

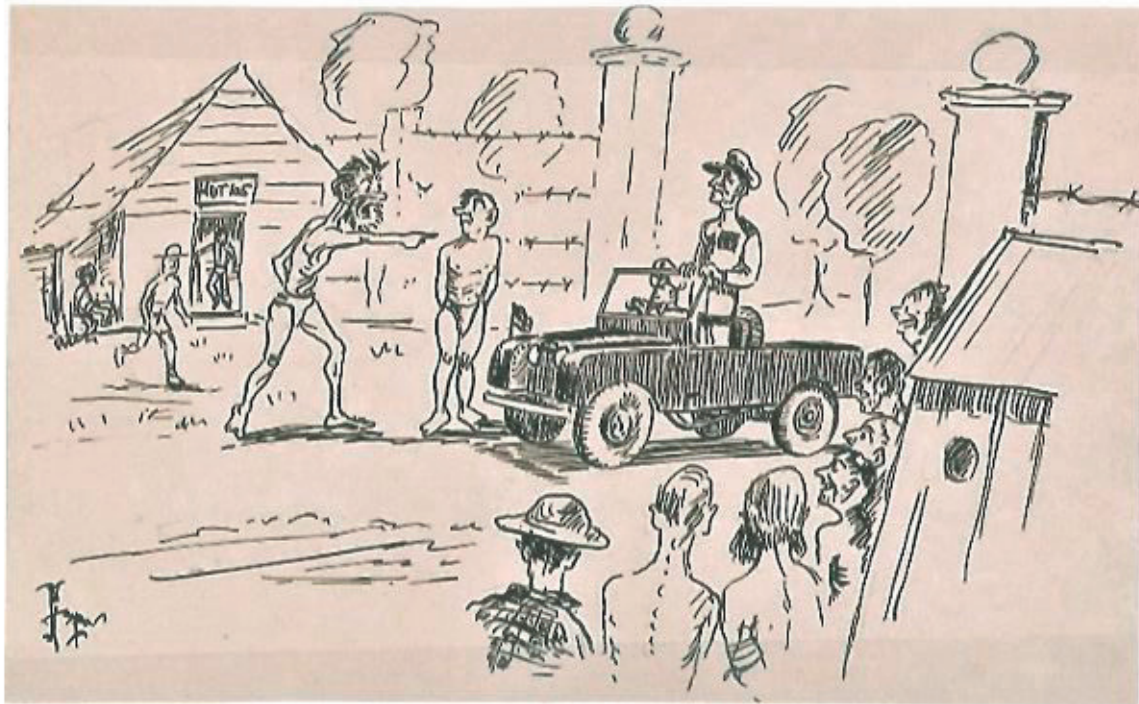
APA KHABAR

Patron: Her Grace The Duchess of Norfolk

www.malayanvolunteersgroup.org.uk



**55th EDITION
JULY 2018**



**"Scene: Sime Road Camp: On the LIBERATION: Irate internee who feels he has been kept waiting over long, to Admiral MOUNTBATTEN:
"AND WHERE THE HELL HAVE YOU BEEN ALL THIS TIME?!!"**

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Image by Robert William Edwin Harper from, "To those who laughed"
by William Foster Norton Churchill (RCMS 103/3/12)

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WELL ATTENDED AND SUCCESSFUL BMS/MVG MEETING IN APRIL THE VOLUNTEERS WERE COMMEMORATED IN MAY AT THE FEPOW SERVICE IN WYMONDHAM, WHERE A WREATH WAS LAID

On a bright spring day in April, members of the MVG attended a very successful and informative meeting with the British Malaysian Society at the temporary premises of the Malaysian High Commission in Bedford Row. Members of both organisations met over coffee before the start of the meeting, giving plenty of time for a chat and catch up. **Anthony Cooper** started the meeting by introducing the Malaysian High Commissioner, **His Excellency Dato' Ahmad Rasidi Bin Hazizi**, who was our host for the afternoon. **His Excellency** gave an amusing speech, followed by two short films about the strong bond which still links Malaysia and the United Kingdom. **Jonathan Moffatt** and **Rosemary Fell** then gave their talks, and the afternoon ended with a splendid Malaysian curry lunch which was enjoyed by all. A full report on the meeting is on P.2. We are very grateful to former MVG member **Felicity Bartleet** and her daughter **Helen**, for attending the annual FEPOW Service at the Church of Our Lady & St. Thomas of Canterbury in Wymondham on **Sunday 13th May** on behalf of the MVG. **Helen** laid a wreath commemorating the Malayan Volunteer Forces and we thank her for representing them. **Helen's** grandfather, **Augustine Joseph 'John' DALY**, fought in WW1 and was awarded an MC. He moved to Malaya after the First World War, first as a rubber planter but later joined Charles Bradburne & Co. Ltd. in K.L. as a Stockbroker. **Felicity** lived in KL with her parents, **John** and **Norah**, where her father joined the FMSVF as Captain in charge of 3 Malayan Field Ambulance. After Singapore fell to the Japanese he was captured and sent by train to Thailand on 28th October 1942 with Letter "U" Party together with so many other Volunteers. He died in captivity in Chungkai Hospital in Thailand in 1944, and is buried in Chungkai Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery in Kanchanaburi, in the same section of the cemetery as the Editor's father. **Felicity** and **Norah** had left Malaya for Perth WA in April 1941 on the Blue Funnel ship, **Charon**, and spent the war years there. They returned to England on the **SS Rangitiki** in March 1946, having heard the sad news that **John** had died. **Felicity** has told the story of her life first in Malaya, then Australia and finally in England, in a delightful memoir called "**Ann.**" The wonderful Church of Our Lady & St. Thomas of Canterbury hosts a service every year dedicated to the FEPOWs. It is a non-denominational service and this is the only Church in the UK which is dedicated to the FEPOWs. The Memorial Books, in which the names of all FEPOWs are inscribed, are on view in the FEPOW Chapel within the Church. The names of your loved ones can be viewed by contacting **Peter Wiseman**, the Historian and Archivist for the Church. **Felicity** said that she and **Helen** had enjoyed the day immensely. There was a huge number of wreaths laid. Many were laid by people in uniform, representing their countries such as New Zealand and Australia and other countries. After the service a buffet lunch was provided for the whole congregation, at which **Felicity** said that they had met other relatives, some with very interesting stories about their FEPOW relatives.

Our next main event is the service in the Chapel at the NMA on V-J Day, Wednesday, 15th August. If you are planning to come, please let **Rosemary** know as we need to let the Arboretum have the numbers attending. It may be possible to find tables and chairs in "Heroes Square" for a picnic after the service, but bearing in mind that these are tables for the restaurant customers, we may not be able to use them for our own picnics. We can, of course, use our own garden plot. On Sunday 13th May this year, the arranged gardening day in our plot at the NMA did not quite work out as planned. On arrival at the NMA before 9am that day, we found ourselves in a huge queue of traffic waiting to park. Eventually we found ourselves in a field some distance from the Arboretum – in fact, in the overflow of the overflow car park which was already full. We discovered that over 2,000 RAF personnel and their families were attending a service of commemoration to mark 100 years since the inception of the RAF. As well as this service, the Fire Brigades Union was also holding a service in their Plot in the Arboretum. In view of the difficulties in carrying gardening equipment from the cars down to the garden plot, we abandoned the full day's work we normally carry out. We are very grateful to **Anthony** and **June Jackson** for visiting the NMA a couple of weeks earlier and for cutting back the bamboo shrubs, weeding the paved areas and asking the groundsmen to mow the grass. This meant that there wasn't much to do apart from cleaning the benches. This can be done nearer the time of the V-J Day service. However, we do thank **Simon** and **Lynda Moss** for coming with their daughter **Claire** and son-in-law. Also thanks go to **Jonathan** and **Sutti Moffatt**, **Keith Andrews** and to **Phil** and **Poll Beynon** for coming. We thank those members who replied to **Jonathan's** plea for help in typing the updates to the Evacuees List for the new website. The task is quite time-consuming but not difficult, and in order to speed up its completion so that we can get the lists on the website, we could do with a few more typists. If you feel you can help in any way – please let **Jonathan** know. He will explain the task and send you the relevant details.

As explained in the **Data Protection Letter**, please let us know if you wish to opt out of the Membership List & haven't done so yet

REPORT ON THE BMS/MVG GATHERING AND TALKS ON 5TH APRIL 2018

By Jonathan Moffatt

Some 29 MVG members joined British Malaysian Society members and High Commission staff for this very friendly and lively gathering at the temporary premises of the Malaysian High Commission.

After a short film on 60 years of British Malaysian links which featured amongst others our **Michael Thompson**, and words of welcome and introduction from **HE Datuk Ahmad Rasidi Bin Hazizi** and **Dato Anthony Cooper**, **Rosemary** gave her illustrated talk on the history and composition of the Malayan Volunteer Forces and the aims and achievements of the Malayan Volunteers Group.

Rosemary spoke of the origins of the Volunteer Movement in Malaya and Singapore during Britain's major conflicts of the 19th and 20th centuries. The proud motto "**In Oriente Primus**" – **First in the East**" emerged in the 1880s.

As World War 2 approached, men from all walks of life and nationalities in Malaya and Singapore – Malays, Chinese, Indians, Eurasians and Europeans – joined the Volunteer Forces. **Rosemary** spoke of her own family's involvement in these events:

*"Before the war, my family lived in Malacca where my father, **Eric Reeve**, was the Headmaster of the Bandar Hilir English School for boys. He joined the Malacca Volunteer Corps, the 4th Battalion SSVF. As a 2nd Lieutenant he was put in charge of the Signals Section. He was well liked by his men who were all Eurasian or Indian. By December 1941, at the start of hostilities, the Battalion numbered some 675 men – Europeans, Chinese, Malays, Eurasians and Indians. The Battalion was mobilized on 3rd December 1941 and entrained for Singapore where it was deployed to defend part of the south coast of the island. Captured in Singapore, my father was sent to Changi barracks and then to the Thailand-Burma Railway. He died there in 1943 of dysentery, pellagra and a leg amputation, and is buried in Chungkai Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery."*

In 1985, **Rosemary** and her mother went on a Royal British Legion Pilgrimage to Thailand to visit her father's grave. Out of the 80 pilgrims on the tour, they were the only family with Malayan Volunteer connections. This made her feel, subconsciously, that no-one knew much about the Volunteers and she resolved then "to do something about this." In 2003, **Rosemary** attended a V-J Day Service at the NMA, and it was then that this "resolve" turned into reality. The staff at the NMA had no idea who the Malayan Volunteer Forces were, and told her that there were no memorials to them in the Arboretum. Later that year, **Rosemary** was invited to a lunch in London for "the children of Volunteers." A small group of 12 met in a restaurant near Trafalgar Square. They agreed to collect money to buy a bench for the NMA and dedicate it to the Volunteers.

In a very short space of time, sufficient funds had been raised to buy 2 benches and a Memorial Stone made of Cornish granite. The benches were dedicated in 2004 and in January 2005 the Malayan Volunteers Group was put on a more formal basis with a membership list and the publication of the first newsletter, "**Apa Khabar**." **Rosemary** then highlighted a few of MVG's major presentations.

In 2006, money was donated to **Rod Beattie's** Thailand-Burma Railway Centre Museum in Kanchanaburi for the purchase of books for its library and lecture room. A teak board with the various Volunteer Units' badges is now displayed on the staircase wall.

In 2007, the MVG's Memorial Garden Plot at the NMA was dedicated by one of our own Veteran Volunteers, the **Revd. Geoffrey Mowat**.

A teak board with 5 Volunteers badges was presented to the Changi Museum in September 2008, thanks to its director **Jeya Ayadurai**. This was unveiled by Singapore's former President **Mr. S.R. Nathan**.

MVG members attended various remembrance events to mark the 70th anniversary of the Fall of Singapore in September 2012 – in Singapore, Perth WA, on Bangka Island and in Sumatra. Two plaques were unveiled in Perth and four in Sumatra. With growing awareness about the fate of many civilian relatives of our members who escaped just before Singapore fell, but were captured and interned by the Japanese, the MVG felt that these civilians should also be included in our acts of remembrance. Thus in October 2013, the MVG sponsored a concert to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Women's Vocal Orchestra created in the women's internment camp in Palembang, Sumatra. The concert was performed by a local choir using music written in the camp by **Margaret Dryburgh**, **Norah Chambers** and **Margery Jennings**. The profits from the concert were given to a Primary School in Muntok; for repairs to a communal grave containing the remains of several women who had died in the camps; and for a plaque inscribed with their names.

In 2014, military and civilian internees in various camps in Sumatra, and those killed whilst escaping from Singapore, were remembered. The plaque presented to the Changi Museum included the Australian Army nurses massacred on Bangka Island.

On the 70th anniversary of the Japanese surrender in Singapore, the 12th September 2015 - MVG members attended the presentation of a plaque to the Changi Museum dedicated to all those who had been interned in the Sime Road Camp, both military and civilian. The plaque was unveiled by **Vilma Howe** and **Olga Henderson**, both former child internees in this camp. Earlier in February 2015, in Muntok, a Museum of Peace dedicated to all those interned there and funded by the MVG was opened.

In 2017, forty MVG members and friends attended events in Singapore, including a service in Kranji Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery, to mark the 75th anniversary of the Fall of Singapore. The MVG laid wreaths on behalf of the Malayan Volunteer Forces and the civilian internees.

Since 2005, the MVG has taken part in many memorial services in various parts of the world, including marching past the Cenotaph in Whitehall on Remembrance Sunday. Annual services are held on V-J Day in the Plot at the NMA and a Reunion Lunch in London. The quarterly newsletter includes wartime diaries written and kept in great secrecy by Volunteers, and civilian eye witness accounts of escapes and wartime conditions in Singapore and Malaya.

MVG is a privately funded group. All plaques and memorials have been paid for by its members. It differs from most other FEPOW Associations in this country in that it concentrates on presenting memorials to Museums and other places in the Far East where so many members' families lived and worked before the outbreak of war or where they were interned during the war. Thus the focus of the Malayan Volunteers Group's remembrance occupies a niche not covered by other groups, especially in Sumatra. The work of the MVG continues to raise awareness of the Malayan Volunteer Forces and to seek recognition for their unique role in the Malayan Campaign and in captivity.

Rosemary concluded her talk with the MVG motto:

"Andai nya kita terlupa" – which means "Lest we Forget."

Jonathan then spoke of the approximately 200 enquiries he continues to receive each year, mostly from families of British Malaya; some from historians and the media. These enquiries often result in copies of photos, diaries and letters coming into the MVG archive. Some families make contact because they are compiling and publishing family history. Recent examples include:

1. Eleanor Nunis' book, *"Unsung Heroes"*, the often tragic story of a Eurasian family in Muar 1930s/40s.
2. The captivity diary of Alastair McKenzie, Manager, Chuo Estate, Segamat and a Sapper in the Johore Volunteer Engineers.
3. MVG's Robin Polglase's book on his father who was in FMSVF Armoured Car Regiment and an F Force POW.

Others close to publishing are MVG member Jan Beranek who is writing about his great uncle, a Czechoslovak Bata Shoes employee who served in the SSVF and was missing, presumed killed, in the Battle for Singapore. In Australia, Mary Ann Schooling and two friends are finalising a history of the Eurasian SSVF Volunteers.

Jonathan originally intended talking about a few such collaborative projects but then one came his way which he found so interesting that he decided just to focus on that. A school teacher in Malacca, Audrey Lim Swee Peck contacted him about her father Lim Keng Watt who had been a Sergeant in the Malacca Volunteer Corps [4/SSVF] and a school teacher at St. Francis' Institution, Malacca. [N.B. See Audrey's article about her father in the April 2018 Edition of *Apa Khabar* and her now published book, *"Memories of a Malaccan."*]

Lim Keng Watt was an enthusiastic photographer who kept a quality photographic record of his Volunteer Service from 1928 to 1942; of the Malaya Contingent in the London Victory parade of 1946; and of his school into the 1950s. Other enthusiasms which dominated his collection were Scouting, Music and Drama.

Jonathan shared with his audience a selection of Sgt. Lim's photos of the Chinese Company MVC in the 1930s and told how St. Francis' Institution paid a heavy price in the struggle against the Japanese. The school was closely linked to Volunteer Service and to resistance during the Japanese occupation, in particular circulating news from the BBC. This led to the arrest and torture of a number of staff including the Senior Teacher Mr. Pamadasa who was sentenced to death and executed. Sgt. Lim somehow survived the Battle of Singapore; the surrender; the screening, after which many of his comrades were massacred; then arrest by the Kempeitai as he returned to Malacca. Eventually he and a few others received Japanese permission to resume teaching duties.

In 1946, Sgt. Lim was among those selected to represent Malaya in the London Victory Parade. Again, he kept a detailed record in photos, letters and memorabilia of the event and touring England, Wales and Scotland. Among the places they visited were Fort Dunlop in Birmingham, Stratford-upon-Avon, Brighton, Edinburgh, the Ford Plant at Dagenham and Elstree studios. The Malayan Contingent camped out in Kensington Gardens where it was inspected by Mountbatten, HM The King and the Royal Family. Later the Contingent partied with Prime Minister Attlee and George Hall, Secretary of State for the Colonies.

The British Film Institute has a very good film on the subject online at:

<http://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-victory-parade-1946-online>

There is also good colour film of the Parade on Youtube.

To conclude, Jonathan explained how enquiries could be messaged direct to him through the recently redesigned MVG website. Also there is lively discussion and queries on our new MVG Facebook. A closed group with over 100 members – new ones welcome. Various new publications were also exchanged including Sir Percy McNeice's captivity account, *"Prisoner under the Sun."*

The talks were followed by a very good chicken rendang lunch provided by Datin Rose. Thanks to Anthony Cooper for arranging this event.

MY TRIP TO BELUM - by E.W. Birch C.M.G.

With thanks to Dave Croft RAFBPA

From: The Journal Straits Branch R.A. Society. No: 54. 1909

[Editor: This short article follows on from the HUBERT BERKELEY story in Apa Khabar April 2018 No: 54]

We started from Grit (sic) for Belum on Monday, the 26th July (1909). Hubert Berkeley, J.W. Simmons, the Datoh Sri Adika Raja, I.S.O., the hereditary Chief of Upper Perak, and I.

We had 21 elephants, one of which is probably the tallest in Perak. His name is **Bogek** and he stands 9ft. 4¼ins. at the shoulder. His master, the **Datoh Wan Man** – the headman of the district for which we were bound – had come down to Grit (sic) to meet me and was our guide to Belum.

We began our journey by walking eight miles to Bersiah, where we camped. The elephants took over seven hours to make the journey. They can go two miles an hour when the going is good, but deep mud, hills, river fords and fallen trees delay them. At ¼ past 12 we reached the Kuala Rui and saw how it empties its muddy water, full of mining silt, into the beautiful Perak River.

We passed through bamboo country and crossed some fair-sized streams.

Bersiah is a village with 64 people of all ages, who live in miserable bamboo huts and have but little cultivation of a permanent nature.

The evil of opium smoking is very evident amongst the Patani Malays here and elsewhere and destroys their usefulness as agriculturists.

There is some padi land, and some more will be irrigated next year at Banderiang, on the Grit (sic) side of Bersiah.

The people suffer a great deal from goitre (*bengok*), and this was more noticeable the further we went up country.

The Datoh Sri Adika Raja tells me that goitre is a peculiarity of the interior of all the surrounding Malayan countries as one nears the mountains: and that the Malays attribute it to the water the people drink. They believe that the water is infected by some unknown *akar* (root or creeper).

Post and Telegraph Office at Grik



MESSAGE FROM MALAYSIA – Re: The Seremban Memorial.



Major A.R. Ramachandran Iyer (Retd.) has sent this photograph of the Seremban Memorial with the following message:

This Memorial exists but has been forgotten as far as ceremonies go. I intend to revive the Remembrance Day Ceremony in November 2018. I need more information, if you can assist. Here's a picture for your gallery. Thank you.

If there are any MVG members in Malaysia who could make contact with Major Ramachandran and attend the Ceremony in November in Seremban, we would be very grateful. It would be good to have an MVG presence at this ceremony, and a wreath laid on behalf of the Malayan Volunteer Forces.

MESSAGE FROM KEITH ANDREWS

Photo Albums

COFEPOW Trustees are working towards creating new photo albums which will be kept in the FEPOW Building and under the control of the Trustees. Should MVG members wish to donate to the albums, please advise me and I will send out the contact details – or they can be sent to me and I will forward on the information.

Projected Names

With regard to the names being displayed on the wall of the Building, I have finished going through the name lists up to the letter "O", so there is still a little way to go. Slowly the bugs are being ironed out of the existing Database, the new projector and computer equipment have now been installed. There still may be names of Volunteers who should be displayed but for which we have no official record. I will be consulting with **Jonathan** about these names e.g. men in the Fleet Air Arm; Royal Navy; British Army; British Indian Army who stayed loyal to the Crown; and men executed before the Japanese POW cards were made out and therefore not in WO392 lists.

[We are grateful to Keith for his help.]

TRANSCRIPT OF THE DIARY KEPT BY SIR ALASTAIR BLAIR-KERR
OF HIS ESCAPE FROM SINGAPORE IN 1942 WITH HIS WIFE ESTHER (nee FOWLER-WRIGHT)

By kind permission of their daughter Linda Hughes

Feb 20th contd. - Escape from Singapore in the Chinese Tongkang

We are short of cutlery and have to eat out of coconut husks. However, we thrive on "maconochie" and tea, with some bully beef. It feels a lot better in some ways to be making for somewhere in particular. The first three days we simply watched the smoke of Singapore and steered in the opposite direction, with an idea that we might have to spend months on the islands with the Malays and the odd hope of getting to Java sometime. We learned, however, at Murow that the Japs had taken the island of Banka which barred our route to Java. So our only hope was Sumatra. We hope to get to the west of the island before the Japs who, we learn, are advancing from the south.

Feb 21st

Still on the Tongkang. Spent the night in a little cabin. (Somervell, Esther and I). We decide to collect contributions from everyone for the cost of the trip. Most of the men have no money at all, and the few of us who have, "carried" the rest. Reach Pergj Raja and are told by the natives that some white people have gone further upstream to Tembilahan. So we continue.

Feb 22nd

We spend the night - 4 in a cabin (S. E. and I and George Aldridge). Esther pretty crushed. Not too well as a result. Reach Tembilahan and disembark. We are received by Capt. Gordon of the Argylls. I meet Davis of the F.M.S. Railways. He was on the "Kuala" which left Singapore on Friday 13th February and was bombed and sunk. We have a wash and a drink and set off again in a large steam launch (a small steamer). It is being towed by another steamer. We are packed like herrings on both boats - about 700 people all told. We see Major and Mrs. Nunn from Singapore (survivors from the "Kuala") also Pat Purser, Chartered Bank, and Stewart from Hong Kong Bank. Also Stabb, Hong Kong Bank. We met Major Hill the senior fighting officer on board, and join his party. Somervell is getting too officious and some of his ideas about getting back to Malaya as guerrillas are just fantastic.

Feb 23rd

Have slept soundly on some planks - Stewart, Miller, Major Hill, Esther and I. As we are being towed there is no vibration of engines, and it is very pleasant. We reach Rengat about 12.30 p.m. disembark. Change some dollars into guilders at the Post Office (each person limited to 20 dollars). Get some pots and pans and some food. Cook it in a large shed. First warm meal for several days. We learn of the sinking of the "Kuala" and 2 other vessels south of Singapore. Some of the survivors (nursing sisters principally) have gone on to Ayer Molok in an endeavour to get to Java. (They appear to have been unaware Banka was in Jap hands and stand a poor chance of getting there).

We get a bus at Rengat about 3.30 p.m. and are taken to Ayer Molok where there is a large rubber factory used as a temporary camp. The drying shed is the "barrack room." No accommodation for Esther and walk 2 miles back to a Rest House where the "Kuala" girls are housed. Esther stays there. I go over to a native hospital and sleep there. Mosquitoes are awful and we are bitten very badly.

Feb 24th

Still at Ayer Molok. We keep watching the notice boards for buses to the West of Sumatra. Major Hill is very helpful. Col. Wolfe-Murray is camp commandant and is just about as difficult as he can possibly be. Capt. Ibbertson is very helpful. Wolfe-Murray (despite the toxic effect of war) is "red tape" from head to foot. We buy odds and ends in the village nearby.

Feb 25th

Slept again in the native hospital on a couple of boards. Join a party on a small red bus and leave Ayer Molok about 9.30 a.m. to Sawahlunto on the West of Sumatra. The journey is very pleasant. The road follows the Indragiri River for about 100 miles. I have lunch about 1.30 in a small village. (Curried eggs, black coffee and banana fritters. They taste good). We now see some rubber estates and coconut plantations. Later we start to climb and pass through some jungle, then secondary jungle. Sumatra has a continuous range of hills on the west which have to be crossed. We rise to over 4,000 feet and the vegetation becomes scanty. We reach Sawahlunto about 9 o'clock at night. We are lucky and get fixed up in a hotel. Feed at once and drop off to sleep. We had almost forgotten what an English bed feels like.

Feb 26th

Sawahlunto is a fair sized town, beautifully situated among the hills. We do some shopping. The Dutch are very helpful. We meet all sorts of people – many of whom are escapees from Singapore. They have an air raid alert about 10.30. A Jap plane comes over every day at that time looking for stragglers.

The Dutch have a curious siren which sounds all the time the alert is on. We are rather worried even now at the sound of an aeroplane! We learn Padang is our next destination.

Feb 27th

We leave by train for Padang at 4 a.m. We start climbing and reach over 6,000 feet. The hills have no trees on them practically. Just patches of green and small clumps of trees. It reminds me of the hills in Perthshire. The Sumatrans sell us eggs and vegetables and cakes at every stop. At about 10 a.m. we begin to drop again and the coolness of the hills gives way to the humid heat again. We reach Padang about 11.40 a.m.

We are met by a sort of Evacuee Committee (Dutch people) who give us all information about registration with the authorities and the British Vice Consul. We are taken to the Town Hall and given some clothes. We jolly well need some too. We are fixed up with a charming family (Dutch) Mr. and Mrs. Brest. He is pure Dutch, she is Dutch Burgher – a perfectly natural result of the Dutch colonial policy which encouraged Dutchmen to settle down in their colonies and marry women of that colony. Mrs. Brest knows no English. We know no Dutch, so we communicate in Malay, which differs slightly from the language we know in Singapore, but it is good enough.

Feb 28th

Still in Padang. Jap reconnaissance planes over frequently. There are about 1,000 English people here – principally soldiers, some civilians and women.

Gen. Gordon Bennett who escaped from Singapore with us the same night, is picked up by a plane and taken to Java. He broadcasts his route from Singapore and across Sumatra!! Despite the fact that there are about 500 of his own men in Sumatra and 500 English people!! Jap reconnaissance immediately increases. Amberhaven (sic), the port of Padang has been bombed a few days before and it is probable it will be bombed again. That would be our escape route by sea altogether. The Japs have advanced well north of Bencoolen by this time. Gordon Bennett is not popular.

March 1st

The strain has been a bit too much for Esther and she is feeling a bit off colour. Flu seems to be developing. At 6.30 I go down to the Army Bureau and find everyone packing up. News has reached the Consul that a British Destroyer and Light Cruiser will call at Amberhaven and pick up all English people.

We rush and pack and get the 7.15 train. At Padang Station we meet Major Hayes of the R.A.M.C. and join the medical party which includes Dr. Morris from Singapore. She is one of the "Kuala" people but has crossed Sumatra by a different route.

We reach Amberhaven about 8 p.m. to find the harbour partly blocked by sunken ships, but HMS "Scout" is alongside. She is refuelling. It is a beautiful moonlight night and about 1,000 of us are sitting on the breakwater. Marvellous target for the Japanese if they arrive. "Scout" gives us all a meal of biscuits, bully beef and tea. We set off about 1 a.m.

March 2nd

"Scout" takes us out about 200 miles and we reach HMS "Danae" and draw alongside. About 400 of us are transferred to "Danae." Esther and the other girls go up to the Captain's cabin. We go to the dining room and sleep on the floor. Not much sleep. "Danae" sets off at full speed to get out of the range of Jap and throbbing of engines is terrific. Slows down somewhat at dawn. The group of islands off Sumatra pass and fade away and by noon we are all well out to sea – not out of range though. The Commander conducts a short service at 9 a.m. The sea is very blue. We zigzag all the time. We join the Australian Cruiser "Hobart" and another Cruiser. "Scout" and another Destroyer are in attendance. Another ship in distress behind us. The 3rd Cruiser transfers her passengers to "Hobart" and returns to rescue.

March 3rd

"Danae" is rather short of rations and water, but there is sufficient to go round, but practically no variety. Esther is improving and sits on deck for a short time.

March 4th

Have slept on deck. Suddenly realize I have not had clothes off for 4 days. A bit grimy sleeping on deck every night. The crew are grand. The girls get a spot of beer in the morning and a glass of sherry in the afternoon. There is a service at 9 a.m. by the Commander. We all welcome it. He seems to hit the mark in his prayer

especially the one about "those whose faith in life has been broken or shaken."

Sight land about 5 p.m. and draw into Colombo about 6 p.m. The ship would normally have gone to the naval base at Trincomalee, but came to Colombo as there were so many escapees on board. The reception committee meet us and we are taken to a church school in the town. They are very kind. It is good to have a hot bath and a real good feed again. Sleep like logs till 9 a.m. next morning on mattresses on floor.

March 5th

Go down to place in town run under auspices of evacuee committee and get some clothes. Visit Whiteaways also and buy some clothes. I call on Julius and Creasy, Solicitors; they very kindly offer some financial assistance and I accept it. Must pay it back as soon as I can. Stay at the church school. Get word we are leaving the following morning for Bombay. We cable home our escape from Singapore.

March 6th

Board the "*Ranchi*" which is now a merchant cruiser, at 9 a.m. She is very changed from the old peacetime "*Ranchi*". We set sail in the late afternoon. About 600 of us including about 100 R.A.F. The crew are a pretty mouldy lot compared with the R.N. Chaps on "*Danae*". We form ourselves into groups for messing and a roster of table orderlies is followed. Food is excellent. We sleep on the various floors on blankets - not enough mattresses to go round. Wounded and some of the girls get camp beds. Not allowed to sleep outside on deck.

March 7th

"*Ranchi*" is much bigger than "*Danae*" - more room to move about. Deck quoits in the morning. Meet Rev. J.R. Thomson formerly of Presbyterian Church, Singapore. He was on "*Kuala*". He used to be Assistant Minister in Dunblane Cathedral.

Stewart, formerly Manager of Hong Kong Bank in Singapore is appointed liaison officer between crew and evacuees.

March 8th

We are moving very slowly and zigzagging all the time. We are pretty well armed with 6" guns and A.A. small arms, but no escort of destroyers. We are escorting 2 other smaller merchant vessels. One of them looks like one of the "President" Class. Play deck tennis in the afternoon with some petty officers. They are good lads. Esther fully recovered again, and plays well.

March 9th

Play quite a lot of deck tennis, and quoits and feel much better. Shortage of cigarettes on board and we are rationed. Food is really good. Play "*Bezique*" with Esther. Read. Good library of light stuff. Paravanes put out about 3 p.m. Sight land about 4 p.m. Draw into Bombay about 5.30 p.m. Not allowed ashore. Spend the night on board.

BATAAN LEGACY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

A message from Cecilia Gaerlan – Executive Director

I came across your website while researching the work of Prof. Yuki Tanaka for an upcoming conference that we are organizing in San Francisco on September 22nd 2018. I want to let you know of our organization and its work to include WW11 in the Philippines on the high school curriculum framework in California.

Since 2014 Bataan Legacy Historical Society (BLHS) has been working with the California Department of Education to do this, and on 14th July 2016, it was finally approved for inclusion in the Grade 11 U.S. history curriculum framework. In 2017, we commissioned 6 Bay Area high school history teachers to create sample lesson plans that are consistent with the California Common Core Standards.

Implementation started this past semester in some schools but this process will take time and a lot of work. These lesson plans, including primary documents, are now available for free through our website.

Every year since Bataan Legacy's inception, we do several events (Bataan Death March around 9th April and a Conference) including exhibitions, lectures etc. We have just finished the 76th Anniversary of the Bataan Death March held at the Presidio in San Francisco on 7th April. We will have our 4th Conference on 'WW11 in the Philippines' on 22nd September 2018 entitled: "*Resistance, Retaliation, Reconciliation and Rescission*." Please let your members know about this.

As I find out more about events during WW11 in the Pacific (Vyner Brooke, Sandakan) I realize the importance of collaborating with organizations such as yours to educate the public about the atrocities of war.

Thank you so much for your time and I hope to hear from you soon!

4th Conference – Saturday 22nd September 2018, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. at the University of San Francisco's McLaren Conference Centre. Speakers from the U.S.A. and Philippines will cover the following topics:

- **Update on 'WW11 in the Philippines' Lesson Plans**
- **Students' Projects on WW11 in the Philippines**
- **Military & Civilian Resistance**
- **War Crimes & Reconciliation**

[Editor: Our members in the USA may like to attend.]

THE SURVEYOR SURVEYED

ERIC STEWART WILLBOURN OBE., ED., MA (CANTAB), FGS. – 21/10/1889 – 25/11/1977

By kind permission of his grandson Roger S. Willbourn assisted by

Amanda E. Royde-Smith (granddaughter) and Caroline V. Willbourn (granddaughter-in-law)

All day on 12th Feb, **Eric** was very busy and it was obvious that the end was near. He and a fellow Australian officer, a **Capt. Boyd**, were working to keep the traffic for retreating soldiers flowing amidst heavy bombing and then **Capt. Boyd** asked the Brigade Major for permission for **Eric** to go into town to check on his wife. They both hopped into **Eric's** car and managed to get the five or six miles to the College Road house where they met a **Mr. Hines**, Chief Police Officer for Negri Sembilan. He said that **Jessie, Mrs. Cowgill** and his own wife had left for the docks just two hours earlier after **John Cowgill** had received a telephone call from **Hugh Fraser**, the Colonial Secretary, ordering him to ensure that the women left immediately. So **Eric**, feeling mightily relieved that **Jessie** was now heading for potential safety, went back with **Captain Boyd** to his Brigade HQ.

Military matters then took their course until surrender on 15th February. **Eric** was imprisoned out at Changi (Barracks), still with the Australians, when a month or so later he managed to get a letter smuggled into Changi Jail, where **John Cowgill** was interned with the civilian men-folk. **John** was able to advise **Eric** that he had taken the three women to the docks and seen them into a launch, along with a **George Blunn** of KL, a distinguished JP and well-known Member of the States Council of Selangor. That was the last **John** saw or heard of them. With the news that filtered back to Changi over the following six months from survivors of the ships that had been bombed, captured or sunk, **Eric** realised that it was highly likely that **Jessie** had been killed or drowned – but he did not give up hope.

In the Changi POW camp, **Eric's** life was, no doubt, identical to that of all other FMSVF and Army officers, which has been well documented. **Richardson** records meeting **Eric** at the Selarang Barracks on 4th March, still with the AIF, but when they met again on 8th June, **Richardson** notes that **Eric** has now rejoined the FMSVF officers.

Richardson was one of the most active proponents and leading lights in the setting up of the 'Chang University' – his thirst for knowledge was insatiable and he mentions a number of lectures and talks on matters scientific, including conversations with **Eric** on geomorphology and a geology lecture that **Eric** gave on 6th August entitled "*The Creation of Malaya*." The infamous Selarang incident in the early days of September seems to have somewhat interrupted such scientific discussions!

Then on 28th October 1942, **Eric** was part of the U-Force [Letter "U" Party (his Japanese POW Card confirms this)] shipped up by railway-truck to Ban Pong in Siam: around 70% of this party was made up of personnel from the local Volunteer Forces. The unpleasantness of that rail journey and the rigours of the subsequent forced march from Kanchanaburi up the Kwai Valley are described in the passages from his post-war diaries, which were published in the October 2015 edition of *Apa Khabar*, so I won't repeat them here in detail. **Richardson** was also on the same train and forced march – his diary also gives a graphic description of conditions. Suffice it to say that **Eric** and his companions marched through the mud and rain for the 50 or so miles to 'Tarso'. This took many days and the terrible conditions plus the 80lbs pack he was carrying took their collective toll, along with a poisoned finger and septic heels from the blisters.

Fortunately, he and 30 other men were taken the final 25 miles or so up the river in barges to their final destination at Kinsaiyok. Here one of the selfless FMSVF doctors (about whom **Jane Flower** gave us so much interesting detail two years ago) was able to give him some relief by lancing his blistered heels – by now the bone was showing in his right heel. He was also suffering from amoebic dysentery and his weight was down to around 8½ stone – from a pre-war fit and healthy weight of 13 stone.

Kinsaiyok is only about half way up the line from Ban Pong to the Burmese border at 'Three Pagodas Pass' and **Eric** was very fortunate that this was as far north as he went, since the death rate at camps further up the line and over in Burma was far higher, reaching 50% or more in late 1943. However, in the first week of December 1942, he was moved to Kanyu River Camp just a few miles back down the line, fairly near the infamous Hellfire Pass. Here, with his close friend **Os Watson**, a fellow officer in the FMSVF, he worked as a gravedigger in the cemetery party. **Os Watson** was an Australian and also one of the older POWs on the railway, being over 50 and only a couple of years younger than **Eric**. He was one of the senior Government Land Surveyors in Perak State, having come to Malaya in 1920 and moved to Batu Gajah in about 1930. His work would have brought him into contact with **Eric** and he must have been a close friend of his for a decade or so before the war. As a result of contacts made through MVG, I was very pleased to be able to exchange e-mails a couple of years ago with his son, **Derek**, who was born in Kuala Lipis in 1928. **Eric** and **Os** shared everything and seemed to have stuck together for most, if not all, of the time during their captivity.

Sadly, it was at this camp that **Eric** had to bury his friend **Ken Bancroft** of the Malayan Civil Service and Kedah Volunteer Force, whom he knew from Ipoh and who had been on the same "U" Party train and hard slog up to Kinsaiyok a mere six weeks earlier.

After four months at Kanyu, **Eric** and **Os** were in a party of sick and elderly men sent down the river to Chungkai, which probably saved their lives, as Chungkai was a so-called hospital camp: **Richardson** records meeting them on 1st April at Bang Kao and they arrived into Chungkai on 3rd April. Also this was around the time when, I understand, the 'speedo' period started and thus the POWs were worked even harder, if that were possible, the worst of the cholera outbreaks happened and the death rates began to soar, as the Commonwealth War Graves cemetery at Chungkai attests. **Eric** tells us that when he and **Os** arrived at Chungkai, there were about 70 graves there: when they left just over a year later, there were more than 1,500 graves – one wonders how many of those **Eric** himself helped to dig. **Eric** was moved to Nakhon Pathom POW Camp in June 1944, which is roughly half-way between Kanchanaburi and Bangkok (via a two months stint in Tha Muang camp, just to the south-east of Kanchanaburi). Nakhon Pathom was a proper Thai town in its own right, to the east of Ban Pong, not just a collection of jungle huts, and many prisoners had been moved there into another so-called 'hospital' camp once the railway had been predominantly completed in October 1943.

According to the post-war verbal account he gave to his daughter, **Betty**, **Eric** worked here as a medical orderly, especially with those who had become mentally deranged by their experiences and the conditions of imprisonment up the Burma railway, although we have no written record of his time in that camp. After seven months or so, in January 1945, **Eric** was moved back up the line to Kanchanaburi. I believe this was as a consequence of the Japanese policy to separate officers from the Other Ranks. At least this move spared **Eric** the agony of transportation in a hell-ship to Japan and the consequential dangers of being sunk by allied submarines.

Of course, **Eric's** life and those of so many thousands of other FTPOWs were saved by the suddenness of Japan's unconditional surrender after the A-bombs were dropped over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The orders to liquidate all POWs are well documented but luckily they were only carried out in the remoter parts of Borneo and so the mass-grave ditches dug at Chungkai and elsewhere were never used for that purpose. The first letters written by **Eric** after the surrender are very interesting. With V-J Day being the 15th August, it would seem that it took some time for the word to filter all along the railway. As luck would have it, **Eric** was in a party of 400 officers which left Kanchanaburi actually on 15th August in a train of open-top wagons bound for Bangkok, en route to Nakhon Nayok. It took almost two days for them to travel to Bangkok, a distance of only 80 miles, so one can see what a terrible state rail-transport communications were in by then, as a result of Allied bombing.

So, on 17th August they arrived into Bangkok to discover that the Japs had surrendered and therefore they did not have to carry on with the journey to Nakhon Nayok, which would have involved a 30 mile walk carrying all their kit from the distant railhead to the site of their new camp. Those who had been part of the five earlier parties to be sent there (which included **Richardson**) had had, and were still having, a dreadful time of it. As **Eric** said in his first letter home, he was *"very lucky to be able to reach the one civilised part of Thailand exactly at the critical date. The parties that were to have left Kanburi after us have been cancelled."*

Eric and his fellow travellers spent about ten days in a godown (warehouse) in Bangkok port, with the boon of concrete floors, *"so much more preferable than the mud and dirt of the jungle."* The most important thing was that they immediately started to eat good food once again and were *"given many of the Red Cross supplies that the Nips have withheld from us."*

He also received his first mail for a very long time, the most recent having been written in January 1945, some nine months earlier. **Eric** was then moved, along with about 100 others to no less an address than the Oriental Hotel! Four of them shared a room and there as no power or light but *"we are a set of scroungers, we four, and have got some coconut oil which we burn in lamps made from old tins."* On the 28th August, he writes that they are still prisoners – not allowed outside the hotel – but that day he was able to send a telegram home to Bridlington through the good offices of a French priest who was allowed into the hotel. This duly reached Bridlington on 30th August and was relayed on the same day to his two children. 30th August was also the day that his Japanese POW Registration Card was marked as being released to the Allied Forces, so it must have been about that time that the first British or American troops arrived into Bangkok.

On 3rd September, he writes again to his sister in Bridlington, still from the Oriental Hotel (!) in which he says he has been sending telegrams to **Hugh Fraser** and **John Cowgill** in Singapore, seeking news of **Jessie** and that he has not yet given up hope of finding her alive. He and the other POWs are supposed to be flown out to Rangoon and India but he has put his name down to return to Singapore or Malaya to seek news and says he will refuse to be flown to India until he has more definite news of **Jessie**. He is still in the Oriental Hotel on 11th September, when he writes

home to his son, Tony – having telegraphed people in Singapore but still having no news of **Jessie**.

After having been properly liberated on 30th August, **Eric** was moved to the Red Cross Hospital in Bangkok where he was treated for his amoebic dysentery from which he had been suffering for three years. He wrote home from there on 17th September, saying that he had been *“quite ill”* for about a week but was now getting better, each day taking 50 pills along with an injection of emetine, an anti-protozoan, to deal with his amoebic dysentery! He describes the hospital as being like heaven and the Thai nurses as *“kindness personified”*, along with a Scots Sister who has just arrived to take charge of the ward.

In this letter, **Eric** is very clear that as soon as he has had definite news about **Jessie** and is well enough, he will come home: *“I’ve had enough of the Tropics.”* He refused immediate evacuation to India and England, as he desperately wanted to get down to Singapore in order to try to find any evidence of **Jessie’s** fate or whereabouts. When he did finally arrive in Singapore, he was very fortunate to meet up with an old family friend from St. John’s Avenue in Bridlington, **Vincent Kelly**, who was an officer in the British liberation forces. **Kelly** gave him the use of a car and also provided all sorts of other invaluable practical assistance, along with access to relatively efficient communications. Writing home to his sister from the 47th British General Hospital in Singapore on 14th October 1945, **Eric** reports that he has been gathering information from a number of former passengers on the ‘**Giang Bee**’ who survived and were imprisoned in Palembang, Muntok and elsewhere and who had been brought back to Singapore for hospitalisation prior to being repatriated. Information came from a **Dr. W.B. Haines**, **George W. Bluan** and a **Mr. Boswell** who had all been evacuees on the ‘**Giang Bee**.’ It was confirmed that **Jessie**, **Mrs. Jo Cowgill** and **Mrs. W.A.C. Haines**, who had all stayed together since Seremban, were indeed all on the vessel and none had survived the sinking or come ashore in any of the lifeboats. From the accounts of those present, it would appear that they were in the port-side lifeboat which had been damaged by splinters from a bomb attack by Japanese planes during the day on 13th February and which had, as a result, then foundered after being launched.

Despite keeping his hopes alive for the three and a half years of captivity, with this almost 100% definite news **Eric** then knew that **Jessie** had died back in February 1942 and he writes, *“One of my geologists is now up-country but I have not yet contacted him. If I find he is trying to do salvage work for the Department, I shall not re-visit BG but will come straight home. I don’t want to see BG again!”* The wheels of government bureaucracy grind ever so slowly and it was not until 11th March 1946 that the Colonial Office wrote to state that it was *“officially recorded”* that **Jessie** had died at sea as a result of the sinking of the ‘**Giang Bee**.’

Eric sailed from Singapore on about 20th October on the ‘**S.S. Ranchi**’ and returned to England via Colombo and the Suez Canal, arriving into Southampton on 20th November, from where he took the train to Waterloo, where he was met by his daughter, **Betty**, who recalled that she did not recognise him at first, so small and shrunken had he become and wearing a huge overcoat far too big for him, but with a luminous and beatific smile. **Eric** then returned to the family home in Bridlington, fortunately just in time to see his mother once again, who died a fortnight later on 8th December 1945, aged 85.

His physical recuperation took some time but with only grown-up children and no wife with whom to enjoy retirement, he eventually decided to return to work. The Colonial Office had offered him the opportunity to take up the position of Director of the Geological Survey in Malaya once again but, for obvious reasons, that was not something he wished to do. Instead, he took up the position of Deputy Director at the Directorate of Colonial Geological Services in London, controlling Geological Surveying work throughout the Empire.

This department was housed within the Imperial Institute in South Kensington, which building was demolished in 1957, apart from the Queen’s Tower which now sits within the grounds of Imperial College on Imperial College Road. From 1954 to 1957, he also served on the Council of the Geological Society, of which he had been made a Fellow way back in 1923.

Eric was awarded the OBE in the New Year’s Honours List of January 1955 and then, after ten years in post, he finally retired on 31st March 1957 at the age of 67. Our family archives contain the letter of appreciation from **Alan Lennox Boyd**, Secretary of State in office when Malaya was granted its independence five months later on 31st August 1957. **Eric** then retired back to the family home in St. John’s Avenue, Bridlington, where he enjoyed a relatively long retirement in the company of his two sisters and one brother, all unmarried, and being a loving and much loved grandfather for his eight grandchildren. He died at the age of 88 and is buried in the family grave in the Priory Churchyard in Bridlington, where the headstone commemorates his beloved **Jessie**, along with his parents and all seven of his siblings.

HAROLD JAMES and GLADYS ISABEL PAGE in World War Two contd.

By kind permission of their granddaughter Judy Barradell-Smith

Official List of Internees in Sumatra

PAGE Dr. H.J. [Harold James] CMG., MBE., OBE., B.Sc., FISP b.1890. Director, Rubber Research Institute KL. Director of ARP Selangor Jan 1941. Swam to Pom Pong Island after "*Tien Kwang*" sinking. Interned at Padang then Bankinang Men's Camp. **Sumatra internee.** 1952: Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture, Trinidad. Retired to Woking. Wife **Gladys Isabel** nee **Shepperd**

PADANG

It appears from the various accounts that a number of those escaping Pom Pong did succeed in making their way across mainland Sumatra to Padang in the hope they could get away from there. Indeed, some did, but not **Harold Page**. He appears to have been one of the many captured when Padang was overrun by the Japanese on St. Patrick's Day (17th March 1942) and was held captive there for several months at least and probably until October 1943. The conditions were very harsh and food scarce but despite this, it was not nearly as bad as in other places as it had never been intended as a POW camp. There is anecdotal evidence that civilian captives were treated a little better than the soldiers. However, for most there was only one meagre cup of rice fed to them per day. Some have estimated the calories from this one meal as being between 300 and 500 K per day. I have no evidence whether anyone at this camp was made to work on a number of projects. There were still many deaths from disease and malnutrition. It appears that some of those held in Padang were moved away from here to other camps. **Harold** was taken to Bankinang Men's Camp and probably not moved from Padang until October 1943.

Eye-Witness account of capture in Padang on 17th March 1942, and movement of internees.

Prisoners at Padang were engaged on heavy tasks such as road cutting, railway laying and bridge building. Their quarters were crude huts, and a nearby stream had to serve for the double purpose of ablution and sanitation. During this period, the ration of rice was reduced to 250 grammes daily for each man, and to a mere 100 grammes for those who were unable to work through sickness. Prisoners were able to barter with the natives for extra food, but as in other camps this entailed the risk of severe disciplinary action on the part of the Japanese guards. From here most of the prisoners were moved in late 1944 to another working camp in central Sumatra, where they were engaged on similar work constructing communications to a coal mine. Those who became too sick to work were eventually transported to a base camp at Pekan Baru. Civilians interned on Sumatra were not much better off. The women and children remained for 18 months in the area of disused houses in Palembang which had been allocated to all the internees on their arrival there. During this period the men had to build for themselves a separate camp of bamboo and attap huts, and their transfer to this new camp at Palembang eased the overcrowding in what then became the camp for women and children. The men, however, were again transferred, this time to Banka Island, and in September 1943 the women and children were all moved into the men's bamboo camp. Here, leaking huts, mud floors, trench latrines and drawing water from wells made life for the interned women and children one of great hardship. Finally, in September 1944, the women were also transported to Muntok, on Banka Island. Rations here became worse than they had been on Sumatra, and lack of medicaments made it almost impossible to combat malaria. The death rate rose alarmingly and the hospital became filled with sick and dying women and children. In April 1944, the Japanese authorities moved the whole camp back to Sumatra. See the full account on: <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-WH2Pris-N94289.html>

In October 1942, European men and boys, who earlier had been interned in the prison in Padang, were brought to a newly built men's prison camp near Bankinang, around 70 km. west of Pekan Baru on the way to Bukittinggi. On the site there was a rubber factory. The women and children followed in December 1943 to Bankinang, where they were housed in newly built sheds around 3 km. west of the rubber factory. By the end of 1944, there were nearly 3,200 civilians interned in these two camps. In 1945 alone approximately 140 people died from disease and exhaustion. The Japanese surrender was announced on 22nd August 1945. Internees were gradually shipped out in the weeks following that surrender.

According to the official POW record card for **Harold Page**, he was moved to the men's camp at Bankinang from Padang (no date given). We should assume from the above report that it was probably about October 1943. The following eye witness account by one of the women internees in Bankinang suggests that the women and children were not transferred from Padang to Bankinang until December 1943.

Eye Witness account by one of the internees in the women's camp at Bankinang.

There were 2 Japanese concentration camps in Bankinang, one for men and one camp for women with children up to 12 years.

The close by village is about 250 km. north-east from Padang and the camps were located in the middle of a jungle of rubber trees. The men's and women's camps were about 2km. apart from each other. The women's camp was newly built specially to keep people as prisoners and consisted of 4 large sheds 60 x 10 metres and one small one 30 x 10 metres. The living places were located in 4 rows of two levels. There was also a small building serving as a hospital and two small sheds for storage. The camp was enclosed with wood and barbed wire and on the corners were guard towers. On 15th December 1943, my mother, her 4 children, a grandmother, a niece and other family members, altogether about 2,300 adults and their children, were transported from Padang prison camp by train and later by open trucks to this new Japanese prison. And this lasted until Japan got hit with the atomic bombs and we were freed on 15th August 1945. All those years we had suffered hunger and punishment from the Japanese. See also another account on: <http://myindoworld.com/een-teenager-in-bankinang/>

GOING HOME



This photograph was taken on his release from civilian POW camp, in Sumatra showing how much weight he had lost during his internment time.

He was finally repatriated on board **The Highland Monarch** which came from Hong Kong and picked up other internees in Singapore, arriving in Southampton on 9th November 1945.

AFTER THE WAR

Despite their dreadful experiences, **Harold** and **Gladys Page** returned to live in Malaya after the war. They returned to their house in Ampang Road, Kuala Lumpur and discovered the kindness of their Malay neighbours and past employees who had taken precious and personal items out of their home and hidden them from the occupying Japanese. So, in the end they got back many of their bits and pieces from the home they had abandoned when fleeing in January 1942. I have in my possession a large Jardinière which, according to my grandmother, was broken during the time the house was occupied by the Japanese. When they recovered the house and their possessions, **Gladys** had it mended with large metal staples.

Harold and **Gladys Page** left Southampton for Singapore via Batavia, Java, on board the **Orange** on 2nd August 1946.

PROPOSED VISIT TO THE NATIONAL ARMY MUSEUM

The Malayan Volunteers Group has received an invitation to visit the recently redeveloped National Army Museum in Chelsea. The letter read:

"Dear Sir/Madam,

After a three-year £23.75 million redevelopment, the National Army Museum in London re-opened to the public in March 2017.

The first year has been a resounding success and the National Army Museum remains focused on attracting new interest groups and growing its audience.

We are keen to establish dialogue with the Malayan Volunteers Group and explore opportunities for a mutually beneficial relationship.

In the first instance, we would be honoured to host you and your executive committee for a private tour.

Once you have spoken to your colleagues about this, please let me know some convenient dates and times.

I look forward to welcoming you to the National Army Museum.

Yours faithfully.

Jonathan suggests that we take a small group of members who would be interested in visiting this Museum in March or April 2019 – on a weekday from about noon.

If anyone is interested in this visit, please would you let Jonathan know as soon as possible so that we can liaise with the Museum about dates.

This is the British Army's central museum. It is adjacent to the Royal Hospital, Chelsea – home of the "Chelsea Pensioners."

Address: Royal Hospital Road, Chelsea, London SW3 4HT. It has exhibits dating from the 1640s to the present day. For those who may not wish to visit the Museum, but plan to accompany their "other half" to London, there is the wonderful Chelsea Physic Garden almost next door – No: 66 Royal Hospital Road – which is well worth seeing.

THE JAPANESE CONQUEST OF MALAYA – by MARK MORRISON

[Mark Morrison was an Australian Barrister-at-law, Advocate and Solicitor for the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States working at 21, Raffles Chambers, Raffles Place, Singapore. He was evacuated on 13th February 1942 on the Kedah. He was reported lost at sea, but reached Australia and wrote a full report on the fall of Malaya.]

About the 4th December 1941, R.A.A.F. reconnaissance planes, operating as far as South Hainan, reported that a huge armada of Japanese transports, supported by naval vessels, was moving southward. The convoy was apparently hostile as the naval escort fired on the planes. When a report was made, no offensive action was, however, ordered. On Saturday the 6th December the R.A.A.F. reported Japanese transports had rounded Cambodia Point and were steaming into the Gulf of Siam. Judging from the direction, the ships were proceeding either for Malaya or Thailand. Efforts were made by reconnaissance planes on Sunday to locate the fleet of transports but extreme weather conditions mitigated against any successful observation. The ships sighted steaming into the Gulf of Siam were presumed to be part of the armada seen two days earlier. On this basis and in the light of later events it is probable that the remainder of the armada sighted on the 4th December had in the meantime moved westward in the direction of the Philippines.

According to U.S.A. naval correspondence dated as early as the 27th November 1941, it appeared to high state and naval authorities in the United States of America that Japan would make an aggressive move within a few days and that the number, equipment and organisation of the Japanese naval task forces indicated an amphibious expedition against the Philippines, Thailand or the Krai Peninsular. If such information were possessed by high authorities in the United States it is reasonable to infer that similar information had been received by the Imperial authorities. The report of the R.A.A.F. read in the light of such information made the movements of the Japanese fleet of transports in the Gulf of Siam even more menacing.

In the early morning of Monday the 8th December, Japanese transports were observed along the coast near Khota Bharu, a port in the N.E. corner of Malaya, south of the Thailand border. Khota Bharu was connected by rail to Singapore and had an important military aerodrome in its vicinity. War had not been declared between Great Britain and Japan and there appears to have been extreme indecision on the part of the British land forces as to whether they should fire on the transports or await some offensive, overt action on the part of the Japanese. Attack on the transports was delayed until the Japanese sought to land. The immediate beaches were defended by the Mysore and Hyderabad regiments. Landings were effected by means of small barges, many of which came along the Kelantan River. There apparently were no defences to the river and it had not been mined. The beaches also had not been mined. Supported by the fire from their warships, the enemy effected landings in three places. The Colonel of the Hyderabad Regiment was killed in the early stages of the attack. He was the only European Officer in the regiment. The intensity of the attack and the loss of the great controlling influence of their Colonel caused the Hyderabad to break and they left their positions. Immediately after landing, each Japanese soldier proceeded onwards into the cover afforded by trees and undulations. By fanning out, the enemy infiltrated through the jungle and some less primitive country over a wide area in the general direction of the aerodrome. The Japanese success in landing and the tactics they adopted after landing forced the general retreat of the defending forces. The main forces retreated in the direction of Kuala Krai. This town is about 45 miles S.W. of Khota Bharu and is the terminus of the only road from the north along the railway line.

The noise of the attack on the beaches aroused the R.A.A.F. at the aerodrome. Planes took off and attacked the transports and barges. After offloading their men the transports made off under the protection of their naval escort. At the aerodrome there were two fighters, one Blenheim bomber, one Beaufort bomber and about ten Lockheed Hudsons. The Lockheed Hudsons did excellent work as dive bombers. Many hits were observed on transports and barges.

At first crack of dawn Japanese fighters came over. They machine-gunned the aerodrome, spotted the landings and assisted the fleet. If they had attacked the aerodrome prior to the landing, they would probably have been able to destroy all the R.A.A.F. machines on the ground. In the course of the day, they did destroy five machines on the ground. Two R.A.A.F. machines were lost in the air and about five got away to Kuantan.

In the afternoon, the general position had become so desperate that it was decided to destroy the aerodrome at Khota Bharu. Infiltrating troops were coming closer. Buildings were destroyed and as much equipment was destroyed as possible in the short time allowed. An attempt was made to render the aerodrome unusable.

The attack on Khota Bharu was the first overt act of aggression by the Japanese in Malaya. Khota Bharu had telegraphic and wireless communications with Singapore and other parts of Malaya. Khota Bharu was attacked at 1.15 a.m. Singapore was attacked from the air at 4.20 a.m. and Sungei Pattani in Kedah was attacked from the air at 7.15 a.m. Apparently both Singapore and Sungei Pattani at the time of the attack on their respective air bases, were ignorant of the Japanese invasion. Either information of the invasion had not been received, or there had been an entire failure to communicate information to the civil and military forces in these areas. In Singapore, all the streets were lit up and the response of the anti-aircraft defences was unsatisfactory.

The speedy British defeat at Khota Bharu disclosed an unsatisfactory nature of the local defences and their employment. There was only one Indian Brigade in the North East which included the Dogras. There was no artillery other than mountain guns. The British had no European troops in the area. The Japanese effected their initial success by frontal attack. The frontal attacks were made in an area where an attack could have been anticipated. The British had not been without warnings of possible invasion. The enemy did not have overwhelming numerical superiority and they sustained heavy casualties in effecting their landings, reducing their strength considerably. In the afternoon of the same day, official reports were to the

effect that the attack had been repulsed. The General Officer Commanding announced in Singapore that the Japanese troops that had landed were being mopped up. This erroneous information was probably due to local optimism at the departure of the enemy transports and the absence of any immediate reinforcements. The Japanese success was mainly due to the original tactics employed by them after landing. With the exception of one regiment, the defence troops fought gallantly. The local commanders were confronted with something new and unexpected and were unable to counter the confusion caused.

It is justifiable to presume that the Pattani and Singgora aerodromes in southern Thailand were in use by the enemy at the time of the invasion. The Japanese were in Pattani probably from the 15th November 1941. On Thursday the 5th December an aerial photograph was taken over Pattani, and on development it showed fighters dispersed around the aerodrome. From the 15th November, persons leaving Thailand reported numerous Japanese "tourists" in the vicinity of these aerodromes. One Chinese visitor to Pattani found on rising on the morning of the 7th December that the area was controlled by the Japanese. He quickly escaped over the border into Kedah.

The tactics used by the Japanese to overcome immediate opposition did not vary considerably throughout the campaign. These tactics aimed at causing confusion in the British ranks and forcing retreat. The Japanese rarely made frontal attacks. On occasions tanks were used to break through the British lines. Generally, however, the British retreated after infiltration troops had penetrated their lines or threatened their flanks. Withdrawal was for the purpose of drawing up new defence lines and maintaining communications.

The greater part of Malaya is covered with jungle. The peninsular is roughly 450 miles from north to south widening in the centre to about 200 miles. A chain of mountains which runs from the extreme north to Kuala Pilah in the south, divides East Malaya from West Malaya. A large part of the area from the foot of the mountains to the sea is low lying and swampy. Development in the tin industry and for the plantation of rubber, oil palm and coconut has cleared large areas, but most of this development has been along the western side of the peninsular and in the south. In the western and southern areas, excellent roads had been constructed, most of them being connected to the main N.S. road to Singapore. Along the east side of the peninsular few roads had been constructed and there is no road running for any great distance from north to south. In the centre of the peninsular there is a road connecting Kuantan on the east coast with Kuala Lumpur and other towns on the west side of the peninsular. Towards the south, there is a road connecting Mersing on the east coast with Batu Pahat and Muar on the west coast.

The most important physical feature of the country, which should have presented itself for deep consideration to any strategist for both offensive and defensive purposes, was the jungle. This jungle covers most of the country and is almost continuous from the extreme north to Singapore. It varies in density, but all jungle gives perfect cover to anyone who has the hardiness to penetrate it. To an onlooker, from a road running through it, most jungle presents a dense and impenetrable appearance. On close contact, much of the vegetation striving for existence is found to be of slender variety. Except in swamp a pathway can usually be cut between trees with a large knife or machete at a slow walking pace. A geographical sense and knowledge of the country should enable any hardy person with sufficient supplies to traverse the whole country without fear of observation. The ability to penetrate virgin jungle does not require any super qualities. The best training is actual acquaintanceship. Experience should overcome most difficulties. Ignorance may be a prolific source of discomfort and danger. Most of the terrors are imaginary. Many of the difficulties have been considerably reduced through numerous penetrations by gangs of men for survey forestry and mining purposes. On account of these penetrations, throughout Malaya there are thousands of jungle paths leading from roads, rivers, mines and estates into the interior, which, although overgrown, can easily be located.

The qualities of the inhabitants of a country must always be of considerable importance to a successful defence of the country. Total war involves the whole population and the resources of the man-power require it to be intellectually marshalled, organised, and directed to the support of the defence of the country and the defeat of the enemy. Of Malaya, it can be said with truth that the really valuable resources of the man-power of the country were not marshalled, organised, or directed to the defence of the country, but were entirely ignored until the end was near.

The most important section of the community was the immigrant Chinese and their immediate descendents. Most of these persons were not British subjects, but they hated the Japanese with a hatred more bitter than any possessed by a European. These Chinese had a stake in the country and it was their class that had been mainly responsible for the development of the country. They knew the country internally. They were in the country in their hundreds of thousands; industrialists, shopkeepers, miners, planters, forestry men, labourers, most of them being men of extraordinary industry and character. Their leaders clamoured for their employment in the direct defence of the country. Until the Japanese were approaching Singapore there was no attempt made to use them. When it was too late a small number received some hurried training, were given arms and taken to their defence positions on Singapore Island. In the face of this magnificent Chinese material, the transport to Malaya in January 1942 of some tens of thousands of conscript troops, over equipped and not suitably trained, was a senseless waste of man-power and shipping. These conscript troops may have been able to render an excellent account of themselves if employed in European areas, but they were not suited for Malayan conditions. Malaya was a country in which the various races, constituting the population, lived on excellent terms with one another, and with the administration. This was mainly due to the natural wealth of the country, low taxation, the low cost of essential requirements, and the wide margin of freedom allowed to all inhabitants. Contentment does not lend strength to character, but it does provide motive to ensure the continuance of benefits enjoyed. The Malay had not the depth or the determination or the ability of the Chinese. He was protected in his land tenure by law and was interested mostly in obtaining the simple and natural pleasures of life with the least amount of effort. The Indian also had not the character of the Chinese, and, whether labourer, clerk or professional man, he was not prepared for any great sacrifice except, perhaps, for India. Neither

the Indian nor the Malay, was an ardent patriot, but both races were prepared to assist. Throughout Malaya, even in isolated areas, there was an entire absence of any general pro-Japanese sentiment. Europeans did not go to Malaya with the intention of establishing a permanent home in the country. Malaya did not attract the individualistic empire builder. Generally, the European was imported for a definite position under an agreement which provided for regular long leave to his home country every three or four years. He was in general, interested only to the extent necessary to enable him to retire from the country after a period of years with an income sufficient to live in comfort. District Officers, surveyors, outstation planters, miners, and persons engaged in jungle produce came into more intimate touch with the Asiatic races and undeveloped areas, but very few Europeans had any considerable knowledge of Malaya or its peoples. The people of the country were allowed very little say in the defence of Malaya which was regarded as being the affair of the Imperial authorities, the imported leaders of the services, and the local Secretary for Defence, who was an officer in the administration. The General Officer Commanding Malaya was a member of the legislative Council. This Council contained a majority of official members and the General Officer Commanding was in a position to exercise considerable influence over the deliberations of the members. Army, Naval and Air Force leaders came to Malaya only for short terms and were succeeded by other leaders. Staffs and Imperial Regiments did not remain in Malaya for long periods. Malaya has never enjoyed the benefit of a military leader trained for any long period in the particular requirements of the country. The Straits Settlements and most of the Malay States, Federated and Unfederated, maintained small volunteer establishments prior to the outbreak of war. Most volunteers were young office workers or planters and they received a training similar to a volunteer in Great Britain or the Dominions. In Singapore and other main centres, provision for Asiatic volunteers was limited to one company for each race. In general, volunteering provided delightful recreation at government expense. In the Federated Malay States, a regular regiment of Malays, recruited from the villages throughout Malaya, was maintained. Their training was orthodox and not based on the peculiar requirements of Malayan terrain. After the outbreak of the European war, conscription was introduced into Malaya for British subjects of European descent under the age of forty years. By this provision the local forces were considerably augmented. Despite handicaps of training and equipment, the locally recruited forces were keen. Their knowledge of the country and Orientals was far superior to that of any other troops engaged in the country. Malay is the 'lingua franca' of the country and most of the members of the local forces had knowledge of this language. The Europeans were intelligent and accustomed to responsibility. If they had been absorbed into Imperial units or attached in small numbers to British, Indian and Australian regiments, their usefulness would have been considerably increased. During the whole course of the campaign, they were rarely employed in direct operations against the enemy. Civilian Malaya was not organised to withstand an invasion. With recognition of Japanese espionage, the general scheme and measures for defence were kept secret, but all classes saw something of the enormous expenditure on defence. Newspaper articles and official announcements reinforced optimism and a feeling of security. The civil service was organised for peace and not for war. For the purpose of peace and to prevent the evasion of law, administration required extreme formality. When the approach of the enemy necessitated quick decision, the civil service lacked the ability to decide quickly and the organisation to carry out any decision expeditiously. Officials had not been trained or advised as to their duties in the event of a successful invasion. In many districts, particularly in the north of Malaya, all European officials fled at the approach of the enemy and deserted their posts and the Asiatic inhabitants in their districts. In some cases, however, they appear to have been directed to do this by the military. Despite dissimilar circumstances, one is wont to compare the conduct of officials of much criticised Italy after the conquest of territory by the British. These officials, faithful to their obligations, handed over the keys of their civil offices, coupled with an offer to continue their civic duties. Throughout the campaign, it was apparent that the Japanese had very full knowledge of the country and its fortifications and even of the disposition of troops. The Japanese took every advantage of opportunity in peacetime to obtain all information necessary or useful for an invasion. Japanese fishing boats had for years been prominent in the fishing industry, and the Japanese contacts with Malays engaged in the fishing industry were numerous. All towns and most villages throughout Malaya had Japanese shops selling the cheap class of goods suitable for the requirements of the poorer people. In the Malay State of Trengganu, one Japanese mine paid by way of export duty a substantial part of the State revenue. In the district in which this mine was situated, most of the Malay government officials received secret monthly payments from the Japanese mining company. In the Malay States of Trengganu, Kelantan and Johore, there were more Japanese than European residents and they were much more in touch with the people. Throughout Malaya there was a high degree of corruption. Corruption was particularly rife amongst subordinate government officials and office assistants. Information was easily obtainable at very small cost. Labour mostly used on fortifications was Chinese. Even amongst the Chinese, the Japanese had contacts by means of Formosans and secret followers of Wang Cheng Wei. For very small expenditure under the system prevailing in Malaya, the Japanese, or any other nation, could have obtained complete information as to the disposition of forces throughout the country and as to the exact position and nature of guns and fortifications. Judging from the disposition of troops, the placing of fortifications, the equipment of the troops, the methods used for the transport of supplies and the training of the troops, the plan for the defence of the peninsula against invasion was based on the jungle operating as a natural barrier restricting an enemy's main activities to the developed areas to the west and south with roads leading to Singapore. The plan for the defence of Singapore, apparently, was based on the natural protection afforded by the jungle on the peninsula and the supposed adequacy of defence preparations effected along some of the seacoasts and in developed areas. Singapore was prepared against naval attack but not against attack from the mainland. There was an entire absence of fortifications along the Straits of Johore, but the sea entrances to these Straits from the east and the west were well protected. It is also believed that many of the guns intended for defence against naval attack were so placed that it was impossible to use them to fire upon enemy concentrations along parts of the Straits of Johore.

It is correct that no large bodies of troops can operate in formations in jungle. No jungle is so dense that it cannot be penetrated by small bodies of men. The Japanese took advantage of the ability of small units to penetrate the jungle and work their way around British positions. It followed that no defence line flanked by jungle, even though additionally protected by jungle patrols, could prevent small enemy units from working their way around to the rear and causing confusion. It also followed that when faced by a numerically superior force with increased jungle penetrations, retreat became inevitable if communications were to be maintained. It is suggested that such retreat should not have left the enemy in undisturbed possession of the areas occupied and that the employment by the British of similar tactics against the Japanese using persons with knowledge of the country would have considerably delayed the advance.

In the latter part of December, the British formed a few commandos to operate against enemy lines of communications by way of the jungle. These commandos were not self contained but operated from the regular defence lines of the British. For a defensive force, the essence of successful irregular operations is the possession of secret and mobile bases within enemy territory. The few commandos employed had to retreat when the defence lines, from which they operated, retreated. This handicap considerably reduced their utility in operations and also prevented their employment in any area distant from their defence lines.

Whether or not the British commander and military experts were able to appreciate the offensive and defensive value of the jungle, there is no doubt that original thought was not necessary for such appreciation. General Von Clausewitz, the great German military scientist, about 100 years before the invention of the sub-machine gun, wrote as follows:

"DEFENCE OF FORESTS. *But impassable forests, that as such as can only be traversed on certain roads, afford advantages in an indirect defence similar to those which the defence derives from mountains for bringing on a battle under favourable circumstances. The army can await the enemy behind the wood in a more or less concentrated position with a view to falling on him the moment he debouches from the road defiles. Such a forest resembles a mountain in the effects more than a river; for it affords, it is true, only one very long and difficult defile but it is in respect to the retreat rather advantageous than otherwise. But a direct defence of forests, let them be ever so practicable, is a very hazardous piece of work for even the thinnest chain of outposts; for they are only imaginary barriers and no wood is so completely impassable that it cannot be penetrated in a hundred places by small detachments, and these in their relation to a chain of defensive posts, may be likened to the first drops of water which ooze through a roof and are soon followed by a general rush of water. Much more important is the influence of great forests of every kind in connection with the arming of a nation: they are undoubtedly the true element for such levies. If, therefore, the strategic plan of defence can be so arranged that the enemy's communications pass through great forests, then by that means another mighty lever is brought into use in support of the work of defence."*

The analysis of this chapter, "Defence of Forests" discloses a wisdom which could have been of great advantage, not only to the Imperial military experts, but also to the civil administration in their respective preparations for defence.

General Von Clausewitz has called 'war' a chain of unforeseen events. Defence preparations in Malaya were for the expected without deep consideration of possibilities. When the unexpected happened, the defence authorities were at a loss and failed lamentably. After the campaign, statesmen in England endeavoured to explain away the failure of the defence by the diversion of aircraft, equipment and other supplies to Russia and the Middle East. During the course of the campaign, in explaining the military situation, Air Marshall Sir Brooke-Popham, who was at the time Commander in Chief, Far East, stated as follows:

"Those responsible for the allotment of troops in the Far East had judged accurately the minimum necessary. They would not be justified in sending equipment to Malaya when it was still urgently needed where fighting already was taking place."

After calamities and reverses, explanations are often required and excuses are often made. It is an important question for consideration whether the Prime Minister and his cabinet were, in fact, largely responsible for the inadequacy of Malayan defences or whether their military experts in Malaya, despite the clear weaknesses in the numbers of aircraft, still believed in the adequacy of the defences prior to the invasion.

On the day that Japan launched her offensive, an 'order of the day' was issued by Air Marshall Sir Robert Brooke-Popham and Vice Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton. It read as follows:

"Japan's actions to-day gives the signal for the Empire Navy, Army and Air Forces and for the Forces of the Allies to go into action with a common aim and common ideals."

We are ready; we have had plenty of warning and our preparations have been made and tested.

We do not forget at this moment, the years of patience and forbearance. We have borne with dignity and discipline the petty insults and insolences inflicted on us by the Japanese in the Far East. We know that those things were only done because Japan thought she could take advantage of our supposed weakness. Now when Japan herself has decided to put the matter to a sterner test, she will find that she has made a grievous mistake. We are confident. Our defences are strong and our weapons efficient. Whatever our race and whether we are in our native lands or have come from thousands of miles away, we have one aim and one only; it is to defend these shores, to destroy such of our enemies as may set foot on our soil and then finally to end the power of our enemy to endanger our ideals, our possessions and our peace.

What of the enemy? We see before us Japan drained for years by the exhausting claims of her wanton onslaught on China. We see Japan whose trade and industry have been so dislocated by these years of reckless adventure that in a mood of desperation her government has plunged her into war under the delusion that by stabbing a friendly nation in the back she can gain her needs. Let her look at Italy and what has happened since that nation tried a similar base action.

Let us remember that we here in the Far East form part of the great campaign for the preservation in the world of truth and justice and freedom. Confidence, resolution, enterprise and devotion to the cause must and will inspire every one of us in the fighting services, while from the civilian population, Malay, Chinese or Indian we expect that patience, endurance and serenity which is the great virtue of the East and which will go far to assist the fighting men to gain a final and complete victory."

Criticism has been directed against the military competence of the two gentlemen who signed the above order of the 8th December but neither their veracity nor their honesty has ever been impugned. A successfully defended Singapore must have been an important consideration in any planning by the Dutch and Americans. Military manoeuvres were not unknown to Malaya, and as late as 1938 very full field exercises had been carried out to practice defence measures against an enemy advancing south from Mersing towards the Naval Base by way of Kota Tinggi. The order of the day expresses what was generally believed throughout the Empire, in the Dutch East Indies and in America. This order of the day expresses the views of the highest military authorities in Malaya as to the adequacy of Malayan defences and the weakness of the enemy. Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, as Commander in Chief, Far East, was in contact with all defence departments, including Intelligence, and was in a position to obtain information from all official sources. The contents of the order of the day could have no misleading effect on the enemy and was not required by the public in Malaya to strengthen morale. The order was issued after the attack on Northern Malaya when it was clear that the defences of the peninsula would be tested. It is difficult to come to any conclusion other than that the defence heads expressed the views they, in fact, held as to the strength of Malayan defences and the inadequacy of the enemy's resources. [To be continued]

AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. LAURENCE CHARLES HURDELL RNZN (Retd)
in February 1995, at his home in Canterbury, New Zealand

[With acknowledgement to Laurence Hurndell's family and to the New Zealand Navy who hold this interview in their archives.]

"I was born in Carterton, New Zealand on the 19th September 1922. I was working in Wellington in early 1941 when I saw all my friends joining up with the Services. I had an inkling for the Navy and so I applied to join the Navy. I was subsequently accepted into the New Zealand Division of the Royal Navy and I entered *HMS Tamaki* on the 15th May 1941. We did three months training before being posted. The posting was delayed because of difficulties with transport and general war conditions, and I was on a month's final leave. Finally in September, we received a posting and we weren't told where we were going but we had to be in Wellington on a certain date in September 1941, where we were drafted onto the Dutch ship *Johan Van Oldenbarnevelt* which was carrying troops to the Middle East. There was a group of 50 naval personnel, of which I was one of those, and we sailed to Fremantle in Western Australia. In Fremantle, WA, we were transferred to another Dutch ship called the *Sybiljaek* which then took us to Singapore, and we were in the Singapore Naval Base in the Royal Navy for several weeks under training before I was drafted to a ship.

Laurie, just stepping back a bit, you have arrived in Singapore, tell me about your joining the Navy initially. I think you recall three blokes quite well, just remind us of those?

We were workmates together. There was a guy called **Ian Gray**, another fellow called **Ivan Friend** and another one called **Bob Melville**. **Gray**, **Melville** and I joined the Navy together and were in *Tamaki* together. I am not sure what happened to **Melville**. I think he was drafted to a coastal vessel. **Ian Gray** was drafted to the *Leander*. **Ivan Friend** came in much later and I am not sure what his first ship was, but he finished up in *HMNZS Gambia*. They were not Prisoners of War. **Ian Gray** was badly wounded when *Leander* was struck by a Jap torpedo up in the Pacific. **Ian Gray** is still alive and is living in Christchurch here. **Ivan Friend** is still alive and is living in Lower Hutt. As for **Bob Melville** I have no idea, I have lost track of him.

You were telling me a moment ago about the hat draw on Motuihe Island when you were under training. Tell me about that in terms of your selection?

Well, we were called to the gym one night and the news was they were making the draw for drafts overseas. It was a hat draw I can remember, by the Commander, **Commander Dennistoun**, and all the names were put in the hat and they drew out one draft after another. A lot of my friends that I made in *HMS Tamaki* on Motuihe Island were drafted to India. We didn't know at that time that they finished up in Colombo. I was in a draft that was destined for Singapore and I was asked to change but I decided against that because one never knew what would happen. I had made the draft and I said, "I will stick to it," and I finished up a Prisoner of War.

Back to Singapore, you were telling us that you were training as an Able Seaman and some of you in the group were trained as Waiters, is that so?

Well there were Waiters and Cooks in the draft with us, most of us were Seamen and we went through a training period in Singapore in *HMS Sultan*, as it was then, and we passed out as Able Seamen and then we were drafted to ships. I was drafted to *Grasshopper*, a Dragonfly Class River Gunboat and a minefield patrol vessel that used to patrol the minefields.

What size was she, do you recall Laurie?

I can't recall the tonnage and I can't recall the displacement she had. About 45 European crew including 4 officers and the rest were Malay seamen, about 80 personnel all told.

About your duties as a minefield patrol vessel, tell us about that, your shipboard life?

Shipboard life was pretty boring before the Japs came into the war. It was a matter of patrolling the minefields and keeping shipping off the minefields. Watch-keeping and during non watch-keeping we had ordinary shipboard duties. We slept in hammocks, it was built for hammocks not bunks.

You were in the fo'c'sle?

I was in the fo'c'sle. The food aboard that ship was superb because we paid extra into mess funds and were able to employ a Chinese cook who dished up some of the finest tucker I have ever had.

The next big incident I imagine was the date of Pearl Harbour, December '41?

That's right. We didn't know anything about Pearl Harbour at that particular point. That night we were on patrol and two or three of us were leaning over the guard rail watching and you could see Singapore in the distance and the lights. We heard the sound of aircraft and saw what we used to call the "flaming onions," which were shells going up. Somebody remarked, "*Ah, it's all for real tonight, it must be a jolly good practice.*" It wasn't until next morning that the Captain cleared the lower deck and said, "*We are at war with Japan. Pearl Harbour has been bombed and the raid last night was the first raid on Singapore by the Japanese Navy.*"

Your duties changed at that point, Laurie?

Yes, the first thing we had to do was round up Japanese fishing boats which were fishing there. It was suggested then, and I have no doubt it was true, that they were spying. We rounded them up and deposited them at Changi Wharf where the local police took charge. It was a matter of keeping ships off the minefields. We had two submarine alarms and on Boxing morning 1941, we engaged in a submarine attack. I had just come off watch. I remember this quite well, as I had just got down to the mess deck when action stations sounded. Apparently, the chap who relieved me on the top watch on lookout duty had spotted two torpedoes on our starboard bow. The First Lieutenant was on duty and he immediately turned the ship towards the torpedoes and they disappeared down the side. All hell was let loose then when the Skipper decided that he was going to make a submarine attack. It was standby depth charges.

Were depth charges carried?

Yes, and we had depth charges on the after part of the ship and the controller released those charges off the stern. We had port and starboard throwers as well. The Skipper made the attack at a slow speed and when the depth charges went off they lifted the ship's stern about 6 feet out of the water. My action station was the Transmitting Station and I had just arrived there when I was knocked completely over with the movement of the ship. I think I hit my head and was unconscious for a couple of minutes, but I remember coming to and there was dead silence. Then I heard, tinkle, tinkle, of little nuts and bolts falling off bulkheads. The ship was in darkness because the generator had been damaged but that was pretty quickly repaired. The Captain said, "*Standby Machine Gunners,*" and one of my duties was the starboard twin Lewis. He said, "*We are not taking any prisoners.*" He was a tough old boy **Commander Hoffman**, the Commander of the ship.

Royal Navy?

Yes, Royal Navy. We stooged around there with the searchlight on and we found a bit of clothing which came up, that was all.

It was a successful attack?

Well we thought it was a successful attack on a two man submarine and that was in the shallows of our Singapore patrol. The next morning we were relieved, we had to go into dry dock for repairs.

It took you to Christmas no doubt. In the New Year you were saying things hotted up?

Things hotted up in more ways than one and, of course, with that submarine attack, the rivets had popped and the plates on the ship's side had sprung and we were floating in a bit of water and so we had to go into dry dock for repairs. We were in dry dock in the Singapore Naval Base, the big Naval Dock there. We were watch aboard, and off watch we were billeted up at the Naval Base. The Japanese had decided to bomb us and, of course, they were bombing Seletar Air Force base as well further up the road. I remember this day in particular – we were watch aboard and a gaggle of 27 bombers came over and everyone thought they were heading for Seletar, until we heard the whistle of bombs coming down. What could you do in dry dock except flatten yourself on the deck. They missed us but a stick of bombs hit the Naval Base and particularly the galley and the General Mess and there were quite a large number of casualties. When we went ashore for dinner that night we had corned beef sandwiches, a standby in the Navy.

Your repairs were completed in the dry dock. Can you tell us what happened from there?

We were towed to Keppel Harbour, but in the meantime we had to de-ammunition ship. We were taking the four inch fixed ammunition shells, four in box, to the Naval Base Ammunition Depot, when the Japanese bombers came over. They spotted us and, of course, dropped their bombs and they exploded all around us but there were no casualties. Fortunately, I dived into a ditch. After that we had to re-ammunition ship and so we took them all back by road to Keppel Harbour. It was chaotic at that stage. We didn't really know where we were. They hadn't brought the ship around. That's right, we slept aboard the **Pinguo** which was an old auxiliary vessel. I remember her – she was a cargo vessel with depth charges, an armed merchant auxiliary. Eventually the ship tied up in Keppel Harbour to re-ammunition and we had all these shells stuck on a damn truck and so we took the shells out of the cases and manhandled them down to the magazine. It was a tricky business because air raid sirens were going all the time, and it was pretty chaotic those days at that stage. However, we got the job done, and marine engineers eventually refitted us with our rudders. We had damaged our rudders in the depth charge attack and when the marine engineers fixed those up we were mobile again. During that time of course, those troop ships were coming in with British troops on and the Japs bombed them with no air opposition at all.

You mean aircraft opposition?

Yes, there was no allied aircraft opposition to the Japs. They were just dive bombing. I can still hear those damn screaming Zeros.

The frequency of the raids....?

The frequency of the raids increased and they were every hour or two because they had captured Malayan Airfields and they also had, I suppose, their aircraft carriers standing off the coast. Things were pretty chaotic and as there was no air opposition, they just bombed everything. By that time we had been repaired and we were on patrol again. We were standing by to take off survivors from Singapore.

You realised the end was inevitable?

Yes, we did and the Captain said, "Standby, we are going in to take off survivors."

In the meantime, we had been mucking around re-ammunitioning ship. There was plenty of work to do. We got these survivors off the British troop ships, the *Empress of Japan* and the *Empress of Russia*. If my memory serves me right those were the two main ships. We eventually stood by to rescue survivors and Singapore fell on the 15th February 1942. We were told to go back and take off survivors, we were standing off the city and it was terrible, the fire. Singapore at night was just a red fire. We were standing off, I suppose, about 5-6 miles out and we could see the dive bombers just machine gunning and dive bombing around the city. There was no air opposition at all and it was just chaotic. The fires were burning and all the oil tanks were burning and Singapore was a massive glow at night. We had to standby and we finally went in about 11 p.m. on the night of the 12th to Clifford Pier to take out the last of the survivors. The Japanese by that time were just down the road about half a mile away.

We were subjected to a mortar attack, and mortar shells were exploding all around us, but funnily enough not one hit us. Whether it was our good luck or poor aiming by the Japs, I'll never know.

That must have been a dramatic night. This is the night before Singapore fell?

The night before Singapore fell, we were ordered in alongside Clifford Pier to take off the women and children, civilians and all odds and sods with some Army personnel and we had 10 Japanese prisoners too, who were marched onto the ship - Air Force personnel that had been shot down, I believe they were. They were later shot by the Dutch. We took off all these people and the mess decks were just jam packed and the Captain said, "That's enough, at midnight we are off." We set sail at midnight for Java. That was our destination, but we didn't get that far.

Tell us what happened when dawn broke the next morning?

Dawn broke the next morning and we were at sea and there was a motor launch with us. We were in convoy. There was *HMS Grasshopper*, my ship, and *HMS Dragonfly*, her sister ship and this motor launch in convoy.

Just the three vessels?

Three vessels and we were all crowded with humanity. A Japanese reconnaissance plane came over about 9 o'clock and at 11 o'clock that morning the bombing started and 127 planes bombed us. They came from all points of the compass. There was no escape. The *Dragonfly* was hit and she sank in 3 minutes and took most of the crew and other personnel with her. We were hit in the middle of the ship and rapidly caught fire, and were burning fiercely within minutes.

A direct hit?

A direct hit, yes. The captain was beautiful. He was trying to dodge the falling of the bombs and, as I told you previously, the old *Grasshopper* could turn on a threepence piece. But eventually, they got us and it blew the middle out of us.

Is that right?

Yes.

Where were you standing at the time?

We were ordered on to the mess decks, and because of shrapnel we weren't allowed on the upper deck, only the watch-keepers, and we were waiting to go on watch when the bomb hit. It came through the Petty Officer's Mess and exploded on our mess deck. Only three of us got out of it. One guy, who was so badly wounded, died eventually just after we were captured and another guy, who survived the war, lives in England somewhere, if he is still alive. Myself, I was badly wounded in the hips.

Did the ship sink?

No, the Captain beached her because we were ablaze and we wanted to get these people off, but for all intents and purposes we were sunk, and I found I couldn't walk. Somebody threw me into the water and the Japs came down machine gunning us and as they went away, the rear gunner would have a go. They killed a hell of a lot of people in the water. That was an awesome day, a terrible day.

There were civilians, of course, with you?

Yes, we lost most of the civilians and we lost most of the children. They were killed on the mess deck. They were all sheltering down there, you see, and the bomb exploded on the mess deck and all hell was let loose. I managed to get ashore somehow on

an uninhabited island, in one of those little archipelagoes.

Were there others with you when you came ashore?

Yes, there were a few of them with us. I don't remember a hell of a lot because I floated in and out of consciousness.

You were pretty badly knocked about, as you say, in the hips?

Yes, I got shrapnel in the hips. I was bleeding and lost a lot of blood. I was pretty sick for a while. They gave me some morphine. I don't know where it came from, but there was a medical orderly somewhere. He had oral morphine. He said, swallow this, and I lost the pain. I remember being placed on native matting and being put under a native house or hut on poles while waiting to be evacuated. With me was a British matchot named **Wilf Fauley**, who was rescued from **HMS Dragonfly**, very badly burned about the back, hands and face. Also there was a Malay seaman, who had one foot blown off. I never knew what happened to the Malay seaman, but I remember **Fauley** (or **Farely**) telling me that his back was itching madly. We were lying together on this matting. I told him to sit up if he could, which he managed to do. I was horror struck, as his back was a seething mass of live maggots, which I proceeded to scrape off and feed to the native hens pecking around our feet. I remember that incident very clearly. I don't remember how long we were under this hut, probably only for a few hours. We were both under oral morphine at the time. I remember being on a carley float. Some are dim memories now. We eventually finished up on an island called Singkep and I was transported to a native hospital on Singkep Island where there was a Dutch tin mine and a native hospital.

You were rescued by whom, as I presume you couldn't walk?

I couldn't walk, so I was carried by some of the Malay seamen from **Dragonfly** who had got ashore on the same island. There were quite a lot of them killed in the water. I remember getting into this hospital and I was placed on bed boards and I was floating in and out of consciousness and I bled quite a lot. They bandaged me up somehow and I had on something like a great napkin. Somebody had pinched my sandals and somebody had pinched my shirt as many people had got ashore with nothing. I remember I still had my life-jacket, it was one of those rubber Mae West ones and I remember getting ashore with it and into this hospital with it. I have vivid memories of the next day when a native orderly came around with a probe with which he probed my wounds trying to find this shrapnel. He didn't find it but, of course, the probe hadn't been sterilized and the wound turned septic. What a hell of a mess it was until a British doctor arrived, **Doctor Kirkwood**, with two Nursing Sisters and he said, *"I am going to operate on you."* He told me afterwards what he did. He had some anaesthetic which they gave me in the hospital. He said, *"I had to probe with my fingers in your wound. Do you know that you are very lucky you are still a man?"* I said, *"Is that so?"* He said, *"Shrapnel went in right to your crutch."* He said, *"If it had gone in much further it would have taken everything."* That is quite incredible really. After that I was a bloody mess and they had some disinfectant which they used, and after a while the wound healed up. I still have numbness in my crutch even to this day.

Did that doctor do a good job?

Oh, he did a good job alright. I shall never forget him – a very tall Scotsman with a large black beard. He died a few years ago in his native Scotland.

We were in this hospital for about six weeks. I remember a little Ceylonese nurse making me a pair of crutches out of four walking sticks so that I could walk, and I eventually walked around. Food was very scarce and we were hungry all the time. There were a couple of naval officers in there with me. One had had his ankle blown out. He was quite a mess and they took a great bolt head out of his ankle and there were all sorts of people in there. There were guys who had had their feet off and legs off. There was this Indian soldier called **David Singh** and he seemed to have money as he would order fruit and stuff like that. He would keep half for himself and issue the rest around for all. We would get a banana occasionally. He was a great guy. He had part of his leg blown off.

How interesting and he had money you say?

He had money, but where he got it from, I don't know. He used to send the orderly out to bring in fruit, bananas and stuff like that. He was a marvellous guy. I never knew what happened to him after we left the hospital. We were taken from the hospital at night and put aboard a motor sampan to sail – we didn't know where.

How many of you, Laurie?

There were two Nursing Sisters and four or five of us wounded people. We were put in this boat and we were at sea when daylight came and I hadn't a clue where we were, but obviously these Indonesian boat people knew where they were going. Eventually land came into sight and it was the mainland of Sumatra and we entered the mouth of the Indragiri River and we sailed up the river to a place called Tembilahan, a village on the mud flats. We were billeted there for two nights. The first night we couldn't sleep because of the mosquitoes which were as big as elephants. It was a screaming night, nobody got any sleep. The next night they gave us mosquito nets and we got a decent night's sleep. In the meantime, we had had no food and these two nursing sisters cooked us bacon and eggs. Where they got them from, I don't know. They must have bought them with some money they had. We had two eggs and a piece of bacon and in a Muslim country I don't know where the hell bacon came from. We also ate coconut flesh and drank boiled water. Then we left the next morning after the second night, on the boat again, and we sailed up the river to a town called Rengat on the upper reaches of the Indragiri River, and we were placed in a native hospital and were there for two days before the Japs arrived.

[To be continued in October]

OBITUARIES

REGINALD EDWIN LAWTHER. Born 26th November 1923. Died 18th July 2017.

Liz Moggie writes:

Reginald Lawther was always known as my **Uncle Reg**.

MVG members who were present at the Luncheon at the Singapore Cricket Club on Tuesday, 14th February 2017 will be saddened to learn that **Uncle Reg** died in Singapore on Tuesday 18th July 2017. **Uncle Reg** was accompanied to the lunch at the SCC by his only child, **Janice**, and his sisters, **Betty**, **Elsie** and **Jean** who had been interned in the Sime Road Camp from early 1945. (There was a report on the lunch in the special section entitled **Commemoration Ceremonies** which accompanied the April 2017 edition of *Apa Khabar*.)

Reg was born at Sungei Lembing, Pahang, where his father (of long standing Durham mining stock but recruited via Australia) was Mill Manager of the deepest tin mine in the world. His mother was Hakka Chinese, originally from Belitung (formerly Billiton) Island, well known for its mining industry. **Reg's** father died in 1939, but his mother, who was a kindly, astute woman well thought of in the community, had bought a piece of land with a house, and so the family stayed on at Sungei Lembing. When the Japanese attacked in 1941, **Reg** was just finishing his Senior Cambridge exams in Kuala Lipis, there being no higher schooling available in Kuantan before the war.

He travelled back to Sungei Lembing, and as his two older brothers were away working, decided to stay so that there was a male to help look after his mother and six sisters.

As 1942 was nearing its end **Reg**, now aged 18 years, realised he was running the risk of being picked up by the Japanese and pressed into assisting their war effort. His mother, who had kept in contact with the "people in the jungle" arranged for him to join the 7th Regiment of the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA), the East Pahang Regiment. He spent the rest of the war in the jungle, learnt Mandarin so he was able to take political instruction from the Commissar and thus be eligible for promotion in the Army. He ended the war as a Major, Second in Command of the 7th Regiment.

Uncle Reg was a charming man with a deep Christian faith and a peaceful, serene outlook on life. I was privileged on three occasions to interview him and hear his tales of derring-do and of survival in the jungle. He was a competent musician and excelled in playing the ukulele. When we had finished our last session he said, "Let's have a song," produced his instrument and sang. I had never heard the famous Communist song, "The East is Red" and asked **Uncle Reg** if he knew it. Without hesitation, he proceeded to accompany himself while singing in Mandarin.

My abiding memory of **Uncle Reg** is his cheerful, confident rendering of, "The East is Red" – truly something to treasure. It was a great honour to be able to join **Uncle Reg's** family for his funeral service and cremation service at The Mandai Crematorium in Singapore on 21st July 2017. In the Memorial Book I was able to express to the family condolences from MVG members who had known him.



Reginald Lawther in MPAJA uniform

LACHLAN JOHN MACKINNON 1957 – 2018.

We were deeply saddened to hear of the death of **Lachlan MacKinnon** in March this year. **Lachlan** had been a staunch member of the MVG for many years and his support was much appreciated by us all. We send our sincere condolences to his wife, **Laurie**, and to his immediate and extended family members.

Lachlan's brother, **Charles**, has taken over his MVG membership and writes:

Lachie, as he was affectionately known, was the son of **Lachlan MacKinnon**, who had been a rubber planter with Jugra Land & Carey Ltd., Carey Island, Port Swettenham. His father, Private 13224, enlisted with the 2nd Battalion, Federated Malay States Volunteer Force, and was taken Prisoner of War in Singapore on 15th February 1942.

Like his parents before him, **Lachie** was born and raised on the Island of Tiree, on the west coast of Scotland, to which his father returned in 1955 to take responsibility for the family farm following a further period of service on Carey Island. Young **Lachie** was educated on Tiree, Oban High School and Auchincruive Agricultural College, Ayr, where his father had studied before him. **Lachie** studied Dairy Technology, Management, Health and Safety, and qualified as a Master Cheese Maker. While at college he met **Laurie**, and they were married in 1982.

Lachie's working life led from Dundee, to Barnsley, to Cambridge and latterly to Carmarthenshire in Wales where he lived and worked tirelessly for nearly 30 years.

A visit to Singapore following a family wedding in Australia brought about an introduction between **Lachie** and **Jonathan (Moffatt)**. **Lachie** valued **Jonathan's** advice, ensuring a meaningful visit for him and his family, visiting Changi Gaol and other places. It was his hope that he and **Laurie**, his siblings and their spouses would visit Singapore and Malaya to mark what would have been their late father's 100th birthday in 2018.

On his return from this significant and memorable trip, **Lachie** took the opportunity to familiarise himself with the work of the Malayan Volunteers Group and considered it a privilege to be a member of it.



Lachie became quite unwell early in 2017. By June, a month after his 60th birthday, **Lachie** was diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease. Shortly after, it was pointed out to him that he had overlooked his MVG membership subscription and he insisted that it be renewed. He bore this progressive illness with much courage and dignity and died in March 2018. **Lachie** is survived by his wife, **Laurie**, three children, three grandchildren, three brothers, a sister and their families.

ANN TONI ELFGREN 1940 – 2018



The MVG sends sincere sympathies to the children and family of **Ann Elfgrén** who sadly died in April 2018. **Ann** joined the MVG relatively recently on her return to the UK in 2014. Her daughter, **Sarah**, and husband, **Rod**, have sent a copy of her Eulogy at her Funeral service: **Ann** was born 11th October 1940, in Penang, Malaya. It is a date that none of her family was good at remembering, and was the subject of much mirth! **Ann** was the only child of **Joan** and **Anthony Crosbie-Hill**. The early months were idyllic, but war meant loss and sadness; her father dying at the fall of Singapore. **Ann** and **Joan** were evacuated to India where the war years were spent.

In 1946, **Joan** remarried and the family returned to Malaya. **Ann** had a happy Childhood and adored her stepfather, **Eric**. At the age of twelve, she flew to Switzerland where she spent 6 memorable years at school, with holidays being enjoyed with her grandparents back in Surrey. Parting from her parents was difficult, but **Ann** had much to enjoy, although not skiing! She never got the hang of it, wondering why anyone would clomp 6ft. lengths of wood on boots to get about!

There was more sadness when her beloved **Eric** died; her "Poppy." **Joan** moved to Australia where **Ann** joined her in 1958.

A whole new chapter of life – a wonderful friendship with **Laurie**, and then **Ann** met **Rod**, her darling man. They met whilst **Rod** was in his MG in Pinjarra one Easter; one thing led to another and they were married in 1962.

They were, in many ways, different people, but it was a very special relationship that lasted 58 years. They were blessed with two children, **Sarah** and **Trevor** – the joy of their lives. So now there were extended families, new friendships made and life was full.

Ann loved reading and also enjoyed classical music, theatre and family holidays. **Rod** introduced her to the beauty of the Australian landscape. She learnt to drive too late in life, but never quite got the knack of it. She loved MG cars, though and the family owned 2 in which they had a lot of pleasure.

Ann called herself a Luddite, never quite coming to terms with technology. Travel was a real joy. In the UK alone, **Rod** and **Ann** must have covered 85,000 miles. This was **Ann's** chance to show **Rod** that part of her life. **Joan** and later **Sarah** came to live in England. What better excuse to visit!

In 2014, **Rod** gave **Ann** her long-held dream and brought her back to live in England. A happy home in Dorset, new friends and interests were forged. Then illness struck. But from **Ann's** point, what a great life it had been and how blessed she felt. To her husband, her family and her friends, **Ann** was a very special lady. She had a wonderful warm and charitable nature and was always smiling and laughing. She kept her family stimulated as they were growing up, teaching them new skills, mentoring and introducing them to new experiences. She was a dedicated home maker, devoted wife and an embracing and caring mother. **Ann** was very intelligent, well read, a consummate dressmaker and enjoyed cooking, being particularly accomplished at catering for parties and other large gatherings. Her mince pies and Christmas puddings were legendary. She bore her illness with much courage and was always apologetic for being poorly and putting others to trouble. For all of us, it was a privilege to have known such a wonderful wife, mother and friend, and we pray she is now at peace.

WILL ALSOP. Born December 1947. Died May 2018.

We send our heartfelt condolences to MVG member, **Sheila Alsop**, whose husband, **Will**, died on 12th May 2018. They both attended several MVG lunches and a V-J Day service at the NMA.

Will had a distinguished career as an architect. He was considered by some as a maverick among British Architects for his bold creations, such as the Stirling Prize-winning Peckham Library in south London. His exuberant designs abounded with colour and odd angles more reminiscent of the late sixties and seventies Pop Art. He designed the futuristic North Greenwich Underground Station, Urban Splash's Chips in Manchester, the Blizzard Building - a medical research facility for Queen Mary College, London - and then Sharp Centre in Toronto. In partnership with other architects, he also designed buildings for major organisations in Europe such as the Hotel du Département in Marseilles, and the new ferry terminal in Hamburg. But in 2001 he established his own business **Alsop Architects**. In 2011 he founded **aLL Design** based in a canal side studio in Hackney. At the time of his death, he was actively involved with a series of projects in China, where his lively imagination appealed to the new breed of nouveaux riches developers. Some of his futuristic schemes were not realised, in particular, the cancellation of his astonishing "Fourth Grace" structure, aptly described as "a diamond knuckle-duster" which had been commissioned to stand at the pierhead alongside the Liver, Cunard and Port of Liverpool buildings as the centerpiece of Liverpool's year as Europe's capital of culture 2008. He was appointed OBE in 1999 and elected to the Royal Academy in 2000. A lover of fine wine and good food he was also a member of Chelsea Arts Club. We extend our sympathies to **Sheila** and to their two sons and a daughter.

REAR-ADMIRAL SIR PETER ANSON, BT. Born July 1924 and died April 2018.

Rear-Admiral Anson was a prisoner of war of the Japanese who later became a leading figure in the British space-communications industry. He joined **HMS Prince of Wales** as a midshipman in July 1941 after the Battle of the Denmark Straits. Following Operation Halberd, the battleship returned to Scapa Flow where the crew was issued with white uniform before being sent out to the Far East. He was at action stations on the port battery on 10th December 1941 when the ship was sunk by Japanese aircraft. On the orders to abandon ship, he helped to rescue other survivors from the sea before being sent to Colombo on survivors' leave. On New Year's Day 1942 he joined **HMS Exeter** which was sunk in the Second Battle of the Java Sea in March 1942. He was picked up by a Japanese destroyer and spent 3½ years as a POW in various camps in the Dutch East Indies.

Postwar, he served in **HMS Vanguard** when she took the Royal Family to South Africa. He chose to specialise as Signals Officer and was promoted early to command **Alert** in the Far East, followed by a series of other commands and later posts in communication satellites. After retiring from the Navy aged 50, he joined GEC Marconi ending as UK Chairman. Other posts in the space industry followed until he became High Sheriff of Surrey and later Deputy Lieutenant.

FORGOTTEN BOYS: BID TO TAKE 828 POWS HOME

From an article by Didi Tang in Beijing,

which was reported in 'The Times' and appeared in 'The Australian' on 18th April 2018.

With thanks to Robert Gray

The horrific story of 1800 British Prisoners of War battered down into three cargo holds of a torpedoed Japanese transport ship is so little told that the dead are known by historians as *the forgotten boys*. Some scrambled to freedom even as the Japanese guards shot at them. Many could not. In one hold, hundreds lost their chance of survival when the only ladder snapped. Survivors recounted hearing the singing of, *"It's a Long Way to Tipperary"* as the boat sank.

Now a Chinese-American businessman is planning to bring the remains of the 828 who drowned in the **Lisbon Maru** to the surface. **Fang Li**, 64, has embarked on a quest to find offspring and relatives of those who went down with the 7,000-tonne vessel in 1942 in the East China Sea.

He wants to remember the dead and to know if there is any support for the soldiers' remains to be retrieved.

"It's time the hundreds of souls that have been detained for nearly 80 years went home," Mr. Fang said.

"They spent the last moments of their lives trying to break out, but after so many years they remain incarcerated."

A survivor of the atrocity has spoken against the plan, saying that the site should be left alone as a war grave. **Mr. Fang** has been encouraged, though, after relatives of those on board contacted him and expressed their wish that the remains be repatriated. Many of the victims died too young to have had children and have no direct descendents, so **Mr. Fang** is looking for great nephews or great nieces.

He first heard about the **Lisbon Maru** in 2013 when his studio, Laurel Films, was producing a film in the eastern Chinese Archipelago of Zhoushan. Fishermen told him that a sunken Japanese boat from World War 2 was resting on the seabed off the islets.

Mr. Fang said he had a keen interest in the war and was surprised that he had never heard about it. His interest piqued, he studied the history of the **Lisbon Maru**. It was transporting to labour camps in Japan, British soldiers captured after the surrender of Hong Kong when a torpedo from a US submarine hit it on the morning of 1st October 1942, and the ship began to take on water.

To prevent a revolt, Japanese guards placed planks and a tarpaulin over the hatches of the holds but the POWs forced their way out and the guards opened fire. The bloodshed on the decks halted when Chinese fishermen arrived and started pulling the men out of the water. One of the fishermen is still alive, now 94.

Mr. Fang commissioned underwater probes that captured images of the 140m vessel. He was "100 per cent" convinced he had found the steel-hulled **Lisbon Maru**. After a chance encounter with the British scientist in Berlin, **Mr. Fang** suggested the remains of the soldiers should be repatriated, consistent with the Chinese belief the dead should always return to their roots upon death.

Dennis Morley, 97, believed to be the last British survivor, however, spoke against the plan. *"It's a war grave and that should be left,"* the private in the Royal Scots during the war, said last year.

Mr. Fang has since received a message from a British woman whose grandfather, **Montague Glistler**, was lost on the **Lisbon Maru**. She said her family would very much like to see the remains of her grandfather returned.

Without consensus, **Mr. Fang** decided he should first reach out to more people and make a documentary to honour the dead. The film crew arrived in Britain last week to meet anyone who has knowledge about the victims.

"With only two eyewitnesses left, we would lose the last opportunity to tell their stories and to remember them if we don't act now," he said. *"They at least deserve a decent memorial."*

MISSING IN BORNEO

13351 Private Norman Valentine Jackson SSVF

With thanks to Dave Croft RAFBPA

A recent article in the Yorkshire Post newspaper supplement about the Yorkshire landscape artist, **Ashley Jackson**, briefly informed that he was born in Penang in 1940. Having an interest in Penang through living there in the late 60s, courtesy of the R.A.F., and knowing that **Ashley Jackson** is from Yorkshire, I wanted to find out why he came to be born in Malaya and if there was a possible "MVG" story. I wasn't disappointed: a quick search on the internet produced information that looked as if it might be of interest to the MVG and I subsequently contacted **Rosemary (Fell)** to this effect. Our brief online discussion provided a valuable clue in respect of his father, **Norman Valentine**

Jackson, a private in the SSVF, who was captured by the Japanese and initially incarcerated at Changi. The clue provided by **Rosemary** was that he was a member of "E" Force sent out from Changi to Borneo.

The Penang Period.

Norman Jackson's family were long term expatriates eventually holding a position with **Fraser & Neave Ltd.**, probably at their Penang branch. He married **Dulcie Olga Scott**, the daughter of **Lieutenant** and **Mrs. Cecil Scott** (of Penang) on 6th January 1940 at the Church of the Assumption in Penang. **Ashley** was born on 22nd October that same year and evacuated with his mother to Singapore during December 1941, to be followed by a safe evacuation from Singapore to India.

It is most probable that **Norman** was called up for military service mid-1940 (Compulsory Service [Volunteer Force] Ordinance 1940) as a Private with the 1st Battalion SSVF. He took part in the Battle of Singapore and became a POW when Singapore surrendered on 15th February, 1942.

The Changi Period

As a POW with a command of Malay, he would have been an asset in being able to procure essential items such as medicines, food, etc., from outside the POW complex. On establishing Changi as a POW area in February 1942, the IJA decided that the newly captured prisoners of war would be responsible for enforcing discipline among themselves. In overall command of the British and Australian POWs in 1942 was Lt. Col. E.B. Holmes of the Manchester Regiment with Lt. Col. **Galleghan** of the 2/30th Battalion AIF taking responsibility for the Australians. Military discipline was strong but matters deteriorated when **Lieutenant Takahashi** was appointed camp commandant and replaced these officers with Lt. Col. **Thomas Newey** of the SSVF – an unpopular choice among officer POWs. One officer stated in a diary entry that **Newey** was *"not a member of the British Army, but rather a Volunteer with the Singapore (Straits) Settlements Volunteer Force"* and *"the tragedy is that a Malay postman is in no position to judge and is too pigheaded to seek advice."* As a civilian, **Newey** held a senior position in the Malay Department of Posts and Telegraphs and as a 'Volunteer' commanded the 1st Battalion SSVF in 1942. Lt. Col. T.H. **Newey** was very much in favour of the demoralizing practice of sentencing those who seriously stepped out of line to long periods of 'solitary' in the (POW) Correction Cells. Such was his harshness towards POW 'offenders' that by July 1942 the Japanese Camp Commandant, recognising such, removed him from his command.

Changi to Kuching.

"E" Force, to which Private **Norman Jackson** was assigned, was destined for Borneo towards the end of March 1943. The POW work force of 500 Australian (destination Borneo) and 500 British (destination Kuching) embarked on the ex-Dutch steamer *SS de Klerk*. Previously a cargo vessel, it was scuttled by the Dutch in 1942 and then salvaged by the Japanese on the 28th November and renamed *Imbari Maru*. The ship struck a mine and sank off Labuan on 16th



Norman Jackson

September 1944. Conditions on board the ship were, as with all hellships, disgustingly unpleasant as described by an Australian soldier on the same journey. *"Conditions on the ship, the de Klerk, were bloody awful. Accommodation was head to toe, with three layers between decks. One turned over, everybody had to do the same. We were allowed on deck to use the toilet facilities; over the stern and hanging onto a rope."*

On arrival at Kuching, the British POWs disembarked for Batu Lintang Camp which housed a mixture of British, British Indian Army, Netherlands East Indies military personnel and civilian internees made up of British (including children) and Dutch. Also, some Dutch military and a small number of British soldiers were sent to stay at a sub-camp near Kampong Batu Tujoh airfield to work on levelling and extending the runway to facilitate transport aircraft. A number of the Australian party from the *de Klerk* remained behind in the Lintang camp hospital whilst the rest continued the journey to end up eventually at Sandakan. From one of those Australians remaining behind at Lintang was the following: *"However, due to the foraging on board the ship, a number of us suffered from diarrhoea and finished up in the camp hospital. The cure was nothing to eat for three days, then one spoonful of rice pudding. If this managed to stay with you, you had two spoonfuls on the second day, and three on the third. However, any bowel movement during this time brought you back to square one and a repeat performance. After getting over this, I went into the O/Rs camp with other Australians, Scots and English. We went out on work parties, where there were occasional belting and punishments. After going out on the work parties for about three months, flattening a hill of sand and filling in a swamp, I and a few other O/Rs were ordered up to the officers' camp as cooks and batmen."*

Evidence of **Norman Jackson** being in Kuching is shown by a copy of a POW card sent to his family sometime during his imprisonment Unfortunately no date is clearly shown, nor any information on the real state of his health at that time. A faded sentence written on the card reads *'Many Happy Returns 1st Sept. Send pictures. Love & Kisses.'* It is probable that he, with the other "E" Force British O/Rs from Changi, were initially intended to work on levelling and extending the present airstrip, an important project for the Japanese, as they were losing too many transport aircraft on landing. Other heavy work party tasks throughout captivity included the repairing of the wharves at Kuching..... and constructing a new fighter airstrip.

As time went on shortage of food became a serious issue among both internees and POWs leading to slow starvation. Everyone was affected, but for the British O/Rs on the heavy manual details more so, leading to around six deaths a day being 'normal' by mid-1945. **Norman** is one of the many POWs of the Japanese without a known grave and a copy of the Colonial Office Register of Deaths (31st July 1946) states: *Presumed to have died in Japanese hands*, with the date of death given as between 6.8.44 and 10.6.45. If he died on a work detail, or in the camp, it is likely that he was buried in the cemetery next to the camp and at the end of the war exhumed and taken to Labuan for reburial in a military cemetery. A large number of graves of prisoners from Batu Lintang were unidentified, a substantial number of camp records having been destroyed by the Japanese following their surrender.

However, in 2015 two 'local' newspapers covering the story of **Norman Jackson's** time as a POW of the Japanese states that prisoners (at Labuan) were ordered to dig their own graves and were then shot. Allowing for inaccuracies in the papers, and there were many, it provides another possibility as to how **Norman** may have died? Labuan camp was opened in June 1944 and used for less than a year. Around August, some 125 British POWs, 70 Punjabis and a handful of Australians from Batu Lintang arrived at the camp. Some two thirds of them died at Labuan during the next nine months before the remainder were 'marched' to Miri in March 1945. By June the remaining 40 survivors had been killed at Miri. The date of death, between 6.8.44 and 10.6.45, from the records matches those given for the time Labuan camp was in use. Perhaps his death was as described in the papers?

13351 Private Norman Valentine Jackson, SSVF, is commemorated on the Singapore Memorial at Kranji.

His son, **Ashley Jackson**, now has the medals his father would have worn if he had survived the war:

1939-45 Star, Pacific Star and War Medal.

BOOKS

"MEMORIES OF A MALACCAN."

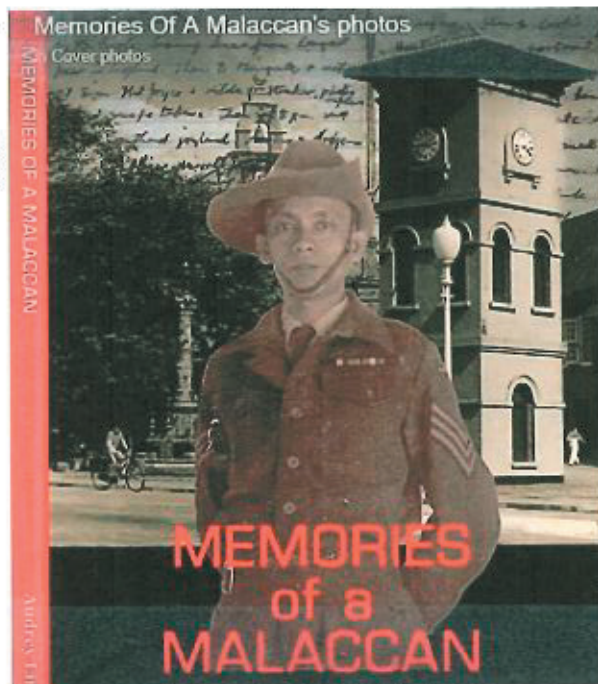
By Audrey Lim Swee Peck. Cost c. £10
Audrey is the daughter of Lim Keng Watt,

who was one of the first King's Scouts in Malacca and joined the Malacca Volunteer Corps (4/SSVF). He survived the war, and in 1946 was chosen to represent "B" Company (the Chinese Company) of the Malacca Corps at the Victory Parade in London.

The story of the Parade and Lim Keng Watt's visit to London was included in *Apa Khabar* No. 54 in April this year.

He was also a prolific collector of memorabilia including postcards, photographs and other documents, which are included in this book.

Please let Jonathan know if you would like a copy of this book.



Memories of a Malaccan is the biography of an ordinary man named Lim Keng Watt who lived in Malacca and experienced some historic events during his lifetime.

In its heyday in the 15th and 16th centuries, Malacca was known as the Venice of the East but by the time the British took control of it, it was more a sleepy town.

But LKW was proud to be living in this historic town. He was also proud to have studied and to be teaching at St. Francis Institution, the second oldest de la Salle mission school in Malaysia.

LKW was one of the first King's Scouts in Malacca. He was also an active sportsman, especially in badminton, and a versatile musician and drama enthusiast as well.

Last but not least, he joined the Straits Settlements Volunteer Force and served as Sergeant RM47 in Singapore when it fell to the Japanese in February 1942. When peace returned, LKW was chosen to represent the B (Chinese) Company in the Victory Parade in London on 8 June, 1946.

Unfortunately, he did not write or talk much about his war-time experiences. However, from his many fragments and notes, plus his vast collection of photographs, postcards, documents and other memorabilia, and through reading and research of the period, his daughter Audrey has been able to write *Memories of a Malaccan* as a tribute to him.

Though this book is mainly about her father's life and times, Audrey has widened her scope to cover significant aspects of the socio-political background, while her inclusion of nostalgic photographs and interesting memories will fascinate the general reader and the history enthusiast alike.

"THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION OF MALAYA AND SINGAPORE, 1941-45: A SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC HISTORY."

By Dr. Paul H Kratoska. Originally published in 1998 by C. Hurst, University of Hawaii Press and Allen & Unwin, this book was recently re-issued in a new edition by NUS Press at the National University of Singapore where Paul Kratoska is the Publishing Director and editor of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

NMA – Wednesday 15th August 2018. Annual Service to commemorate V-J Day. 12 noon in the Chapel.

In a departure from the usual service in our Memorial Garden Plot, we are holding the service in the Chapel, which has been booked for us from 11.30 to 13.30. [See Report in A.K.52 Ps. 3 & 4]. The noise from the LaFarge machinery, just behind the Plot, has become unbearable and holding our services there has become untenable. Weather permitting, the wreath will be laid on the Memorial Stone in the Plot afterwards. Please let Rosemary know if you plan to attend and if you would like to do a reading. Alison Brierley and Michael Mowat have kindly agreed to take the Service as Jonathan's son is getting married and he is unable to be there on the 15th August. We also thank Gerald Lindner for offering to play the organ for the hymns.

PERTH Western Australia. Merdeka Day Service in Kings Park. August 2018. Date TBA.

We thank Bill and Elizabeth Adamson for organising this annual service in conjunction with the MBVA WA Inc. Please contact Elizabeth if you wish to attend, and/or help with the catering.

CALIFORNIA, USA – Saturday 22nd September 2018. Conference in the McLaren Conference Centre, San Francisco.

MVG members in the USA may like to attend The Bataan Legacy Historical Society's 4th Conference called, "Resistance, Retaliation, Reconciliation and Rescission," between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. at the University of San Francisco in the McLaren Conference Centre. Speakers from the USA and the Philippines will speak on 4 main topics:

- Update on lesson plans covering WW11 in the Philippines
- Students' projects on WW11 in the Philippines
- Military and Civilian Resistance
- War Crimes and Reconciliation

LONDON – Saturday 20th October 2018. Annual Reunion and Luncheon at the RAF Club, Piccadilly – 12-5pm

Please put this date in your diaries, and let Rosemary know if you are planning to attend. A lighter menu, which was much appreciated last year, has been arranged by the Club's Chef. The starter is melon with seasonal fruit compote; followed by a main course of Pork Medallions with baby artichokes, peppers, courgettes, black olives and marsala jus, sauté potatoes and broccoli almondine; with Lemon Tart, raspberries & Chantilly Cream as dessert; followed by tea or coffee with Petit Fours.

There is a vegetarian main course option of Polenta cakes, soft herbs, creamed spinach, asparagus and cheese gratin. If the other courses are not acceptable to vegetarians, please let Rosemary know at the time of booking, together with any other dietary needs. There will be a pay bar where drinks and wine can be purchased. **The cost is £40 per person.**

PLEASE SEND YOUR NAMES TOGETHER WITH THOSE OF ANY GUESTS & PAYMENT BY THE END OF SEPTEMBER

Cheques should be made payable to: **Mrs. R. Fell Malayan Volunteers Group** [see address on P.27]

Payment may be made by BAC transfer to MVG's Bank Account, but please notify Rosemary.

We are delighted that the talk is to be given by MVG member Mary Harris, entitled, "*Bouches Inutiles. Who were they and what happened to them?*" This will be a fascinating insight into a little known part of the history of WW2 in the Far East.

The Ballroom at the RAF Club has been booked for the afternoon, as usual. This is on the first floor and is accessible by stairs or lift. Please give your name to the front desk on arrival. Gentlemen's coats may be left in a cloakroom on the ground floor, and there is a Ladies' Powder Room on the first floor almost opposite the Ballroom. Name badges will be displayed outside the ballroom. Please bring a prize with you for the Draw. **This is the final reminder about the luncheon.**

LONDON – Thursday 8th November 2018. Cross Planting Ceremony and Service at Westminster Abbey.

We thank Alan and Karen Harney for attending this ceremony and representing the MVG at the FEPOW Plot in 2017. Please let Rosemary know if you would like to join them this year, so that we can apply for tickets in good time. We are grateful to Revd. Pauline Simpson for organising our MVG Cross for the Plot.

LONDON – Sunday 11th November 2018. Remembrance Sunday Service and March Past at the Cenotaph in Whitehall

We plan to apply for the 12 tickets we were allocated in 2017 for the Service and Parade. Please let Rosemary know in good time if you wish to march and before August when the application has to be made digitally. Individual tickets are supplied for each marcher, giving details of your full name, current address, place and date of birth. As this is the 100th anniversary of the end of WW1, and falls on Armistice Day itself, there will possibly be a huge demand for tickets.

CANADA – Sunday 11th November 2018. Remembrance Day Commemorative Service at the Cenotaph, Toronto, Ontario

We are delighted to announce that Sallie Hammond, our Secretary in Canada, has offered to lay a wreath on Remembrance Sunday. Please would Canadian (and American) members let Sallie know if they would like to join her.

Sallie says that her husband Alex and son Jonathan will join her and she will lay a wreath for the MVG Canada/USA. She will be joined by Wendy Freeman and Vilma Howe.

Sallie has sent the following information about wreath laying in Canada:

Wreaths may or may not be part of a commemorative service, though they are very common for ceremonies on 11th November. During the wreath laying, appropriate music may be played, such as “O God, Our Help in Ages Past” or “O Valiant Hearts.” The wreath is usually carried by someone walking alongside the person who is to lay the wreath. The two approach, briefly pause, exchange the wreath, place it (often on a stand), step back, pause for a moment (military personnel will salute), turn to the right and walk off.

Sallie adds – if anyone needs accommodation to be booked, please let her know. Toronto is a beautiful city even in November – but you will need warm clothing as November can be chilly.

MALAYSIA – Remembrance Sunday Services in KL and Penang – TBA

NMA – Monday 10th December 2018. Anniversary of the sinking of HMS Prince of Wales and HMS Repulse.

Please contact Bob Hall for details. We hope it will be less cold this year.

SINGAPORE – 12th September 2020. Service at Kranji CWG Cemetery to mark the 75th Anniversary of the signing of the Japanese surrender.

A future date to keep in mind to join the MVG for the 75th anniversary of the end of the war in Singapore.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS

Thank you to everyone who has paid their subscription promptly.

GENERAL DATA PROTECTION REGULATIONS

All members have been notified about the GDPR either by e-mail or sent a printed letter. Those who have asked for their details to be removed from the next list of members, which is due to be issued in October, will not receive a copy of the membership list. In line with other public organisations, if you have not returned your form indicating your preference – we will assume that you are happy for your details to remain on the membership list. There is still time to opt out if you so wish, but you must let Jonathan and Rosemary know.

HELP STILL WANTED TO UPDATE THE EVACUEE LIST

Help is still needed with the typing of names and some information about each evacuee, for the website. Please contact Jonathan if you feel you can help. He will explain the task and give you the surnames and information. There is no time scale for this task, but obviously we would like to get the lists on the website as soon as possible.

MVG FACEBOOK PAGE

Becca Kenneison reports that the FB page is going well and has received numerous photos posted by Jonathan. She also says that Audrey Lim Swee Peck [see P. 26 for details of her book] has shared a lot of fantastic photos of the Malacca Volunteers which would be of interest to those with Malaccan connections. Some amazing stories about Volunteers during the Japanese occupation, including stories of local people sheltering evaders, have also been added. We hope to share these with all members of the MVG in due course in the newsletter.

PEACE MUSEUM IN MUNTOK

We have received from Mr. Fakhri of the Tinwinning Museum, details of monthly expenses for the cost of electricity and cleaning the Museum. We have agreed to contribute £40 sterling monthly towards this. We feel that this is a reasonable cost.

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