

There has been an encouraging response to the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition of "Apa Khabar," not only from this country, but also from "Malayans" living elsewhere in the world. As the Newsletter was sent out to over 80 people, it seems sensible to give ourselves a name tag, despite our initial reluctance to form yet another group. Various suggestions have been put forward, some lending themselves to snappy acronyms, others not. In the end, a simple name, without a special tag, came to mind, and so the "Malayan Volunteers Group" was born.

Salamat Datang ke all members of the MVG.

It has been a great pleasure producing the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition of "Apa Khabar." One important point which has emerged, is that there are many of us still trying to find out what happened to our fathers and other relations, over 60 years ago. Therefore, it seems even more relevant to have a means of exchanging information. If this Newsletter can provide a medium through which to share and exchange information, it will serve a useful purpose.

If you would like to continue to receive a copy of the Newsletter, we are asking for a £5 "Newsletter donation" to cover the cost of printing and postage. For this donation, you will receive 4 Newsletters per year, an address list of other Malayans and information concerning meetings, Arboretum services and dedications. If you do not wish your address to be circulated, please let me know.

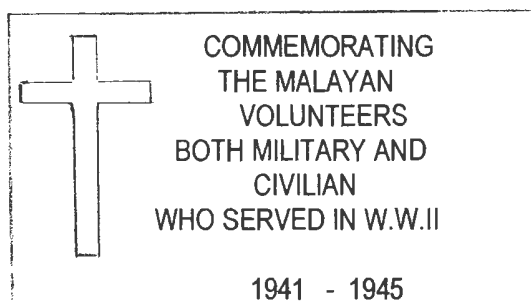
Any funds which are left over from the Newsletter donations will be added to the original "Bench Fund." We plan to look into the possibility of putting a memorial to the Malayan Volunteers in Singapore and in Kanchanaburi, Thailand, at some stage in the future, when funds become available.

### **MEMORIAL STONE TABLET.**

After the negative response to our request to place a small memorial stone tablet in the FEPOW Plot, next to one of the benches, we have now received permission to put it in the National Malayan and Borneo Veterans Association's Plot, in the National Memorial Arboretum at Alrewas. The NMBVA has welcomed us with open arms, and has been very helpful and supportive.

The tablet will be of fine rubbed grey Cornish granite, 18ins wide and 15ins long. It will slope forwards from a depth of 4ins at the back to 2ins at the front. The inscription will be cut into the face of the granite and painted with 2 coats of black paint to give a durable finish, and make the inscription stand out. To the left of the inscription, a cross will be carved into the stone, and this will be finished in gold leaf.

The finished tablet will have the following inscription:-



We are very fortunate to have found a sympathetic Monumental Stonemason, who has offered to supply this tablet at the cost price of £195.00 + VAT. This is within the budget of the money remaining from the Bench Fund.

It is planned to place the tablet on the outline of a Malay Kris, which has been cut into the bank in the NMBVA Plot, and filled in with white chippings. The tablet will show up well on this background, and will need the minimum of maintenance.

We will let you know when the tablet is in place in the Arboretum, and when it will be dedicated.

## INFORMATION EXCHANGE.

Mary Harris nee Alexander from London writes:-

My father was N.S. Alexander, a member of the Singapore Volunteers from 1936. As Scientific Advisor to the Armed Forces, (while continuing his work as Professor of Physics at Raffles College) he was in a reserved occupation when the Singapore fighting started. For the last few days before the fall and indeed until they were all rounded up, he worked as a volunteer in Singapore General Hospital, keeping the X-ray machines going and acting as an orderly. He was, therefore, a civilian internee in Changi Gaol, not a Prisoner-of-War in Changi Camp. I would be delighted to be contacted by anyone who may have known him.

My e-mail address is:- [mary@maryeharris.plus.com](mailto:mary@maryeharris.plus.com)

Michael Pether from Auckland New Zealand writes:-

Recollections or mention in FMSVF diaries etc of Private John William "Jack" Clark, #13709, 2<sup>nd</sup> Selangor Battalion, FMSVF.

Jack was a 19 year old New Zealander working as an Assistant for ICI Malaya Ltd in Kuala Lumpur. His parents were living in Singapore at the time of the Japanese invasion of that island – his father was Nobby Clark, Manager with the Government Rice Mill. Jack was last heard of in the company of other FMSVF on Blakang Mati at the time of the surrender and is known to have made one escape attempt from there with Sgt D.V. McKenzie of the FMSVF, but after their boat grounded and the steering failed they were separated. There are anecdotal stories that Jack then escaped with others but was captured by the Japanese somewhere away from Singapore and executed on a beach or near water. Research has shown no record of him actually being in any of the POW camps – definitely not on Singapore.

In that context, I have over the last few years been quite extensively researching the FMSVF, including IWM/PRO records and NZ Archives, plus established contacts with several ex- FMSVF personnel in NZ and researchers/authors in the UK. My motivation, apart from improving our understanding of Jack's last days, is also to ensure that his part as a FMSVF soldier does not slide into historical obscurity.

I would be happy to share my knowledge/research so far with other people interested in the FMSVF and also help in any NZ connections.

My e-mail address is:- [mncpether@xtra.co.nz](mailto:mncpether@xtra.co.nz)

Ros Henry from Oxhill in Warwickshire asks:-

Does anyone have any information about the Civilian Camp Orchestra in Changi? Ros's father, "John" S. Harper-Ball, who was in charge of the Civilian Camp, played the violin in the orchestra. Ros would like to know more about the orchestra – how many members did it have, and what were the other instruments? Also, where did the instruments come from?

Ros can be contacted at the following address:- Fexloe House, Oxhill, Warwickshire. CV35 0QR

## SOME INTERESTING WEBSITES TO VISIT.

The NMBVA has a website on:-

<http://www.nmbva.co.uk/home.htm>

Paul Riches' website:-

<http://www.far-eastern-volunteers.co.uk>

Simon Shelton Palmer has a website on Changi/Thailand/Malaya:-

<http://japanesepow.fasttimes.co.uk>

Rod Beattie of the Thailand-Burma Railway Centre, Kanchanaburi, Thailand has a website on:-

<http://tbrconline.com>

Victoria Institution, Kuala Lumpur has a website on:-

<http://www.viweb.cjb.net>

Discovery Channel Changi documentary website:-

<http://www.discoverychannelasia.com/sayonarachangi>

COFEPOW has a website on:- <http://www.cofepow.org.uk>

## British Malayan / Volunteer Sources at the PRO and IWM

### The PRO

There is an enthusiastic buzz about the Public Records Office [National Archives] at Kew on a Saturday morning. It is very user friendly and serves a decent breakfast before 9.30 a.m. admission to the documents. I begin to relax after the perils of the North Circular Road and a pretty frightening roundabout at Ealing. The Tube is an alternative; five or ten minutes walk from the PRO. There is a 15 minute induction tour for 1<sup>st</sup> time visitors and then you get your white card and it is over to you. Those with Internet access can pre-book their visit and first three documents – see PRO website <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/visit/> You collect a seat number from the Documents desk on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor and documents you collect from a numbered glass locker. Vigilant staff has the interests of users and precious documents at heart. You order documents on the PRO computers throughout the day with an ordering interval at lunchtime.

WO [War Office] 345 boxes contain the Japanese POW index cards of all British POWs who were in Changi POW camp or transited through Singapore. The front of the card contains basic details, mostly in English; the reverse side of the card is in Japanese and contains minimal information except in the cases of deceased POWs where details are quite precise.

The recently released WO 344 files are MI 19 Questionnaires given to FEPOWs in 1945. They mostly cover Escapes [and with it War Crimes] and Acts of Heroism. Most are poorly filled in except for the names of camps the individual FEPOW was in with precise dates.

Ships passenger lists [Department of Trade] are viewed on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor. I took copies of the Empress of Japan [BT 26/1197] and Duchess of Bedford [BT 26 /1198] passenger lists for arrival in Liverpool in March/April 1942.

For those interested in Escape from Singapore [February 1942] stories the Malayan Research Bureau papers CO 980/217 and CO 980/139 [numerous accounts by British Malayan civilian evacuees / escapees from Singapore] and some ADM [Admiralty] documents such as ADM 199/622A are quite fascinating. John Brown also recommends CO 980/7 which relates to Volunteers casualties and escapees including some MVAF and Dalforce reaching Australia.

Bleary eyed and in need of recreation, close to the PRO are Kew Gardens and a big shopping centre with M. & S. For anyone needing accommodation there is a big Travelodge over Kew Bridge as well as many B.& B.s in the area.

### The Imperial War Museum Reading Room

Book your visit in advance – this can be done by phone or e mail to the Department of Printed Documents. I usually take the Tube to Lambeth North and walk from there for 10.00 a.m. opening.

Volunteer memoirs and diaries include those of:

Evans, T H  
Hedley J.

SRA  
JVE

85/29/1

Brundle, KA	SSVF Escaped on SS Kuala	99/50/1
Innes-Ker, WM	SSVF	84/45/1
Morgan, ED. MBE	SSVF	91/18/1
Richardson, JA Lt	FMSVF	87/58/1
Ross, HR, Lt	FMSVF	Con shelf
Alexander, AHB	FMSVF	88/5/1
Bird, AW	MVAF	Con shelf
Turner, SY	MVAF	91/14/1
Wagstaff, JH	Signals FMSVF	91/14/1
Malet HFG	FMSVF	
Todd, RBR	FMSVF	84/2/1
Warren, HG	FMSVF	97/6/1
Thornton, C	FMSVF	Con shelf
Furneaux, WJ	MVAF	80/46/1
Kinahan, CHG	SREV	90/15/1
Hodgson, JR	SSVF	97/41/1
Craig, Mrs CE	husband was SSVF	
Middleton-Smith, R	1SSVF	02/50/1
Seed, CWS	FMSVF	Con shelf
Murphy, MP	FMSVF	Con shelf
Romney, PH	FMSVF, Malay Mail	81/7/1
Porter, HA	1SSVF	90/2/1
Dobree, PGJ	FMSVF	95/34/1
Bennett, R	Armoured cars	85/50/1
Buckley, Dr TA	FMSVF	96/19/1
West, Dr GF	3 <sup>rd</sup> Malayan Field Ambulance	98/7/1
Muir-Jones, C	FMSVF, motor launch Celia	99/50/1
Lee, CH	FMSVF	Con shelf
Hart, TM	FMSVF	01/24/1
Walker-Taylor, BP	FMSVF	01/24/1
Rea, J.T.	1SSVF	
Gale J.K.	SRA	83/32/1

The Changi Register of Civilian internees 1942 and Captain David Nelson's annotated copy of the 1940 Directory of Malaya are available. The Directory list thousands of British Malaysians and their professional details with Nelson having annotated Volunteers and POWs/Civilian internees as well as pencilling in numerous missing names.

The Department of Books has the SSVF Yearbooks 1937-1940: lots of photos, adverts and nominal rolls of all units.

I am happy to assist with any enquiries and share any relevant documents I have copies of. I may say that John Brown knows more about the PRO documents than I and also about Family Records.

Finally an enquiry: has anyone ever come across the FMSVF Journal 'Volunteer' for the period 1937-1940? None of the obvious libraries here and abroad or known veterans have a copy but I have firm evidence it did exist.

Jonathan Moffatt with some input by John Brown

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# Why Ron will be marking VJ-Day

By Peter Rhodes

Jan 19, 2005, 08:28

Tony Blair says there will be no official ceremony on the 60th anniversary of VJ-Day, August 15.

Oh, yes there will, say Ron Mitchell and his pals. And when you hear their story you wonder how any government could ignore the anniversary of the Victory in Japan, August 15, 1945, which ended so much suffering.

Two days before his 18th birthday, Ron was one of 130,000 British, Australian and Indian troops who surrendered at Singapore, imperial Britain's greatest fortress in the East. The defeat of so many Allied troops by less than half that number of Japanese in February 1942 was one of the bitterest blows of the war.

Private Mitchell, a dispatch rider with the Singapore Volunteer Corps, was "in the bag" for the next three and a half years. He witnessed starvation, sadism, suffering and degradation beyond imagining. Sixty years on, he has published his memoirs.

His language is spare, undramatic and unsentimental. There is no need to embroider the daily diet of beatings, torture and casual murder inflicted on the Brits by their Japanese and Korean guards.

At his Bridgnorth home, the 80-year-old retired civil servant reflects on the mentality of warfare, defeat and despair. He was raised in some style in colonial Singapore. His book, *Baba Nonnie Goes to War*, is based on the pet name given him by his Chinese nanny. His father worked for Cable & Wireless and young Ron joined the Volunteer Corps when he was just 17. Like many Singapore veterans, he still finds it incredible that such a vast British garrison was humbled by the Japanese.

"But you could see what was going on," he says, shaking his head. "There was no proper front line. We just kept retreating and retreating and there were a lot of desertions." In the confusion, one of his friends, also a dispatch rider, was captured by the advancing Japanese, tied to a tree and bayoneted to death. It showed the total contempt the Japanese felt for an enemy who surrendered. All around the colony, defending troops simply evaporated.

"You got the impression that there were very few Allied troops in Singapore. Then, when we were all marched off into captivity, well, I've never seen so many men." He was put to work on the notorious Thai-Burma Railway where, according to legend, one British PoW died for every sleeper laid. Sometimes, he says, soldiers simply lost the will to live.

"It affected all sorts. They might be Oxford graduates or totally uneducated but they would get seriously depressed, not want to eat and then die."

When liberation came, Ron Mitchell was reunited with his parents but learned that his brother had perished in a Japanese prison camp in Borneo.

Surprisingly, he feels little bitterness. If the PoW camps were a war crime, he says, then so was the fire-bombing of German and Japanese cities. Three of his grandchildren have visited Japan and been kindly received. Sixty years on, he and his half-dozen surviving pals in the local Fepow (Far East Prisoners of War) branch are not impressed by government plans to combine VJ-Day and VE-Day celebrations on a date in July. Whatever Whitehall says, August 15 will not pass unmarked.

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"We'll be having a bit of a do," says Ron Mitchell.

- *Baba Nonnie Goes to War* is published by Coombe Publishing at £10.99. Order on 01746 766646.

## CHANGI QUILTS.

The following story about life in Changi Civilian Camp, was sent to me by Audrey McCormick.

Sheila Allan, author of "A Girl in Changi" and who lives in NSW, gives talks all over Australia. She has also appeared in TV documentaries in Australia and overseas. One of her exhibits is a quilt, made in Changi by young girls. 20 girls in the camp had been recruited by Elizabeth Ennis, an English nurse, to form a Girl Guide Group to keep them occupied. One of their tasks was to make a quilt, and at the same time a Canadian internee, Ethel Mulvaney, who had been a Red Cross representative in Singapore, organized the older women into quilting bees. The completed quilts went to the Changi Hospital for the sick and ill men. The women sewed on patches with names and addresses on them, so that their husbands would learn that they were still alive. Two quilts eventually went to the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, and one to the British Red Cross HQ in Surrey.

Sheila Allan was sent her quilt several years ago by Elizabeth Ennis who has recently died. Sheila intends to return the quilt to Britain because, as she says, most of the Girl Guides were British. Indeed, Sheila was herself only a teenager when she entered Changi.

## SOME DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES.

### Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> May 2005

FEPOW Memorial Church, Wymondham, Norfolk.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Service of Remembrance will be held at the Church of Our Lady and St. Thomas of Canterbury, at 2.30 p.m.

This Church was built by Father Malcolm Cowin, who survived the Japanese POW Camps, and made a promise, on his return home, to build a Church in memory of all those who died in POW or internment camps. In 1948, he began the task of collecting together the names of all the POW's and civilian internees, from whatever country, who died in the prison camps of the Far East. He collected 3 large volumes, all lovingly written by hand, and housed in a glass-topped cabinet, which stands in the small FEPOW Chapel within the Church itself. The books are on view and the pages are turned every day.

During the Millennium year, it was decided to extend the Books of Remembrance, by including the names of those who were POWs but who survived, and returned home. These names are included in an Addendum Book.

As Father Cowan wrote:-

*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.*

The Memorial Books will be open to Visitors from 11.00 a.m. on 8<sup>th</sup> May. Anyone wishing to attend the Service may reserve a seat by writing to :-

The FEPOW Secretary, 1, Norwich Road, Wymondham, Norfolk NR18 0QE.

### 15<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 2005

Possible date for the dedication of the Memorial Stone Tablet. Details will be posted in due course.

**5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2005**

Japanese Occupation Conference, Singapore.

Prior to this conference, an open public forum is to be organized with veterans and the wartime generation, and will be held on the Sunday afternoon, 4<sup>th</sup> September. It is hoped that Singapore Volunteers, in particular, may participate in the open forum.

Details may be obtained from Dr. Kevin Blackburn, Humanities and Social Studies Education, National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, 1, Nanyang Walk, Singapore 637616.

Fax No 679-0 3414

E-mail [Kpblack@nie.edu.sg](mailto:Kpblack@nie.edu.sg)

**BOOKS.**

BABA NONNIE GOES TO WAR. By Ron Mitchell and edited by Jonathan Moffatt. Coombe Publishing 2004.  
ISBN 0-9536470-1-3

The Memoirs of a Singapore Volunteer on the Thai-Burma Railway.

MOON OVER MALAYA. By Jonathan Moffatt and Audrey Holmes McCormick. <sup>Tempus</sup> ~~Coombe~~ Publishing <sup>2003</sup> ~~1999~~.

ISBN ~~0-953-6470-05~~ 0-7524-2690-7

A Tale of Argylls and Marines.

SURVIVING THE SWORD. Prisoners of the Japanese 1942 – 45. By Brian MacArthur. Time Warner Books 2005.  
ISBN 0-316-86142-1

For the Far East Prisoners of War 1942 – 45 and their families.

FORGOTTEN ARMIES. The Fall of British Asia 1941 – 1945. By Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper. Published by Allen Lane of the Penguin Group.

ISBN 0-713-99463-0

The authors are acknowledged as two of the world's leading historians of India and Southeast Asia. Both have written and researched widely in their respective fields. This book charts the overall impact of the Japanese invasion of Southeast Asia, which tore Asia apart between 1941 and 1945.

**CONTACTS.**

If you need any help with research on British Malayans/Volunteer Forces/Argylls and Royal Marines, please contact:-  
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Or

If you would like to meet up with other "Volunteer Children," please contact:-  
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