



APA KHABAR

8TH EDITION
OCTOBER 2006

We are indebted to Jonathan Moffatt and his son Peter who, between them, have created and developed the new Malayan Volunteers Group website. In particular, we would like to thank Peter very much for giving up the first part of his summer holidays to work on the website, which must have taken many hours work. The website has been well visited in the two months since it was set up,

and several new members have come forward as a result of seeing it. In case you need a reminder of the website address, it is as follows:-

<http://www.malayanvolunteersgroup.org.uk/>

MVG members have represented the group at various functions during the summer months. On VJ-Day, 15th August, 4 members were present at the Service of Remembrance in the FEPOW Plot at the National Memorial Arboretum. The service was arranged by the Shropshire FEPOW and Internees Association, and conducted by the Revd. John Fagan. It was attended by a dozen Standard Bearers from various branches of the RBL and other FEPOW organizations, and there were about 120 in the congregation. It was a chilly overcast blustery day, but the sun came out as we all gathered by the Lych Gate before the Service started. After the Bugler sounded the Last Post, followed by the 2 minutes silence, and Reveille, wreaths were laid on the FEPOW Memorial Plaque.

On Sunday 24th September, 6 MVG members were present at the Dedication of the newly constructed Memorial Cross and Kris in the National Malaya and Borneo Veterans Association Plot at the Arboretum. A Service of Dedication was held in the Chapel at 2p.m. followed by an on-site unveiling of the Cross. Preceded by an Argyll Piper, Standards were paraded from the Chapel to the Plot, where a short on-site ceremony took place, ending with an excellent rendering of Reveille by a Bugler from the Light Infantry. After the Service, we were invited to a buffet as guests of the NMBVA.

We are especially grateful to Maurice Humphrey of the Doncaster and South Yorkshire Branch of the NMBVA, who not only designed and created the Memorial Cross and Kris, in his capacity as a Master Stonemason and caretaker of the Plot, but also included the MVG logo on the right arm of the Cross. Thus the Malayan Volunteers are still commemorated on this Memorial, but with our logo instead of by the Stone Tablet which was sited on the original Kris last year. The Stone Tablet has now been placed to one side of the Cross on a plinth, in readiness for its re-location to the MVG Plot in due course.

MVG PLOT in the NMA.

Plans for the design of the MVG Plot were submitted to the RBL Board of Trustees in July, and we are delighted to report that they were passed without alteration. All members should have received a copy of these plans, and we hope they meet with everyone's approval. On 15th August, the first payment of £500 was made to the Arboretum to secure the plot. They have kindly agreed that the remaining donation of £2000 can be paid as and when we have the funds. To date, £1130 has been raised for the Plot, and we are very grateful to everyone who has contributed so generously to this fund. We plan to make a start on developing the plot as soon as the Grounds Manager, Paul Kennedy returns from his holidays, and hope that we will have enough to pay the landscaper when the time comes. If all goes according to plan, the plot should be ready to be dedicated next year, possibly on VJ Day. You will be kept informed of all developments. In the meantime, if anyone has any good ideas for fund raising, please twist as many arms as you can!

INFORMATION EXCHANGE.

Gareth Owen writes:-

I recently received from Jonathan Moffatt the website address of the MVG which I read with great interest as my father was a part-time civilian volunteer in KL, where I was born and spent some years of my childhood. Would it be possible to receive back copies of Apa Khabar? If they are for members only, then I'd be happy to join up. I escaped from Singapore aboard the *Duchess of Bedford* on 31st January 1942, a mere 10 months old. Since I've been retired, I've tried to find out as much as I can about the circumstances of these last escapes of civilians from the beleaguered island and have collected quite a lot of information. The *Duchess* stopped several times on her way to Liverpool, including several days in Cape Town, but I have never been able to find very much information here in South Africa, and Cape Town Harbour, unlike UK ports, never kept a record of ships arriving and departing.

I'm still hoping to find somebody old enough to recall what it was like to be on these last ships out of Singapore. The *Duchess* alone carried some 580 children so there must still be quite a few of us about — maybe you are one?

Editor's note:-

I'm not one, but another of our new members, Penny Dembrey (nee Todman) was evacuated on the *Duchess of Bedford*. See Penny's story next.

Penny Dembrey writes:-

Gill Gibson has passed to me the information on the Malayan Volunteers Group with a copy of the "Apa Khabar" News Sheet. I met Gill at the age of 8 or 9 at boarding school in Wendover in about 1948. My father, **Daniel Innes Todman**, joined the Malacca Volunteer Force sometime after his arrival in Malacca with his new wife (**Peggy Todman**) in either December 1935 or January 1936 to take up his post as the Municipal Engineer for Malacca. My brother and I were both born out there (brother Tony in 1937 and myself in 1939) in the Malacca Hospital and lived in a house at Bukit Palah nearby. He started as a Lieutenant and was made up to Captain before the outbreak of hostilities and his regiment was part of the Straits Settlements Volunteer Force. We were living still in Malacca in December 1941 and that Christmas my father went down to Singapore to join his regiment (having been in hospital with a tropical ulcer, I believe.) When my mother later discovered (over the phone with a crossed wire) that the Japs were already in K.L., a driver from the Municipality drove the three of us to Singapore, just crossing the Muar Ferry before it was blown up by the Allies. This was about the 9th January and the bombs were being dropped on the road during the journey, and at one time the Syce jumped out of the car and took cover! Luckily all was well and we arrived in Singapore to stay with a friend. My mother sent a cable to her parents in England to say "she was safe in Singapore" at the same time as Winston Churchill announced over the radio that "the beleaguered City of Singapore awaits its fate"! My father was able to get us a passage on the *Duchess of Bedford* and we sailed on the 1st of February, having embarked on the 31st January. The Purser was killed during our escape and after repairs in Batavia, we took eleven weeks to get home to Liverpool, having been advised to spend the war in South Africa en route. The Captain promised to get us home for Easter but in fact we arrived on Good Friday having safely crossed the Atlantic as well. Meanwhile, like everyone else, my mother had no idea what had happened to my father, but eventually heard that he was a prisoner of war in Changi where he stayed for three and a half years. They lost all their belongings, including all their wedding presents etc. My father survived the war and after recuperation in England returned to his job in Malacca in 1946 and finished his career in the Far East as the Municipal Engineer of Kuala Lumpur in May 1959 when he retired. I went back with them to Malacca for two years in 1946 and went to school at the Malacca Convent, learned to swim at Tanglin Swimming Club and attended Evensong with my parents at Christ Church, Malacca, where I had been christened. My father on retirement in the U.K. became the British Legion Representative for Malaya and served on the committee with **Lord Louis Mountbatten**, often going to meetings at Lancaster House in London, and of course marching at the Cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday. He was also involved in Haywards Heath/Lindfield local branch in Sussex. He died at the age of 73 in 1978 and my mother followed him in May 1994. I am therefore enclosing my cheque to join the Malayan Volunteers Group, and trust this is acceptable.

Editor's note:-

Penny's life story and the details of her escape from Malacca with her mother and brother are very similar to mine. We are also convinced that as 2 year olds we played together at my parent's house in Bukit Pringgīt, together with another little girl called **Diana Darby**. Her parents were **Bob and Mollie Darby**. **Bob Darby** was another member of the Malacca Volunteers, who was interned during the war, but survived. The Darbys retired to Eastbourne and Penny says that her parents kept in touch with them, and her father spoke to **Bob Darby** on the telephone every year on the 15th February.

I have also read in a private diary that Penny's father, **Dan Todman**, and my father, **Eric Reeve**, were in the same house in Changi barracks at the start of their internment. **Dan Todman** shared the scullery with **Arthur Goode** and **Donald Cameron**, all Chinese company officers in the Malacca Volunteers, while my father lived on the tiny verandah upstairs with **Father Gerrard Bourke**, the Padre who had been assigned to the Malacca Volunteers three weeks before capitulation.

Hamish Patterson writes:-

My father, **Ian Leslie Patterson**, was Inspector of Mines in Perak by 1940, and joined the FMSVF, where he became a Battery Sgt. Major. He saw action behind Jap Lines and was mentioned in Dispatches (see **Spencer Chapman's** book "The Jungle is Neutral") He was captured in Singapore, and sent to the Railway with H Force. After the war, he returned to Malaya and became Chief Inspector of Mines, living in Ipoh, Johore and KL. As Chief Inspector, he worked under **Tunku Abdul Rahman**, Malaysia's first Prime Minister after Independence, whose daughter stayed with us during her time at University in London. He died in Sidford, Devon in 1986. My Uncle, **William Sidney Godward**, was Planter Manager of Kinrara Estate, Petaling, and Sione Estate, Batu Caves, Selangor. He was a Civilian Internee in Changi and Syme Road. He returned to Scotland post-war and died there in 1957. I was born in Batu Gajah in August 1941 and escaped with my mother and her sister by ship from Singapore in 1942. We sailed back to Scotland via South Africa, but I do not know the name of the ship, and unfortunately my mother and her sister are now both deceased.

Lt. Col JMF Thomson RA (Retd) writes:-

"--- I must confess I had no idea that such a thing as the Malayan Volunteers Group existed, although I have been in intermittent touch with Audrey Holmes McCormick since before my Father's death. I would certainly be interested in becoming a member both on my own behalf and as a sort of proxy for my Father who died in 1999.

Accordingly, I enclose my cheque along with your little questionnaire duly completed, although I have a little difficulty with your para 5 ~ what sort of details do you want? Perhaps the best thing is for me to give you a short para or two and you can choose.

Father. John Forrest Thomson – 1908-99. Rubber Planter in Brunei and later Malaya. Believed to have joined the KVF in 1938 whilst working at Bukit Slarong Estate, Padangserai, Kedah. He was in the armoured car section, or troop or whatever? He was wounded in an ambush about 7 or 8 miles south east of Ipoh on the Gopeng-Kampar road at a place called Kampong Kepayang, and subsequently injured again in Singapore Island and Blakang Mati. He received an MID for the short Malayan campaign. He returned to Malaya in '46 and managed the Heywood Estate near Sungei Siput in Perak. Here he was active against the communist insurgency and in March '51 was the only survivor of a CT ambush. After convalescence he was moved to the Emerald Estate near KL but decided that enough was enough and retired from planting in about '52 or '53. He was awarded the CPM in the '51 NY Honours List.

Self. Born '39 in Penang and escaped with my mother by ship from Penang sometime in '41. Sadly I have no personal recollection of our escape from Penang, although my mother did mention sailing with the ship darkened, and having to sleep fully clothed. After the war, we joined my father at Heywood, and luckily we were on home leave when the CT insurgency broke out – as you probably know the first planter murders were in the Sungei Siput area! Subsequently I joined the Army and in the late 60s served in Singapore with the 3rd Commando Brigade. I retired from the Army in '92.

I am finding the copies of Apa Khabar very good reading. In the July edition, one item which struck a chord touched on the generally higher rates of survival of Dutch FEPOWs compared with their British and Australian non volunteer counterparts. I remember hearing this from my Father, and to go a little bit further, he said that in general the Scots (and don't forget I am one!) were even worse at adapting to what food was available than the English.

Fred Seiker writes:-

Something rather nice happened. The Dutch counterpart FEPOW Association has presented me with a silver lapel badge, (three pagodas) commemorating the survival of the Dutch survivors of the Railway (550) still alive today. I will send you a translated copy of the presentation.

However! I find the whole thing a bit strange. The Dutch FEPOWs have a monument in Bronsbeek, commemorating those who died whilst working on the Railway. Now we have a pin for those who survived and are still alive today. What about those who survived and died since? Many of them as a result of hardships suffered whilst on the Railway!!

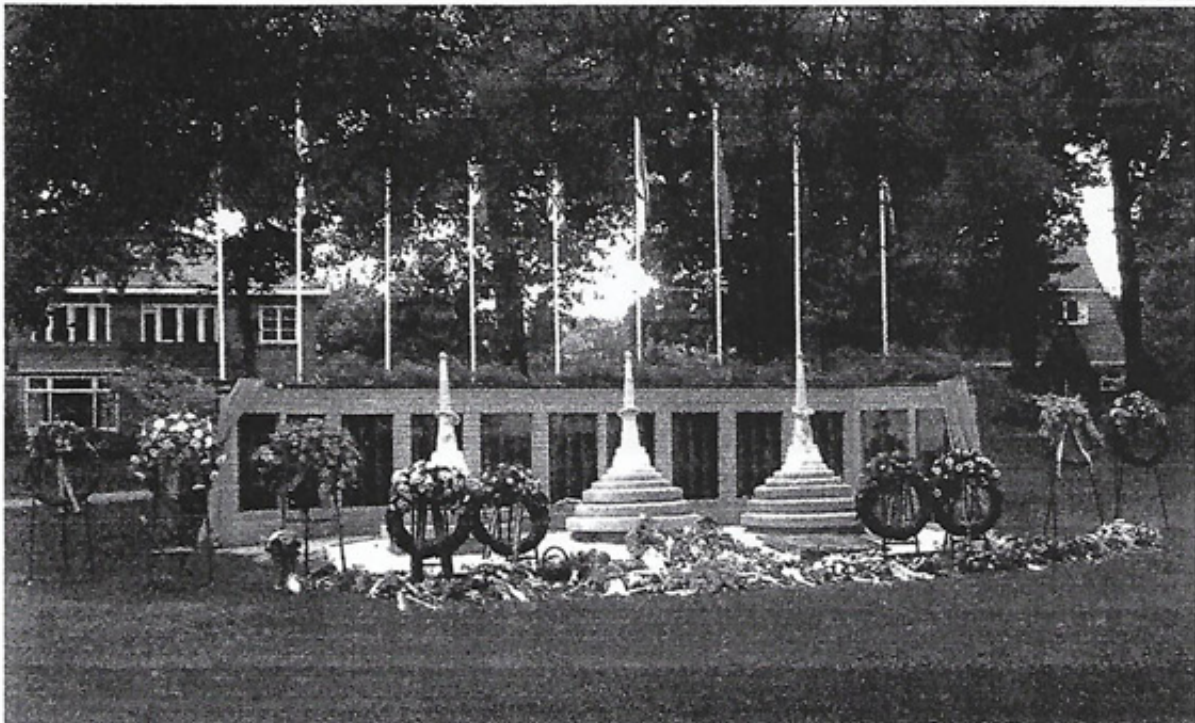
The translated letter from the "Comite Herdenking Birma-Siam Spoorweg" reads:-

"May we be allowed to offer you sixty one years after the capitulation of Japan and as an addition to your Wall of Remembrance at Bronsbeek, a lasting memory, "A SILVER LAPEL PIN", a small symbol of great respect, deep gratitude and appreciation for what we feel for you.

With friendly greetings from the Committee."

Fred went on to say:-

I am enclosing a copy of a photo I received from the CHBSS (Committee of Remembrance of the Burma-Siam Railway) of this lovely Memorial Wall at Bronsbeek in the Netherlands. I particularly like the images of the three pagodas.



Diana Mirkin writes:-

I would like to join the Malayan Volunteers Group, but I am in the US, so please tell me if this is possible. My father, **Donald Purdie**, was a Professor of Chemistry at Raffles College and Private in SVACC. He was in Changi until October 1942 and died on the Railway in May 1943. I was born in Singapore on 26th January 1942. My mother, 2 year old brother and I left aboard the **Felix Roussel** on 8/2/42. I would be grateful to hear anyone with memories of this.

I have learned so much more in just the last few years, thanks to the internet; I would have loved to have all of this information while some of the people who remembered my father were still alive. I am particularly grateful to **Keith Andrews** for his research and copying of my father's Japanese POW index card.

John Mackie writes:-

Many thanks for the 7th edition of Apa Khabar which, with its accompanying papers, made very interesting reading. After telling of the Battle of Kampar, I have an idea I threatened to inflict my story of the Battle of Singapore on you, and possibly on the members of the Group via Apa Khabar. I'm attaching it to this e-mail in case you might find it useful -- also an old photograph of **Paxton-Harding, Jack Brown** and myself taken during manoeuvres with the 2nd (Selahgor) Bn.FMSVF in KL in 1938. **Paxton-Harding**, incidently, played golf with a +1 handicap!



A break during military manoeuvres, KL, Selangor.
L to R: Paxton-Harding, Mackie, Brown.

SINGAPORE FALLS

From John Mackle's Record

"GINFORCE" and the Final Battle

The following day (12th Feb.) I learned that Brigadier Moir had taken command of a mixed force (brigade of sorts) consisting of the 1st Battalion of the SSVF, about 2 Companies of Jind^{*} infantry, some RE personnel, some ack-ack gunners (without guns), and portion of an anti-tank regiment. This was called GINFORCE, of all names – dubiously derived from the Jind troops who were commanded by a fine-looking, unflappable Lt.-Col. Gurbuk Singh who sported a walking stick. He had the nickname of "Gearbox".

The Brigadier had asked for some FMSVF officers, including me, to act in liaison and intelligence duties. So, after getting my three NCOs (from the MOBCOL operation) back to Volunteer HQ, off I went to his HQ located about quarter of a mile up Bukit Timah Road from Newton Circus, and reported. There I found 2nd. Lts. Scoular, Downie and Travers-Drapes in a similar capacity to my own. Major Cooper was there too, liberally daubed with blood from one of his signallers – Shrimpton -- whom he had just buried.

Dave Downie and I were sent up to the Mt.Pleasant-Thomson Road area to contact the ack-ack people. We had a rather hair-raising morning, for we were machine-gunned from the air twice and lucky not to have been hit as we dashed for cover. The Jap pilots were shooting at anything that moved – even individuals. In one of these attacks I escaped by taking cover in a deep drain half-filled with unsavoury water, under a concrete-slab car crossing. One of the bullets gouged a deep hole in the slab!

In the afternoon I went out with the Brigadier in his open, touring Cadillac to point out where the various units were on the ground. We had to pass through a zone, which was being heavily shelled by the Japs, and the Brig. told me how they used to do this in World War I. We waited until a salvo arrived, and then made a dash through, bouncing among the rubble, while the dust was still thick. Thank heavens he had a veteran driver! Shortly after, another salvo arrived behind us. The old Brig. never wore a tin hat – only his Argyll & Sutherland Highland glengarry. If I remember aright, he had his dog with him.

In the evening there was a "flap" in the vicinity of our HQ. One of "Gearbox" Singh's soldiers had let fly with his rifle at something and soon other rifles and light automatics were going off all over the place. We barricaded the doors and windows and stood-to with pistols and tommy guns, but it was all apparently a false alarm which soon petered out. Nevertheless, it was a scare at the time, with the real enemy fairly close-by and definite attempts at infiltration being made.

Our line was along the high ground in front (north) of Scotts Road, across Bukit Timah Road and up to the Mt.Pleasant area. 1/SSVF Bn, was on the left (Scotts Road), Anti-tank Regt, and Jind infantry in Bukit Timah Road environs, and the ack-ack personnel on the right near Mt.Pleasant. We came under the 18th (British) Division, and as I was the

only liaison officer with a car still in working order, I was put on maintaining the link between our Brigade HQ and 18th Div.HQ in Chancery Lane.

On 13th February we shifted Brigade HQ a bit further back to two tenement houses

* An Indian State in the Punjab

in a block in Bideford Road. To get to 18th Div. HQ I had to drive up Cairnhill Road, along Scotts Road, through Newton Circus, up Newton Road into Thomson Road, thence into Chancery Road and so up Chancery Lane. As all these roads were being shelled by the Japs, I used to have an interesting drive. I got to know the General commanding the Division (Major-General Beckwith-Smith - a most approachable man) and his G.1. Another of my jobs was to take Capt. Harry Lilley down to the "Battle Box" (Army HQ) at Fort Canning to get the "general situation". Harry (another New Zealander, a surveyor) was our senior Brigade Intelligence Officer. The flags on the situation map at HQ told its own story of how we were being hemmed into the City by the Jap forces.

All the British artillery, both ground and ack-ack, had been collected inside our defences and was putting up a lot of fire; the din became terrific, especially when the nearby Bofors started up as they got a bead on Jap planes. The pall of smoke over parts of the city had thickened and lowered, so that all was in a kind of semi-darkness at times. The streets were becoming badly cratered and growing numbers of shops and other buildings were in ruins.

My appearance at this time must have been pretty grim: unshaven, unwashed, sweaty, armed with a rifle, pistol and ammunition, capped with a steel helmet and carrying a haversack gas mask. When I went down into the "Battle Box" I felt the people there were wrinkling their noses at me! I think at this stage most of us who were outside amongst the flak were resigned to our fate and hoped that an end would come to the fighting - whatever that end might be. A feeling of inevitability was about: escape if possible but otherwise, fight on. The die appeared to be cast, and some were even enjoying themselves in a perverse, inexplicable kind of way.

On the 13th February I met Geoff Gripper (Mines Department colleague) at 18th Div. HQ. He was a liaison officer with the 135th Field Regiment, RA. It was good to see him again and have a brief chat. At the time, I recall the whole area was being heavily pattern-bombed from the air, the ground shaking and clods of earth flying about. Later that day I took a truckload of picks and shovels up to the ack-ack people near Mt. Pleasant; they were very grateful as their positions were rather exposed.

That night (13th) passed with a few interruptions for me - I was ordered out on several nocturnal excursions to collect information.

The 14th February dawned noisily and murkily and the others and I kept going on our jobs of visiting Div. HQ and various units to keep in touch. Our Brigade HQ had several near misses. Night fell again and we scratched together a meal. The Brigadier, Maj. Pat Hayward, Maj. Goldman and Capt. Harry Lilley were in one house, while the staff of liaison officers and some NCO'S were next door. Halfway through the evening a mortar-bomb burst in our roof. It made an almighty bang and filled the whole house with acrid smoke. A shower of shrapnel came through our ceiling (the floor of the unoccupied first floor) but by some miracle none of us was hit. Some mattresses we would have been sleeping on later were holed. Next morning we picked up several pounds of metal fragments from the pockmarked tiled floor, and out of the mashed furniture.

The 15th February was a black day indeed. The pall of smoke was still hanging around, and the usual dive-bombing and shelling were going on with greater intensity. In the early hours, Harry Lilley and I had been down to the Battle Box again and had seen that we were in a pretty hopeless position. Jap ground forces ringed us round to the north, east and west. In the south were elements of the Jap navy, and in the air they had 100 per cent superiority. The game was up and we must either fight it out to the bitter end or give in. I saw several people I knew sheltering in the deep underground bunker and wondered what they were doing there.

Running the gauntlet on the way back from Fort Canning we were ordered to stop by a lone sentry. As we were pulling up a shot cracked out from the sentry now behind us. I leaped out, identified myself, and told the soldier a few home truths. After we had gone a short distance further we found that the bullet from the sentry's rifle had punctured the off front tyre! It must have gone under the car. We had to change the wheel, which was something of a nerve-racking business in the circumstances – and we were very lucky to have one to change after the earlier near miss from a bomb.

Singapore Surrenders

The story of the capitulation of the British forces in Singapore is too well known to repeat in any detail. As far as we in GINFORCE were concerned, rumours trickled through, first of all, that negotiations were going on; then, in the afternoon, what seemed to be an order to lay down our arms came through, but not as far as I recall from Div. HQ. We just stayed put and waited. However, our Brigadier deemed the order to be a doubtful one and sent me to 18th Div.HQ with Scoular to find out what was going on. The General himself gave me the official "order to capitulate" to pass on to Brigadier Moir and I had the presence of mind to get him to give it to me in writing over his own signature before leaving. On the way back we nearly had a serious collision with some transport which seemed to have gone haywire in Newton Road.

On our return, the other liaison officers and I were kept busy for a while circulating the capitulation order to our sub-units. Most of the shooting, bombing, etc., ceased a little after 1800hrs.

One of the incidents of the day occurred prior to the ceasefire when the negotiating cars carrying senior officers and white flags were going through our Brigade position to the surrender rendezvous. They were reported to Brigadier Moir. He had not received any information about them, and being highly suspicious of what he thought was fifth column activity, ordered up two armoured cars to see them off! Fortunately he was persuaded to hold fire, or something very unfortunate might have happened.

There was an eerie silence over the City and the battlefields around the perimeter after the ceasefire – no shells, no bombs, and no rattle of automatic weapons – just complete and utter quiet for a while. Destruction and his partner Death were leaving the scene, at least in the guise of war.

Richard Middleton-Smith writes:-

I enclose an account of my War Service 1942-1945; the post-war work done for the many thousands of surviving displaced local people forced to work for the Japanese; and a review of Colin Smith's book "Singapore Burning," which your members may find of interest. I sent Colin Smith a copy of my review and he telephoned me from London expressing approval and at the same time asking me whether I knew a Dr. Riley, the M.O. in charge of the Leper Colony at Sungei Buloh near K.L. who, he said was allowed by the Japs to move about freely during the occupation. I never knew him, but Colin Smith wanted information about him. I was interested to read in Apa Khabar about Rod Suddaby – my wife and I met him when we contributed war memoirs to the Imperial War Museum. I think I must be one of the few surviving ex-POWs who actually saw the Allied bombing of the Kwai Bridge, as you will see from the enclosed copy of a note I have written. I believe Col. Toosey had left Tamarkan by then.

N.B. My M.C.S. Service was mainly in Malaya from 1936-53, when I went to Singapore. I happened to be on the Colonial Secretary's Staff in Singapore for a few months from mid 1941!

R. Middleton-Smith. War Service 1942-1945.

1. Joined Straits Settlements Volunteer Force as a Private in December 1942. Service was in machine-gun pillboxes at Kallang Airport and Singapore Harbour Board area. On surrender, went to Changi Barracks. Very crowded and uncomfortable.
2. In June 1942 went to Siam by rail in cattle trucks in a party of 600. Very uncomfortable and unhealthy. Journey took 5 days and nights. Went to a camp called Ban Pong. Work was hut construction and unloading trains. Camp flooded in August.
3. October 1942 moved to Chungkai, a big base camp. 2 weeks later joined a party of 60 to install telephone line along the railway. Went by boat up river with equipment, lived in tents. Hard work. In February 1943 the communications party was detailed to join gangs of prisoners working on a big quarrying job at the Wampo viaduct, worked at night, hard work, and dangerous. Food bad.
4. In March 1943 resumed communication work. Developed ulcers on legs and was sent to hospital camp at Tamarkan near the bridge over the Kwai river. Legs cleared up after two months but dysentery developed and took time to clear up. Heard about Geoffrey's death up the railway.
5. In December 1943 was moved to Chungkai. Developed ear trouble and fever (B.T. Malaria). Ear eventually cured by Iodoform which, luckily, M.O. had. July 1944 Chungkai was flooded and many prisoners, including me, were moved back to Tamarkan, to extend that camp.
6. On 29th November 1944 at 7p.m. when all prisoners were on parade for roll call, 24 Liberators appeared out of the sun and dropped bombs aiming at the bridge and a Japanese anti-aircraft gun position near the camp. Bridge not hit, but gun position put out of action. Bombs dropped in camp killing 18 prisoners. Days later, low level aircraft made dive-bomb attacks severely damaging bridge.
7. Feb. 1945 returned to Chungkai. In June sent to camp at 185 kilo to cut wood from jungle for trains. Mid August, war over, returned to base camp.
8. August-November 1945 joined small party of 6 to rescue Malayan labourers, mostly Tamils, taken by Japs to work on railway. Based in Bangkok station, went back up railway (past my last camp at 180 kilo) and also went down south to Victoria point, where Japs had also employed Malayan labour on railway work. Promoted to 2nd Lieutenant for this.
9. Got Dysentery and Malaria and went to hospital in Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. Returned to UK by sea in Feb 1946

Mary Harris writes:-

Thank you for another interesting and informative newsletter and it is very helpful to have a members' list with who members' relatives are. One of the best things for me about the very good conference was meeting Harry Hesp, the only ex-internee I have ever met who knew my father and remembers him well. We have had and continue to have a fascinating correspondence.

Although this is not newsletter-worthy, the picture of the "Officers' Rest Home" triggered a small memory of mine which might amuse you. About 15 years ago I did a job for the British Council in Singapore and they put me up in a hotel at the top of Orchard Road, not far from their office. The hotel was full of Japanese coach parties and we bowed politely to each other in the lift every day, as I smugly said to myself that I have no reconciliation problem, though my FEPOW husband always had. The tours I did for the British Council were rather grueling and I kept fit by doing lengths before breakfast in the hotel's pool – when there was one. This hotel had a pool on the roof of one of the lower floors but I did not use the Health Centre on its far side because I always manage to hurt myself in gyms. A couple of days before I was due to leave, I did something to my foot which caused it to go into spasm and made it very painful to walk. So I went to the Health Centre and asked the receptionist if I could see a physiotherapist. She looked a bit surprised and asked me precisely what I wanted, so I explained. She said that unfortunately madam, they only provide special services for men.

I was horrified, and as I rushed back to my room in shame and embarrassment, I chided myself for being so innocent as to not think that four star hotels in Orchard Road were likely to have conspicuous and misleading brothels by their swimming pools. But, having read huge amounts about the fall and aftermath in Singapore, I remembered that my hotel was on or very near the site of one of the Japanese "Rest Homes" of the war years. I remember well my reaction, "My God – they're still at it!" though no doubt this time the girls were professionals and properly paid. But I was violently sick before I realized that perhaps I did have a reconciliation problem after all!

In a later e-mail Mary makes a kind offer for Remembrance Sunday, 12th November 2006, when she writes:-

As usual, I am offering free B&B and escort to Whitehall for up to 2 people (sharing a bed!) who may feel a bit frail and daunted about coming to Remembrance Day. There are 12 steps up to my spare room which has its own shower and WC but not bath.

Indian, Javanese Labourers from Malaya impressed by the Japanese to
work on the Siam / Burma Railway 1944-1945

This is a note about what was done for the displaced Malayan labourers in Siam. These unfortunate people, of whom there were roughly twenty-seven thousand survivors at the end of the War, were forced by the Japanese to work on the Burma / Siam railway, upward of 60,000 South Indian and a few thousand Javanese were taken to Siam from Malaya and Java by the Japanese army.

Sometime before the Japanese surrender, a party of ex- Malayans amongst the P.O.W.s on the Burma / Siam railway, had planned to make an expedition at the earliest opportunity in order to force the Japanese to improve the conditions in which these labourers were living.

On 28th August 1945, after obtaining permission from the British authorities in Bangkok, a party consisting of three British P.O.W's, three Dutch P.O.W's and a Repatriation of Allied Prisoners of War Indian (RAPWI) Control Officer visited camps between Kanburi and the Burmese border. Lt Col. W.M. James of the Federal^{ed} Malay State Volunteer Force, as the Senior Prisoner of War, was in command of the whole party. Major Edge was the RAPWI control officer, and the three British P.O.W's were T. F. Carey and myself (both of the Malayan Civil service in the Singapore and Malayan volunteer forces) and S Chamier, a rubber planter who had been in the F.M.S.V.F. Carey, Chamier and I were all able to speak Tamil and Malay. The three Dutch P.O.W's were able to speak Javanese.

A tour base in the railway station at Bangkok arrangements were made for a stock ^{of} and food and medicine to be provided by the Japanese and put on a special train with a Japanese guard including an officer. During the next three weeks or so, the party visited over one hundred camps and travelled over four hundred kilometres between Bangkok and Moulmien. There were seven thousand displaced Javanese on the railway in addition to the Tamil speaking South Indians from Malaya.

Conditions in the camps varied from extremely bad to reasonably good. In all camps, an immediate increase of rations was order and a diet scale drawn up which include^d items of high food value plus tamarind and garlic for the South Indians, indispensable items to the enjoyment of their food, which although easily obtainable, had never been provided by the Japanese. In most camps, cooking was communal and where there was a mixture of nationalities, separate kitchens were ordered. In camps, where the labourers complained of ill treatment, the offending Japanese were produced, dealt with on the spot and reported to their senior officer.

It was found that, as with P.O.W.s, the Japanese had made practically no provision for medical care of the "labourers". In places where there were doctors, only the labourers working under a particular unit could be treated. The doctor belonged to that particular unit and no labourer, however sick, working under a different unit, even though in the same place, could be seen by that doctor. This was soon altered of course and the enlargement of "hospitals" at **Wampo, Kensayak, and Tamajan** was ordered.

At **Kensayak**, the Japanese complained that they could not complete the enlargement within the stipulated time of five days. Lt. Col. James replied, "all right then, you will have to do it in four days" and when we called there four days later, the job had been done.

We had brought a stock of drugs and medical supplies with us and these were distributed to three Malayan doctors, of whom one was in charge of each hospital. These three, Dr de Souza, Dr Stephenson and a Chinese doctor (probably Dr. C. J. Poh M.B.E.) were doing splendid work by staying up in the jungle wilds of that railway when they were all naturally anxious to get back to their relations in Malaya. Some of the labourers were very sick and were soon brought back to a big Base hospital set up in Kanburi under an Indian Army Medical Unit, where pyjamas, separate beds, sheets and most of the amenities of a real hospital were provided.

At every camp, the labourers seemed overjoyed to see us and meet those of us who could speak to them in their own language. In a number of camps, they seemed unaware that the war was over. Their first wish was to get back to Malaya and see their relatives and we assured them we would send them back as soon as we possibly could. Conditions in Malaya were explained to them and it was pointed out to them that for the time being they were better off where they were, as we had ordered the Japanese to continue to provide work and to pay them and also, to improve their rations and medical treatment. We heard accounts of hardships they had suffered and mandores of all nationalities told us that out of gangs of one hundred men, only four to ten remained. This did not surprise us as we had seen thousands of them die during the cholera epidemic in 1943 when the Japanese made P.O.W.s bury them in huge pits. There were probably something like one hundred and fifty orphans on the railway and, at each camp, we made sure that someone was caring for the children.

A plan was formed by B.M.A. Siam and B.M.A. Malaya for the repatriation of these people; and a few thousand from the Kra Isthmus railway were cared for at a camp at Anak Bukit in Kedah.

Meanwhile, all were well looked after at camps in Kanburi and Bangkok where they were concentrated. The International Red Cross at Bangkok was most helpful in providing clothing and comforts at our request. We hoped that it would not be long before they were all safely back with their relatives and friends.

From 28th September to end October I went with two RAPWI officers to the Kra Isthmus, South Siam, to arrange temporary relief and ultimate repatriation of mostly Javanese labourers taken to that area by the Japanese to build a railway extension to Victoria point in Burma. Early in November I contracted amoebic dysentery and malaria and was flown from Penang to hospital in Kuala Lumpur. Later I was transferred to hospital in Singapore and home by sea on a troopship. I arrived in Southampton in early February 1946

R. Middleton-Smith



Merilyn Hywel-Jones writes:-

Here is the Port Dickson photograph with as many names as I have been able to get people to remember. Perhaps if you use the photo more names may come along. I have given the Imperial War Museum a copy of this photo with these names.

The photograph shows "B" Company Depot Battalion, Port Dickson 16/9/40 to 15/11/40. It was originally given to **Merilyn by Hermione Dormer (nee Pantling)**, and MVG has been given permission to copy it in our newsletter. We thank both **Merilyn** and **Hermione** for allowing us to use it.

The names of the men who have been identified are as follows:-

TOP ROW -- Left to Right:-

- 4th Ronnie Pantling (Hermione's father)
- 5th Digby Gates
- 6th Eric Hawes?
- 9th Ted Cooper
- 10th George McFie
- 12th George Booker (Merilyn's father)
- 13th Willy Wall
- 14th ----- Yates
- 15th Bill Piercey
- 16th Doug Rennie
- 17th Bob Shotter

MIDDLE ROW -- Left to Right:-

- 1st Judy O'Grady
- 6th Arthur Goode
- 8th Jimmy Weir
- 15th Essex Bloomfield
- 19th Bill Scott
- 20th George Robey

BOTTOM ROW -- Left to Right:-

- 8th Bill Riches

OBITUARIES.

We are deeply saddened to announce the death of **Ian Aviet** on Sunday 6th August 2006. Ian was a Child Internee in various camps during the Japanese occupation of Malaya, starting in Bahau, between the borders of Negri Sembilan and Pahang. His moving story was told in the 3rd Edition of "Apa Khabar" last July. He has supported MVG from the beginning, and became a member in the first year we were formed.

We send our very sincere sympathies to Ian's son and his family on their loss, and salute a courageous man.

For some time now, Ian has been battling with the British Government to receive his rightful ex-gratia payment of £10,000 given to all British POWs and Internees of the Japanese, only to be told that he was not "British enough" due to the "birth rule." In a letter some time ago, Ian very astutely said that he thought the British Government would go on stalling about paying those who had no blood ties with this country, but held British Passports, until they were all deceased, and then the problem would go away. How right he was. There is a point of principle here.

Shortly before Ian died, he wrote a letter, enclosing a very generous donation to the MVG Garden Plot in the NMA. It was a most poignant letter, and, without any rancour, it demonstrates that in the 61 years since he was released from that civilian camp, justice is still in short supply.

This is what he wrote:-

"Sorry I haven't written to you for so long, as I've been pretty depressed having all these health problems. I've got to have an operation for my cataracts next month, and also have an appointment to see a consultant about my breathing problem, as it's getting worse. But I am on a waiting list, so I am pretty housebound, but my family come round every week to see me, so I'm O.K. First of all I would like to thank you for an excellent newsletter and also the latest news about the garden plan, and Legion news which mentioned the "ex-gratia payments." I would also like to say how grateful I am to know that there are people like you who believe in justice and fair play, and it means a lot to me having been let down by others. I didn't have much help from the 2 contacts you gave me as they mentioned that the "birth rule" ruled me out, so I was pretty disappointed.

I've already decided to give up the fight, so I'll see what happens next. To tell you the truth, I had already given up hope 5 years ago, after putting up a fight with the V.A. but when I received the letter offering me £500 that got me going again, and I wrote to the V.A. that I was refusing their offer. It wasn't the money I was interested in and it still isn't. Of course if they paid me £10,000 I would be a fool not to accept it, but I definitely will not accept £500. I never asked for this ex-gratia payment, but I was sent the forms etc. So I went for it. I am sorry to have done so. I was happy with my life. I was grateful to God for having survived my hardships knowing so many others dying around me. I have learnt a lot through my years of captivity. For instance, I would never know how to do manual work, and how important it is. Simply, if you don't work, you don't eat and all you need to survive is warmth, food and a roof over your head. That is why I am not materialistic. I also learned how to share what little you have with others who are worse off than you and how grateful they are to you for those simple gifts. There are also some silly habits that still haunt you, like I can't throw away food without feeling guilty, especially food on a plate, and also picking up little things on the pavement like rubber bands etc. All these things come in useful sometime or other. I thank God for letting me have such a good life while so many millions have suffered much worse than me during WW11. I hope I haven't bored you with all my moans. Once again I would like to say how much I appreciate your support and kindness that you have given me. When your Garden is completed I'll make an effort to be there for the dedication. God Bless! and regards to your family."

We are also sad to report the death of **Jack Edwards**. Most of you will have read his obituaries in the newspapers. He campaigned tirelessly on behalf of ex-servicemen and their widows in the Far East, and was instrumental in obtaining pensions for the ethnic Chinese veterans and their widows in Hong Kong. Captured in Singapore and sent to Formosa (as it then was) to work in the copper mines at Kinkaseki, Jack Edwards recorded his experiences in his well known book, "Banzai, You Bastards!"

Headlines from Yahoo! Singapore News reads:-
"96-year-old war heroine **Elizabeth Choy** dies from cancer."

The following is an account of the remarkable life of **Elizabeth Choy**, to whom many FEPOWs owe a debt of gratitude.

96-year-old legend Elizabeth Choy died on Thursday, after a battle with cancer. Family members said she died at 2pm at home, surrounded by her loved ones. The wake will be held at the St. Andrew's Cathedral.

Elizabeth Choy was born Yong Su-Moi in Sabah in 1910, but moved to Singapore in 1929 to further her studies.

Responsibility came early to this eldest of 6 children when her mother passed away early. Of Hakka descent, she became a teacher to support her siblings – a vocation she returned to later in life.

In 1941, Elizabeth Choy got married, but life would soon turn hellish. Both she and her husband were captured by the dreaded Japanese Kempeitai when Singapore fell. Accused of passing food, medicine and messages to British prisoners-of-war, she was locked up and tortured for 193 days.

In a recent documentary, she recalled these times to her grand-daughter, Andrea. "My most agonizing torture was – besides all the kicking and punching – nothing compared to the electric shocks - they applied electricity to my bare body," said Elizabeth.

After the war, the War Tribunal asked the war heroine if she wanted her torturers executed. Her answer was no. "If not for war, they would be just like me. They would be at home with their family, doing just ordinary things and peaceful work. Let us pray that there will be no more war," said Elizabeth.

Elizabeth Choy went on to be awarded a number of medals for valour and service to the nation, including the Order of the British Empire.

There were fun times as well, such as the little-known fact that she turned to modelling to supplement her income during a 4-year stint in the United Kingdom after the war.

After returning to Singapore, this war heroine then turned to politics – making history by becoming Singapore's first female legislator. She then stood for elections in the Queenstown branch but lost.

Elizabeth Choy then left politics to go back to her first love – teaching. She spent 40 years doing this. Asked some years ago which part of her remarkable life she wanted to be remembered for, there was no hesitation. "Teaching is a noble profession. You have young people and you help to mould them so teaching is very important," said Elizabeth.

In the end – perhaps that is indeed Elizabeth Choy's lasting legacy. She taught a nation what it is to live a life less ordinary. – CNA/dt

More from > Singapore News Channel NewsAsia.

More from > Singapore

Previous President Nathan, PM Lee pay tribute to Elizabeth Choy.

See:- <http://sg.news.yahoo.com/060915/5/singapore230370.html>

MVG Website -

BOOKS.

The following is the report by Richard Middleton-Smith on Colin Smith's book. (A very short review was given in the 3rd Edition of "Apa Khabar.")

"SINGAPORE BURNING." By Colin Smith.
Viking 566 pp Bib 36

Before reading this excellent book in which is described the Japanese conquest of Malaya and Singapore during World War 11, it is worth remembering certain background facts. The major powers, including Britain, exhausted after the 1914-18 war, did not have the energy or interest to counter Japanese military activities in mainland China during the following two decades. Japan had armed herself as an ally of Great Britain against Germany during the First World War and had suffered no real casualties. The United Kingdom, Russia, and the U.S.A. had suffered severe losses in manpower and damage to their economies. The Japanese intention to attack in the Pacific was not foreseen, and insufficient account was taken of their all round military capability resulting from their years of war experience in China. At the same time, during World War 11 expansionist elements in Japan felt able to mount the devastating attack on Pearl Harbour and successful incursions into Indochina, Malaya and Indonesia.

The author has given a remarkably detailed account not only of the naval and military aspects of the campaign, but also of the personalities and achievement or otherwise of the commanders on both sides. In addition to pointing out the intelligence failing on the British Side, he gives a resume of the Japanese foreknowledge that in Malaya they would be opposed mainly by raw Indian Colonial troops and untried Australians. They also had 200 tanks against none, with an aircraft superiority of four to one. In spite of the fact that a Japanese naval force had been sighted off the coast of Thailand some hours before the attack on Pearl Harbour, both General Percival and Sir Robert Brooke-Popham decided against a British Plan named Matador to invade Southern Siam to deny the Japanese the use of the port facilities and airfield at Singora. The Japanese were thus able to invade Malaya from the North without too much difficulty. It was also helpful to them that the two British battleships the Repulse and the Prince of Wales in that area had turned back after realizing they had been spotted by Japanese aircraft.

A famous British admiral once stated in his memoirs that the three essential qualities of a great naval officer are imagination, audacity, and the genius to disobey orders at the right moment. When Stanford Raffles sailed into Singapore on January 28th 1819, he did so knowing that both Lord Hastings, the Governor General of India, and Colonel Bannerman, the Governor of Penang were not in favour of such an enterprise. Even if such qualities were not always displayed 123 years later, there were many instances, recorded in this book, of great exploits, both on land and sea, and of heroism, on the part of those defending Malaya and the colony.

Although not a great deal of damage was done to the buildings in Singapore, the Japanese bombing of rubber godowns and the denial of oil tanks by the defenders produced very large clouds of black smoke, which gave the impression of the city and port area being on fire. As a private in the Straits Settlements Volunteer Force stationed in a machine gun pillbox in the port area, I well remember the black smoke covering the island. It was so depressing in fact that it made me determined to throw away and deny the Japanese army my silver cigarette case which, had I kept it, would have been exchanged for many duck eggs and much tobacco when later I was a prisoner of war on the Burma-Siam Railway.

There are some very apposite and dramatic illustrations of both the Malayan campaign and of Singapore burning. There are also some excellent maps. The author has taken the trouble to describe the bravery of those merchant navy and naval personnel who evacuated many British women and children and others from Singapore to Java and elsewhere, and particularly praises a Straits Steamship vessel the "Kedah", which, because of its outstanding service, was allowed to lead the fleet back to Singapore after the Japanese surrender.

Penang and the Malay States were administered by the East India Co. and the Government of India from 1768 until 1867, while Singapore was governed by them from 1819 until 1867. Jurisdiction was then transferred to the Colonial Office, and the Malayan Civil Service was established. As L. A. Mills has said in his work "British Malaya 1824-67," a feeling of gratitude is owed to the East India Company because through its Malayan policy a great part of the Malay Peninsula was saved from falling into the hands of Siam. One must hope that the successors to the British in Malaya and Singapore will have similar feelings after the way in which the Siamese government collaborated with the Japanese in 1942.

The author does not express very definite views on the merits or demerits of colonialism or the benefits to Singapore, Malaya, and their inhabitants of the integrity of its administration over a period of nearly 100 years by British officials, but the peace and economic success achieved since independence speak volumes in its favour.

So much is recounted in this very well written book that it is difficult to do it justice. The author covers the whole ground extremely well, and I thoroughly recommend it.

"IN THE SHADOW OF DEATH." The Story of a Medic on the Burma Railway 1942-45. By Idris James Barwick. Published by Pen and Sword Military Books. ISBN 1-84415-246-4

So many died then and so many have died since, but this book is dedicated to:-

"The Best and Truest of My Many Friends Who Died in the Jungle."

"The Best of Pals Who Survived the Jungle Epic."

"All Those Who Slaved on the Railway of Death."

"In the Shadow of Death" is a brilliant, shocking but deeply inspiring record of one of the darkest periods in the history of British military history.

"ONE DAY AT A TIME." A British Prisoner of War's account of 1,300 days in a Japanese Slave Labour Camp. By Arthur Titherington. Published by The S.P.A. Ltd. ISBN 1-85421-205-2

The foreword by Robert O'Neill, Chichele Professor of the History of War at All Souls College, Oxford, lays out the four realms of experience which all FEPOWs must have gone through between 1942 and 1945. The first was defeat; the second was captivity under rigorous conditions; the third was life under a brutal or inhumane regime and the fourth was comradeship in adversity.

"THE SINGAPORE CHINESE MASSACRE. Sook Ching." By Ralph Modder. Published by Horizon Books Pte. Ltd. ISBN 981-05-0388-1

After the British had surrendered Singapore to the Japanese on 15th February 1942, Lt.Gen. Yamashita, commander of the victorious 25th Army, ordered that male Chinese had to "register" at various centres. The purpose was to discover "anti-Japanese elements among the Chinese population," in particular Chinese guerrilla-volunteers (many of them members of the SSVF, FMSVF and other Volunteer Forces) who had fought courageously when the Japanese invaded Singapore. Thousands of Chinese were picked out at random by the Kempeitai, the dreaded Japanese secret police. The victims were taken to remote places, mostly beaches and shot. A British War Crimes Court in Singapore in 1947 sentenced several senior Japanese army officers to death or to long prison terms for their parts in the massacre, also known as the "Sook Ching" Massacre (meaning "purification by purge" in Chinese.) The Japanese had admitted that 5,000 were executed while there were claims that the number was about 50,000. The actual number is unknown.

"JOURNEY BY CANDLELIGHT." By Ann Kennaway. Published by Pentland Press. ISBN 1-85821-7245

Ann is the eldest of the 4 daughters of Mark John and Dorothy Kennaway, whose Escot Rubber Estate became famous for its house parties.

"THE PRICE OF PEACE." True accounts of the Japanese Occupation. Compiled and edited by Foong Choon Hon for the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and translated by Clara Show. ISBN 981-3068-53-1

A compilation of true accounts of many of the courageous members of the resistance movement against the Japanese during their occupation of Singapore and Malaya, including Elizabeth Choy.

"A GIRL IN CHANGI." By Sheila Allen.

Details of the 3rd Edition will be given in the next Newsletter.

REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY – 12TH November 2006.

There are still a few tickets left out of the 12 tickets MVG has been allocated for this year's Service of Remembrance at the Cenotaph in Whitehall. Please let Rosemary Fell know if you would like to attend the Service and Parade this year. The details and tickets have not yet arrived, but they will be forwarded to you in due course.

We are asked by the Royal British Legion, who co-ordinates the Parade, March Past and Laying of Wreaths, to advise everyone who chooses to march, that there may be a wait in Whitehall before the March begins, after the Service ends. The marching distance is about 1 ½ miles, down Whitehall, past the Cenotaph, right into Parliament Square and into Great George Street, and then right again into Horse Guards Road. Last year the final salute was taken by the Prince of Wales opposite Horse Guards Parade where the march ends. It may sound a long way, but a great deal of chatting went on while we were marching, and it made the march go very easily and quickly! One also needs to be aware of the possible cold or inclement weather, and dress accordingly.

After the Parade we plan to have lunch together at a restaurant near the London Eye on the South Bank. We are not intending to book, but last year there were plenty of spaces, and the food was very good and not expensive.

MVG ANNUAL LUNCH – Saturday 30th September.

A most enjoyable afternoon was had by 29 MVG members and friends at the annual lunch in London last Saturday. It was held in a private upstairs room at The Super Star Restaurant in Lisle Street, China Town. Members were delighted to meet Sheila Allen, and enthralled by her fascinating talk on the Changi Quilts. A full report of the talk, and lunch will be given in January's edition of "Apa Khabar."

The lunch enabled several members, who had not met since childhood, to become re-acquainted and other old friends to meet up again. As ever there was a great deal to reminisce and talk about.

ACCOUNTS.

The MVG accounts have again been prepared by SJA Accountants Limited of 10, Rowan Close, Honiton, Devon. EX14 2YH from 6th April 2005 to the 5th April 2006. If anyone would like to have a full set of the accounts, please would you send Rosemary Fell a stamped addressed envelope with your request. The accounts have been prepared without cost to the MVG. A copy of the Income and Expenditure Sheet is printed below.