Estate. There are 14 square miles in the Estate, over a thousand coolies including children, three white people, **Mr. & Mrs. Reis** and **Ellis**, a young Englishman of about 20 or 21. They have Chinese & Malay Clerks, fitters etc.

Mr. & Mrs. are Scotch (sic) and could not do enough for us. The house is two stories, Elec. Light. Sewer, Hot & Cold water service, bedrooms mosquito proof, fans everywhere, house Boys etc. etc. A marvellous lawn with tennis courts on the lawn. About the lawn are several large granite mill stones used over 100 years ago for grinding sugar cane into sugar, the plantation at that time was exclusively sugar and coconut. **King George** (father of the present King) was entertained there when in the navy. On average the island is 5 miles long by 2 to 3 miles wide. There are tons of snakes, crocs, wild pigs and monkeys.

On arrival we were given tea (about 10 a.m.); then off about the island and saw part of the plantation; then onto a hill to view the island as a panorama; down to the sea then for a swim, and it was good too. The shores abound in fish and fishing is carried out nearly all round it. On the way back we saw coffee growing. It grows on a shrub about 4 or 5 ft. high and is a green berry which turns red as it ripens. The outer skin is taken off and the coffee bean is inside. The bean berry is this size (drawn illustration). It looks somewhat like a tiny apple. The one I have here is red and ripe. Here they roast and grind their own coffee for household use, but do not commercialise it. As we came back, we were met about 2 miles from the house by the cars again, and ice cold beer was served to us.

Next we visited the rubber factory and saw huge vats made of aluminium filled with the milky latex from the trees. There are partitions in the vats so that when acid is added to the fluid it sets like a junket in huge slabs. These are then floated up to the roller and passed through a series of rollers and then sundried and latex smoked in a smoke house before finally being packed in boxes and sent off to England.

We had a midday meal of fish curry and a lot of (??) curried. Rice is served separately with this on your plate, the Boy going round to each one separately and you help yourself. Then comes the titbits for the same plate, baked peanuts, chutney and a lot of other titbits I do not know the names. Iced water to drink, oh, and Beer before the meal. Pudding was fruit salad etc. (I'm quite adept now with finger bowls and don't attempt to wash my face with it) coffee was served in another room and we were invited to have a siesta in another room but the interest was too great to allow us to sleep.

So off we went, we saw toddy gatherers, they are Indian with a loin cloth and on one side a sheath of knives and on the other a calabash jar shaped (drawn illustration) which holds about a gallon. Well up he goes, up the coconut tree and on top he has water bottles (earthenware) shaped thus (another illustration). He takes one of the flower shoots of the tree right at the top, cuts off the end and bends it over to let it into the bottle and secures the bottle in the tree.

Some trees have 4 or 5 bottles attached. The fluid, which is called toddy, is taken from each tree twice per day. It is strained, bottled and sold in toddy shops at 10 cents a quart. The natives drink it and it's sold within 36 hours of tapping. It makes them drunk if too much is drunk, but it is the most nutritious (sic) drink sold anywhere. If toddy is kept a few days it is as intoxicating as whisky. I tasted it, but it's rotten to taste and vile to smell. But the natives love it. I, yes I, climbed a coconut tree via the cut-in steps to see the toddy jars. Well, by that time we had an audience of over a hundred small kids of all shades of black. The estate takes care of these people who are employed on the state. Over 1,000 natives live on the estate. They have a hospital and a dispensary. Any sores or cuts must go straight to the dispensary, and sick infants must be cared for there. The school has 3 teachers. English is taken, but only taught to the highest class and then only English speech, not written. Their language is Tamil, an Indian language. Very few children of both sexes wear clothes until they are about six. They have their own stores and temples. Each child gets a feed of rice in the school and a pint of milk each day. This is an incentive for the children to attend school. The Manager, **Mr. Reis**, is more to these people than any being.

Back to the house and more Ice-cold beer, then on to the copra works. The natives go out with long bamboo poles with curved knives attached. They cut down bunches of coconuts and heap them up, then husk them. They are carted into canals, which run through the coconut groves, loaded on to barges and conveyed to the copra kilns. Great heaps of nuts are put on the landing and other natives cut them open, chopping each nut in half. The milk just runs back into the canal. But the halves of the nuts are sun dried, then put in the kiln and dried over a fire. Then the outer case comes away from the meat of the nut and the meat is then called copra. The copra is bagged and exported to make margarine, soap & coconut oil.

Back home to the house for more beer (Ice cold) and a little later High Tea. Cakes, fruit, tea etc. and a smoke. It was starting to get dark shortly after so we moved in and **Mr. Reis** wrote away for 5 tickets in the lottery run on the Penang races at the end of the month. Well, we played dice for those tickets (Poker dice) - the five of us and **Mr. & Mrs. Reis** - each of us with an interest in each of the tickets. I won a 30% interest in 2 tickets and a 10% interest in the other three. So, I may yet land something worthwhile.*

Dinner was at 8 p.m. There was a beautiful Danish (sic) ham - the last of 10 they had from Denmark before the invasion of Denmark. It was delicious. We had Coconut Cabbage which come from the very heart of the top of the tree and means that the tree stops growing, so our Cabbage caused the death of the tree. And the pudding I can't describe. It was something like a jelly & trifle but it was much nicer. The dinner was marvellous. How I would love my Mummy with me here to see it all. The table was in keeping with the rest of the place. Well, at 10p.m. we were driven back to the ferry and came home by truck.

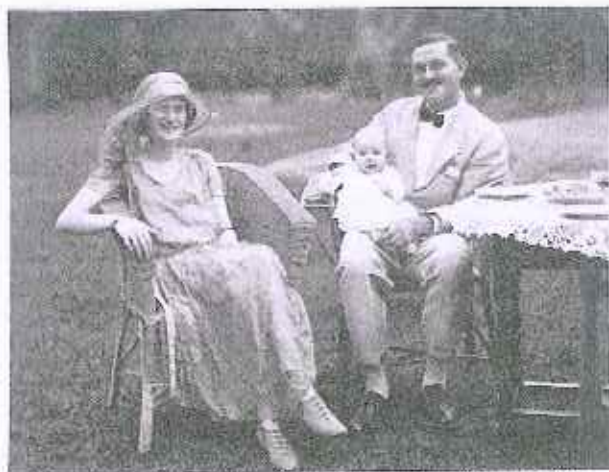
Their daughter is in Australia on Hols, but is now about to return to Malaya. They went to Aus for Leave a few months back and are going to retire there in 2 years.

Well, my sweetest of sweethearts, I must close.

Your ever loving husband,

Dick.

*[In a letter written on 2nd November 1941, he said that he had received the results of the Penang lottery from **Gordon Reis** without any success.]



Mr and Mrs Reis with their daughter on Batu Kawan, 1922

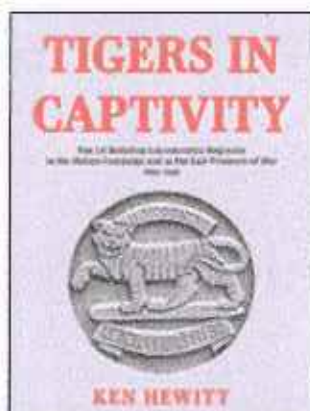


Mrs. Reis with her dog Stout and one of the granite mill stones

N.B. Gordon Reis studied Agriculture at Edinburgh University & received a BSc. He later studied forestry at Heidelberg University & spoke fluent German. He met his wife **Winifred** at Edinburgh after returning from Sumatra. They were married in Rangoon in 1921. They are **David Man's** grandparents, & their daughter **Sheila** is **David's** mother.

BOOKS

"Tigers in Captivity. The 1st Battalion Leicestershire Regiment in the Malaya Campaign and as Far East Prisoners of War 1941-1945." By Ken Hewitt. Published by Troubador Publishing Ltd. ISBN 978-1803-131-283



Reviewed by Richard Brown.

"Tigers in Captivity" tells the story of the 936 men of the 1st **Battalion Leicestershire Regiment** during the Malayan Campaign and the subsequent three and a half years in captivity as Japanese Prisoners of War. Whilst telling the detailed story of this Battalion, the book covers extensively the Malayan Campaign and it includes references to and information about other units, including the Malayan Volunteers, who fought alongside the British Battalion at the Battle of Kampar. This comprehensive and authoritative book starts with the Battalion's move from India to Malaya in early 1941, and continues with the defensive actions and withdrawal from Jitra in the north to Singapore in the south over a seventy day period following the Japanese invasion of Malaya in December 1941. It describes the early encounters with the enemy, the chaotic withdrawal after the battles of Jitra and Gurun, and the merger with my father's 2nd **Battalion East Surrey Regiment** to form the **British Battalion** at St. Michael's Institution in Ipoh on 20th December 1941.

This merged new battalion (it was merged because both the 1st Leicesters and the 2nd East Surreys had lost half their numbers – either killed, wounded or isolated from their units) put up a strong defence at the Battle of Kampar which delayed and frustrated the invading forces for four days before being ordered to withdraw. The 1st Battalion (Perak) Federated Malay States Volunteer Force (FMSVF) helped to build slit trenches, clearing vegetation from lines of fire and laying barbed wire before the battle. During the battle a machine gun platoon, under **Lt. Greetham** of FMSVF, reinforced the Green Ridge defences and a 2nd FMSVF platoon, under **Lt. Mackie**, stood alongside the British Battalion at the Malay cemetery and provided cover for the withdrawal from Thompson and Green Ridges.

The book describes further action at Batang Berjuntai and Batu Pahat, where the Battalion became isolated behind enemy lines and was fortunate to have been evacuated by the Royal Navy from Ponggor on the southwest coast of Malaya to Singapore. This is described as a "mini Dunkirk." After a period of consolidation on Singapore Island, the Battalion was ordered to the Kranji-Jurong defence line where they engaged with the enemy in fierce fighting. A withdrawal east along the Jurong Road to Bukit Timah was quickly followed up by the Japanese, leading to further encounters and a retreat across Sleepy Valley to Reformatory Road. After several more days of aerial bombardment and enemy artillery fire, Singapore finally surrendered.

Some men are known to have escaped the island around this time, and some of the wounded had already been evacuated. Those who are known to have escaped the island are identified and, where known, their ultimate fate recorded.

Following the fall of Singapore, 694 men of the 1st Battalion Leicestershire Regiment were now prisoners of war and **"Tigers in Captivity"** goes on to describe the movements of these captives around the Far East – the work parties in Singapore, the transfers of men to Japan and other Far East Asian countries, and the exodus from Singapore to Thailand to build the infamous 'Death Railway' between Thailand and Burma. Malnutrition, illness and disease, hard labour, brutality and allied offensives all took their toll. Even after the railway was completed the horrors continued with further hard labour in Thailand, 'hellship' voyages to Japan which often came under Allied attack and forced labour in the factories, mines, shipyards and docks of Japan. Finally, on 15th August 1945, the Japanese surrendered unconditionally and the book continues with the liberation and repatriation of these now ex-POWs and the post-war situation in which they found themselves.

Every man who was killed in action, or who died as a prisoner of war, is remembered by name at the appropriate point in the text and specific information on the circumstance of his death and grave location is given.

Summary Charts, Movement Tables and an A-Z listing of all 936 men provide further statistics and information on the men of the 1st Leicesters. An extensive bibliography lists the sources of information and provides readers with a signpost to further relevant reading. The book has a comprehensive index.

Not only is **"Tigers in Captivity"** the definitive historical record of the 1st Battalion Leicestershire Regiment during this period, it provides a tangible memorial – not only to the men who died but also to those who survived and had to live with the memories of those terrible years for the rest of their lives. The book also provides a better understanding, via detailed insight, into various aspects of the Malayan Campaign and the defence of Singapore. It is well written with comprehensive diagrams, maps and photographs.

I have to declare my personal friendship with the author, **Ken Hewitt**, and we have spent many hours discussing and researching the war in Malaya. Like many Far East prisoners of war, **Ken's** father, **Colour Sergeant John Hewitt**, and my own father, **Band Sergeant Bernard Brown**, spoke very little about their wartime experiences after returning home. In 2006, 20 years after his father's death, **Ken** started to research his father's 22-year military career with the Leicestershire Regiment, from enlistment in 1927 until his discharge in 1949. He learnt of his father's time with the 2nd Battalion in Germany, Catterick and Londonderry, with the 1st Battalion in India and Malaya and his three and a half years as a POW in Singapore and Thailand. **Ken's** interest quickly extended to all 936 men of the 1st Battalion who fought in the Malayan Campaign and their subsequent movements around the Far East as prisoners of war under the Japanese.

Then in 2015, to commemorate VJ70, **Ken** presented his research findings to an audience of 100 FEPOWs, descendants, Regimental veterans and other interested parties. Following the talk, he was strongly encouraged to document his findings more formally and now, seven years later after further research, writing and re-writing, sorting photographs and creating charts and maps, his book, "**Tigers in Captivity**" is now published.

Copies of the book are available at a cost of £25 + postage and packing from the author at kenhewitt@ntlworld.com or from the publisher at www.troubador.co.uk/bookshop For further information visit: www.tigersincaptivity.co.uk

"Nagasaki: The Forgotten Prisoners." By John Willis. Hardback. Cost £25. ISBN 978-1912-914-425 Published by Mensch Publishing.

The forgotten story of the prisoners of war who, against all odds, survived the devastating Nagasaki nuclear bomb. Using unpublished and rarely seen notes, diaries, interviews and memoirs, **John Willis** tells the harrowing stories of the forgotten Nagasaki prisoners of war, in their own voices.

At 11.02 am on an August morning in 1945, America dropped the world's most powerful atomic bomb on the Japanese port city of Nagasaki. The city was flattened to the ground 'as if it had been swept aside by a broom'. More than 70,000 Japanese were killed.

At the time, and unbeknownst to the pilots carrying the bomb, hundreds of allied prisoners of war were working close to the bomb's detonation point, as forced labourers in the shipyards and foundries of Nagasaki.

These men, from the Dales of Yorkshire and the dusty outback of Australia, from the fields of Holland and the remote towns of Texas, had already endured an extraordinary lottery of life and death that had changed their lives forever. After living through nearly four years of malnutrition, disease and harsh labour, their prison home was now the target of America's second atomic bomb.

In one of the greatest survival stories of the Second World War, we trace these prisoners' astonishing experiences: bloody battles in the Malayan jungle; the fall of Singapore; the brutal working conditions on the Thailand-Burma railway; the dangerous Journeys in the overcrowded "hell-ships" to Japan; and to top it off the world's second atomic bomb.

The prisoners in Nagasaki were eyewitnesses to one of the most significant events in modern history but writing notes or diaries in a Japanese prison camp was dangerous and sources are scarce.

Now, using unpublished and rarely seen notes, interviews and memoirs, this unique book weaves together a powerful chorus of voices to paint a vivid picture of defeat, endurance and survival against astonishing odds.

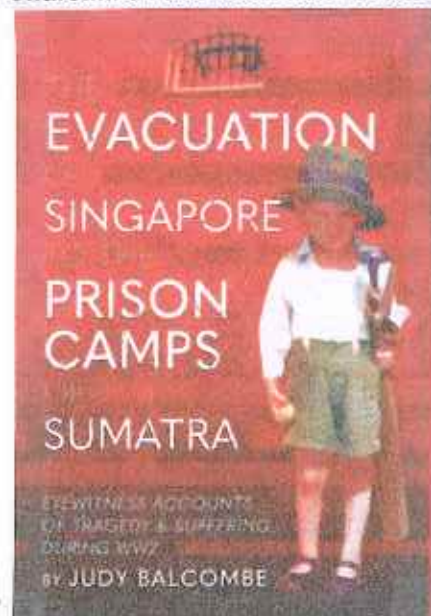
Author **John Willis** is one of Britain's best known television executives. He is a former Director of Programmes at Channel 4 and Director of Factual and Learning at the BBC. He is also the author of "**Churchill's Few and Secret Letters.**"

"The Evacuation of Singapore to the Prison Camps of Sumatra."

By **Judy Balcombe**. To be published by Pen and Sword in October 2023.

Originally entitled, "Unexpected Journeys" this book has been re-named by Pen and Sword much to **Judy's** regret. The front of the dust cover shows the window of Muntok Jail and her father's brother **Barney**. On the back is a picture of the Singapore Far East Moon Rose, which was specially bred in Australia to commemorate the military and civilian POWs.

More details about this book will be given when they are available.



"That's the Way it Was, Dear: Three Colonial Women 1898 – 1956." By Jennifer Howe.

A story chronicling the journeys of three generations of women from England to South East Asia and the war that forever changed their lives.

History is replete with just that: *his* story. So many women's stories go untold or are passed down in verbal snippets from generation to generation until, often, those snippets are lost. This book captures three of *her* stories: my grandmother's, my mother's and my own in turn-of-the-century Malaya. It recounts our colonial family's life in turn-of-the-century Malaya; our experiences during the Japanese occupation of Malaya and our lives during my father's and grandfather's captivity as prisoners of war, interspersed with passages from my father's POW diary. It follows our long journey back to England after the war and our subsequent return to post-war Malaya, ending, ultimately, with our departure from the land of my mother's birth and my own. It is at its core a story about women finding and creating homes where ever they find themselves.

Jennifer Howe has written three books – the first two for family consumption. Now at 81, she has finally published a moving, occasionally funny, and always engrossing account of her life as a Colonial Brat. These events informed her life; and the older she gets, the more the fallout impacts on her.

Former MVG member, **Jen Howe**, now lives in Canada. She is the daughter of the late **Thyra Godber** and niece of the late **June Wingate**, both MVG members.

Her book is self published, but can be obtained in paperback from Amazon and as an E-Book.

[N.B. This book was advertised briefly on P.5 of the July Edition of A.K. No:71.]

Report on the RSL's 2022 Vyner Brooke Tragedy Commemoration Service – by Robert Gray

This belated report was received recently with apologies.

The RSL commemoration at the Army Nurses' Memorial at Point Walter went very well and numbers were well up for this 80th anniversary year. Famed Australian Soprano, **Sara Macliver** led the congregation in singing the National Anthem. **Major Jo Wilson** of the Australian Army Nursing Corps was the Guest Speaker and **Lt. Pamela Truscott** read the Ode of Remembrance. Local historian **Sarah Fulford** delivered a talk entitled *The Vyner Brooke Story*.

The *Born to Sing Choir* sang a capella version of *Largo* and *Londonderry Air*, as sung in the camps, and a trio comprising an adult and two young singers gave a touching rendition of *The Captives' Hymn*, which brought a tear to many an eye. The Presbyterian Ladies College provided a piper and drummer, a Platoon of Air Force cadets participated in various ways, and uniformed students from local schools assisted with morning tea and as ushers handing out orders of service etc.

Next year's Vyner Brooke Tragedy Commemoration Service will again be held at the Army Nurses' Memorial, Point Walter Reserve, Bicton, WA on Sunday 12th February 2023 at 10.10 a.m. for 10.30 a.m. start.

OBITUARIES.

Felicity Bartleet (nee Daly) – died 12th November 2022

We are sad to report the death of **Felicity Bartleet**, aged 92, one of the founder members of the MVG. She died peacefully at home with her family. We send our very sincere condolences to her children, **Robin, Tim and Helen**, her 18 grandchildren and 15 great grandchildren. **Felicity's** husband **John** died several years ago.

Felicity and John attended several MVG functions during the early years including marching in Whitehall on Remembrance Sunday. It was the first time the MVG marched in 2005, the 60th anniversary of V-J Day. It was a bitterly cold day with a strong wind blowing down Whitehall and we all felt cold in the long wait before it was our turn to march.

Felicity's father, **A.J. Daly** earned an MC in the first World War and in WW2 was a Captain in the FMSVF 3 Malayan Field Ambulance. He was sent to Thailand where he died on the Railway and is buried in Chungkai Cemetery on the banks of the River Kwai. **Felicity** and her mother were evacuated to Perth WA where they spent the war. In 2006, **Felicity** wrote a book called, "**Ann**" about her early life in Malaya, her wartime experiences in Australia and subsequent life in England on her return after the war.

James Jeremiah – died 30th June 2022

The death of MVG's last Veteran Volunteer, **James Jeremiah**, aged 97, formerly of "E" Coy 3/SSVF, was announced in the Star newspaper on 2nd July 2022. **James** joined the Volunteers aged just 16 in 1941 as the Japanese overran Malaya. His first encounter with the enemy was early in December when Japanese Zero fighters started to bomb Bayan Lepas airport where he and his fellow Volunteers were stationed. Once Penang had been overrun, **James** became a POW and he had to work for the Japanese throughout the war, firstly removing the bodies of the dead and helping the wounded, then as a driver and later at the Batu Ferringhi reservoir. In 2017 he was invited to attend the Remembrance Service at the Cheras Road War Cemetery in KL, where he laid a wreath. He also regularly attended the Annual Service on Remembrance Day organised by the Penang Veterans' Association at the Cenotaph on the Esplanade in George Town, where he was the first to lay a wreath. He was awarded the PKT and PJK medals.

Ian Richardson – died 17th August 2022

It was with great sadness that we recently learned of the death of **Ian Richardson** from his wife **Zella**. We send **Zella**, her family and **Ian's** 4 brothers, together with his and their extended families, our sincere sympathies for their loss. **Ian's** health started to deteriorate in April last year and he was eventually diagnosed with lung cancer which caused his death.

Ian had been researching for many years into the atrocities which had taken place during the Japanese invasion of Singapore at the Alexandra Hospital where his father was a patient. He had been helped in his research by **Tan Ding Xiang**, who, we

hope, will be able to preserve **Ian's** meticulous and important research and prepare it for printing.

Ian joined MVG soon after **Andrew Hwang** became MVG secretary in Malaysia and Singapore, and was a regular attender at the Remembrance Sunday services at the Tugu Negara Memorial in KL. His father, **Louis A.L. Richardson**, held an important position as Superintendent of the Sultan of Johore's Palace Gardens, Zoo, Parks and Gardens. His mother, **Kathleen**, was appointed as Lady Superintendent of the Istana Besar – the only European woman to be in charge of a Malay Palace. **L.A.L. Richardson** joined the 2nd [Selangor] Battalion FMSVF's 1st Engineer Detachment and was a POW in Singapore. **Ian's** mother was evacuated on the **Orion** together with **Ian** and his 2 brothers to Melbourne.



PALACE SUPERINTENDENT

Wolverhampton Woman's Malay Post

News has reached the *Express and Star* from Singapore of the appointment of Mrs. L. A. L. Richardson, wife of the Director of Gardens in Johore, as superintendent of the Istana Besar.

"This," says *The Straits Times* "is of great interest. She is the only European woman to have charge of a Malay palace."

"Mrs. Richardson has especially important duties at present while the Sultan and Sultanah are away in Europe. They are not expected back until after the Coronation next year."

Mrs. Richardson is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. E. A. Davies, of Wolverhampton, where she formerly resided. An account of her marriage was published in the *Express and Star* on May 12th last.

July (?) 1936
a AUGUST CR

Simon Moss – died 30th October 2022

We send our heartfelt sympathies to **Lynda** and her family on the loss of her beloved husband. For many years, **Simon** and **Lynda** joined MVG's annual Gardening Group in early May to tidy the MVG's Memorial Garden at the National Memorial Arboretum. **Simon** would clean and oil the benches, doing any repairs deemed necessary, while **Lynda** would help with carting mulch and topsoil from the Arboretum's maintenance area to add to the ground around the trees, and help with trimming back the bamboo. After a morning's hard labour, we would all enjoy a well earned picnic lunch. It was gardening with conversation and friendship, and their work was much appreciated.

We also remember **Stoker Fred Lee** who died in July aged 95. He was serving on board the frigate **Nith** which saw action during the Normandy landings in June 1944. But in March 1945, **Nith** sailed for the Far East and witnessed the liberation of Burma. On 6th May 1945, she was the first British ship to berth alongside in Rangoon. On V-J Day **Nith** was at Cochin in India, where victory was celebrated in grand style. **Nith** continued her tour of the Far East visiting Bangkok, Jesselton and Singapore – Christmas was spent in Saigon before returning to England in March 1946.

We announce the death of **Major Tony Wright MC** aged 95. His MC was awarded in 1950 during the Malayan Emergency, when he, with a party of 10 men, took on and beat back a communist terrorist camp of 150 men. He also served in Singapore, Hong Kong and Sarawak. He took early retirement in 1964; settled in Australia where he married & lived in NSW. The death of **Major-General Keith Spacie** aged 87 was reported in the Telegraph on 24th November. He began his military career patrolling the jungles of Malaya, mounting counter-insurgency operations against the Communists. He was mentioned in dispatches in the London Gazette "for gallant and distinguished services in Malaya." He was an accomplished athlete as well as an academic and author.

THE REMARKABLE CONVERSION OF THE LEAD PEARL HARBOUR BOMBER

AN ARTICLE IN THE SPECTATOR ON 4/12/22

By Francis Pike

This week marks the 81st anniversary of the Japanese attack on the US fleet stationed at Pearl Harbour, Hawaii, which launched the start of the Pacific War and turned what had hitherto been a European war into a world conflict. The air attack by 353 Japanese warplanes on the US fleet at Pearl Harbour was led by flight Lt. **Commander Mitsuo Fuchida**. His later conversion to Christian evangelism was one of the peculiar outcomes of this seminal event in 20th century history.

In the summer of 1984, I was on a small car ferry taking me from Matsuyama, a city on Shikoku, the smallest of Japan's major four islands, to Hiroshima, situated on the main Japanese island of Honshu. It was a journey that had a transformative effect on my future. It was here that my life intersected in a virtual sense with **Mitsuo Fuchida**. It was a calm, warm, summer's evening, the sun was setting over Japan's magical Inland Sea with its tree-covered myriad of islands. Why was I the only person on deck? Inside, the saloon of the ferry was crowded with Japanese passengers watching "*Tora! Tora! Tora!*" (Tiger! Tiger! Tiger!) the multi-Oscar nominated joint US-Japanese film which portrayed Japan's infamous surprise attack on the US fleet. It was the code sent by **Mitsuo Fuchida** to **Admiral Vice-admiral Chuichi Nagumo**, aboard aircraft carrier *IJN Akagi*, that signalled the success of the surprise attack. **Fuchida's** character played a starring role in the film.

On the ferry I had watched the film astounded as, every time a moored American battleship was hit, the watching Japanese screamed '*Banzai*' an abbreviation for '*Tennoheiks Banzai*' meaning 'Long Live his Majesty the Emperor.' Particular appreciation was given to the scenes showing the blowing up and sinking of the *USS Arizona* in which 1,102 Americans died. How different the post-war Japanese attitude to WW2 was to Germany's. It was the episode on the ferry that eventually spurred me to abandon my financial career to write about modern Japanese and Asian history.

For **Fuchida**, Pearl Harbour was the start of a career defined by narrow escapes. At Pearl Harbour he stayed behind after leading the first wave attack to monitor the second wave and to map out the damage to the US Navy. This small map, exquisitely detailed and coloured, was sold by his family for \$430,000 in 2014 and later acquired by the Library of Congress. Filling in the map almost cost **Fuchida** his life. His badly shot-up *Nakjima Type 97* torpedo bomber's controls had all but been destroyed. He was luckier than most of his crew – nine out of ten were killed before the end of the war.



Fuchida later served in carrier strikes against the British in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and an attack on Darwin in Australia. Most significantly, he was present at the defining aircraft carrier *Battle of Midway* on 4th to 7th June 1942. Here the US Navy, aided by the breaking of Japan's naval codes, scored a fluky yet crushing victory against the **Admiral Yamamoto's** Imperial Japanese Fleet. Four of his six fleet carriers were sunk in the space of minutes with the loss of just one US carrier. It was a blow from which Japan could never recover.

Again, **Fuchida's** luck held. Struck down by appendicitis on board, he could not

take part in the battle and had to watch the ensuing US attack from the aircraft carrier's bridge. The attack by *Dauntless* dive bombers from *USS Yorktown* and *USS Hornet* cost the lives of 3,057 Japanese sailors and airmen. On the sinking and on fire *IJN Akagi*, **Fuchida** had to clamber down from the bridge on red-hot ladders until he could hold on no longer. He jumped onto a lower deck and broke both his ankles before being helped from the burning carrier's only escape route to the nearby light cruiser, *IJN Nagara*.

Forced by his injuries to take a desk job, providence again favoured **Fuchida**. On 5th August 1945, the day before the dropping of the first atomic bomb, **Fuchida** was meant to be in Hiroshima for an officers' conference but was called back to Tokyo. This saved his life. All his fellow attendees died.

Afterwards, he was sent back to Hiroshima with colleagues from Tokyo to report on the effects of the bomb. The Japanese government knew about atomic bombs; **Dr. Yoshio Nishina**, who had worked with the eminent theoretical physicist **Niels Bohr** in Denmark, had established a nuclear facility at the **Riken Institute** in 1931 and had built Japan's first cyclotron. Quite recently, workable designs for a Japanese atom bomb have been found at Kyoto University in the Radioisotope Research Laboratory. However, neither American nor Japanese scientists had anticipated radiation sickness. Within weeks of going to Hiroshima, all of **Fuchida's** colleagues had died of radiation sickness. Only **Fuchida** did not succumb.

Afterwards, returning to his family's chicken farm he recalled, *"Life had no taste or meaning ... I had missed death so many times and for what? What did it all mean?"* He was soon to find out. Having been called to testify at the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal as a witness, **Fuchida** became infuriated by what he perceived as 'Victor's justice'. Surely, he asked, Americans had treated their POWs as badly as the Japanese?

He thus set about finding Japanese captives. To his astonishment, he found that they had been well treated. He was particularly struck by the tale of a former comrade whom **Fuchida** had thought had died at the *Battle of Midway*. This survivor recalled the compassion of a Christian woman called **Peggy Covell**, who had treated him and his fellow Japanese captives with exceptional kindness even though her missionary parents had been murdered by the Japanese army in the Philippines. The episode sparked his curiosity about Christianity. In September 1949 he converted. *"Looking back,"* he said later, *"I can see now that the Lord had laid his hand upon me so I might serve him."* He later wrote a book called, **"From Pearl Harbour To Calvary" (1959)**

Fuchida spent much of his remaining life in the United States where he toured the country as a member of the Worldwide Christian Missionary Army of Sky Pilots. On one such tour he met **Paul Tibbets** who had flown the Boeing B-29 Superfortress, *Enola Gay*, which had dropped the atom bomb, "Little Boy", on Hiroshima. *"You did the right thing,"* **Fuchida** told **Tibbets**, *"You know how fanatical they were ... they'd die for the emperor ... Can you imagine what a slaughter it would be to invade Japan?"*

Fuchida turned out to be a rare critic of his country's participation in the conflict and a supporter of the use of a US atom bomb to end it. Another rare Japanese adherent of this position, nuclear scientist **Masa Takeuchi**, concluded that, *"If we had built the bomb first, we would have used it. I'm glad in some ways that our facilities were destroyed."* **Fuchida's** views starkly contradicted the standard narrative in the school texts approved by today's ultranationalist Japanese government (and revisionist US historiography) which lay the blame for the war almost entirely on the West. **Fuchida's** maverick views were in keeping with what was a remarkably unusual life.

Historian and author **Francis Pike** has written 3 books, "Hirohito's War", "The Pacific War 1941-1945", and "Empires at War: A Short History of Modern Asia Since WW11."

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

BICTON, WA – Sunday 12th February 2023. Vyner Brooke Commemoration Service, 10.30 a.m.

The service of commemoration for the sinking of the *Vyner Brooke* in February 1942 will take place at the Army Nurses Memorial at Point Walter Reserve, Bicton WA. Please make sure you are there by 10.10 a.m. For further details please contact **Robert Gray** rgraywa@hotmail.com [See P.28 for last year's report.]

STIRLING MEMORIAL GARDENS WA - 15th February 2023. Fall of Singapore Commemoration.

Please contact **Elizabeth Adamson** - bunneyelizabeth5@gmail.com if you wish to lay a wreath at the MVG memorial in Stirling Gardens.

MUNTOK – 16th February 2023. Radji Beach Service to commemorate the massacre of the Australian Army Nurses.

This service will take place for the first time since 2019 on Radji Beach in Muntok. It is being organised by **Michael Noyes** and will be attended by **Judy Balcombe** and **Arlene Bennett** from the Nurses Centre in Melbourne. For further details, please contact **Michael** at noyce@me.com or **Judy** at jdbalcombe@gmail.com

WYMONDHAM – Sunday 14th May 2023. 77th Anniversary of the Relief of Rangoon Service, FEPOW Church at 12.30

Please would MVG members living locally in East Anglia offer to attend this service to lay a wreath on behalf of the Malayan Volunteer Forces. The service takes place in the Church of Our Lady & St. Thomas of Canterbury in the Norfolk town of Wymondham. The wreaths are laid in the small side Chapel, dedicated to the FEPOWs, where the Books of Remembrance are housed in a glass topped cabinet below an inscribed glass triptych. The Service is ecumenical, although this is a Roman Catholic Church, built by **Father Malcolm Cowan** (an army chaplain) after the war, in memory of all those who suffered and died as Far East Prisoners of War. **Father Cowan** was himself a FEPOW and on his return promised that "we must never forget the 'debt of honour' we owe."

In his words – *They died in misery, often in agony, upon no bed with nothing but a sack to cover them in squalor unbelievable. Here is the symbol of things they never knew in their last days – peace, quiet, cleanliness and the cool, soft air of prayer – a living memorial – God's house built in their memory."*

If you would like to attend, please let **Rosemary Fell** know, so that your name can be given to **Peter Wiseman**, Church Archivist, who organizes the wreaths. A delicious, light buffet lunch is served after the service in the Parish Hall. It is also a good opportunity for meeting other FEPOW relatives.

NMA – ALREWS – Tuesday, 15th August 2023. V-J Day Service in the Chapel and MVG's Plot at 12 noon.

Further details will be given in the April newsletter. We hope this service will be well attended this year. It is a good day out – the Arboretum has many interesting memorials as well as our own Memorial Garden.

LONDON – Saturday, 14th October 2023. Annual Reunion & Luncheon – RAF Club, Piccadilly - 12 noon - 5p.m.

Our speaker this year is **Michael Yardley** whose father, **Richard Yardley**, was a FEPOW who, having endured working on the Burma-Thailand Railway, then suffered the appalling agony of shipment to Japan on the hellship *Osaka Maru*. He wrote the book, "*The Amonhasidate or The Gate of Heaven*," in which he describes his extraordinary life as a prisoner of war under the Japanese.

Other details of cost and the chosen menu will be given in April.

LONDON – Cross Planting Ceremony and Cenotaph Parade – 9th and 12th November 2023.

We hope that the MVG will be represented at both these events.

REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY AND ARMISTICE DAY – in Canada and Malaysia.

NMA – 10th December 2023. Service of commemoration for the sinking of HMS Repulse and HMS Prince of Wales.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS

This is a reminder to read the enclosed information from Colin Hygate and Roger Willbourn about the changes to the collection of subscriptions in April 2023. Please note the change of Bank Account AND the increase in subscription from April 2023. We are strongly recommending that you set up a Standing Order with your bank so that your subscription will be a paid annually into this new account.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank **Sara Haines**, MVG's Accountant, for dealing with the annual accounts over the past 20 years without charge. Her services have been 'donated' to the MVG and we are very grateful to her for her meticulous attention to detail and for keeping the funds in good order.

REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY – 13th NOVEMBER 2022
MVG members line up on Horse Guards Parade before the Cenotaph Parade



L to R. Rosemary Fell, June Jackson, Christine Cavender, Sandy Lincoln and Anthony Jackson.

SERVICE OF REMEMBRANCE FOR THE LOSS OF HMS REPULSE AND HMS PRINCE OF WALES – 10/12/41

10th December 2022 – National Memorial Arboretum

It was a cold but pleasant day as we gathered around the memorial stone to remember those who served or lost their lives on both HMS Prince of Wales and HMS Repulse on 10th December 1941. The memorial service was led by **Chaplain Vic Van de Bergh** who opened with prayers and The Exhortation. A lone bugler played The Last Post followed by two minutes of silence. Then The Reveille was sounded followed by the laying of wreaths. Prayers concluded the service.

The memorial service was also attended by a complement from the new aircraft carrier, *HMS Prince of Wales*. There was also good support from the local cadets. We all enjoyed the customary tot of rum before departing on such a cold day. It was a privilege and yet humbling experience to be reminded of the devastating cost of freedom.

Report by **Bob Hall**.

CONTACTS

ELIZABETH ADAMSON – MVG Secretary in Australia

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

SALLIE HAMMOND – MVG Secretary in Canada and the USA

68, Kinnear Crescent, London, Ontario N6K 1V8, Canada. Tel: 519 473 1542 e-mail: salliehammondn@gmail.com

RICHARD PARRY – MVG Secretary in Malaysia and Singapore

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

JONATHAN MOFFATT – MVG Historian and Archivist

49, Coombe Drive, Binley Woods, Coventry CV3 2QU. e-mail: jonathanmoffatt@btinternet.com

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

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

COLIN HYGATE – MVG Secretary from April 2023

Lime Trees, Randalls Green, Chalfont Hill, Stroud, Gloucestershire GL6 8EF. e-mail: colin.hygate@greenfuels.co.uk

ROGER WILLBOURN – Membership/Subscriptions/Donations from April 2023

Tanglin, Oakley Road, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire GL52 6NZ. E-mail: rswillbourn@gmail.com

