

APA KHABAR

12TH EDITION
OCTOBER 2007

www.malayanvolunteersgroup.org.uk



VOLUNTEERS REMEMBERED ACROSS THE GENERATIONS

Two Veteran Volunteers and a Civilian Internee; sons and daughters of Volunteers; and two granddaughters of Volunteers gathered in London on Saturday 29th September at the MVG Annual Lunch. Two members were from overseas – Sheila Allan, who was the guest speaker last year and who was making a return visit from Australia, and Stephanie Hess, this year's speaker from South Africa. Judging by the decibels, it was a very successful and enjoyable afternoon, and proof that the memory of the Volunteers is in good heart and in good hands. Indeed, Stephanie, herself the granddaughter of a Volunteer, told the assembled audience that her own 11 year old daughter was keen to learn about her great grandfather's experiences as a POW.

Recognition for and remembrance of the Volunteers has now been established for posterity, with the laying down and planting of the Memorial Garden in the National Memorial Arboretum. Dedicated on 15th August 2007 by the Rural Dean of Tutbury, and accompanied by the haunting sounds of the pipes, so ably played by an Argyll Pipe Major, the day was rounded off with a special service for V-J Day, organized by the Shropshire FEPOWs.

On 31st August members of the MVG were again at the Arboretum to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of Merdeka with the NMBVA. Organized by the Doncaster Branch, the Service rounded off a summer of remembrance.

Finally, the MVG would like to salute fellow member Harry Hesp for the marvellous FEPOW FOCUS newsletters he has edited for the Manchester & District FEPOW Association over the years, and commiserate with him on editing his last one. We thank him for remembering the Volunteers, and for his kind comments about "Apa Khabar". We hope that in our own small way we can keep the FEPOW spirit alive through our pages, and across the generations.

DEDICATION OF THE MALAYAN VOLUNTEERS GARDEN – 15th August 2007 [V-J Day]. Report by Jonathan Moffatt.

Some twenty five members of the Malayan Volunteers Group and members of other families met at the Changi Lychgate, National Memorial Arboretum, and were led by Pipe Major Duncan Thomson, appropriately in Argyll & Sutherland Highlander dress uniform, to the Malayan Volunteers Garden Plot.

A service of dedication followed, conducted by the Revd. Tony Wood, assisted by FEPOW members Harry Hesp, John Hedley and Ron Mitchell who said the Exhortation, FEPOW Prayer and Kohima Epitaph followed by a minute's silent remembrance. During the service, the Revd. Wood paid tribute to the Revd. Geoffrey Mowat, MVG member, who had dedicated the Memorial Stone on V-J Day in 2005. The National Anthem and "I vow to thee, my country" were sung and the piper played tunes including Highland Laddie, Flowers of the Forest and Amazing Grace.

After a lively lunchtime chat, members joined the Shropshire FEPOWs for their annual V-J Day Service. Despite the gloomy forecasts, the sun came out.

We can feel proud that in such a short time and not without some opposition, the MVG has now its own special place at the Arboretum, next to the "Kris" plot of our NMBVA friends and with a fine view across the Arboretum to the new National Memorial.



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE MEMORIAL GARDEN.

1. Prior to the service, the trees, which had been sponsored by MVG members for family relatives, had been tagged so that they could be dedicated during the service. The sponsored trees and bamboo are as follows:-

Magnolia Tree – for George Philip BEAN

Chinese Birch Trees – for Allan BARRIE; Sholto Douglas STITT; Aden McLEOD; Eric Wilfred REEVE; James and Penelope LONDON.

Bamboo – for the Volunteers on behalf of Bill Cranston.

Although the tags were made of a good quality slate with black ties, the Arboretum authorities would not allow them to be left on the trees. Only the metal plaques provided by the Arboretum are permitted at a cost of £200 each. Therefore, until each family has had a plaque made, the trees appear to be unnamed, but all have now been spoken for.

There are still 5 bamboo shrubs which have not been sponsored. If any one would like to reserve one of these, at a cost of £15 or £20, depending on the variety, please contact Rosemary Fell for details and an application form for a plaque. Each plaque is made up with the art work, wording and a badge provided by the family.

2. Owing to the inclement weather causing traffic chaos on the motorways, several members were delayed on their journey to the Arboretum, including Maurice Humphrey, who brought with him the two beautiful plaques he had made for the Memorial Garden. Both are made of polished black granite – one bears the MVG logo on a grey background, and the other the colourful SSVF badge. The plaques were later placed one on each side of the memorial stone, and make an interesting and attractive focal point to the paved seating area. The MVG would like to thank Maurice very warmly for his help, support and generosity over the last two years and for his gift of the two plaques.

3. We are also very grateful to Mary Benger of Burrow Farm Gardens – listed as one of the finest landscaped gardens in the West Country – for designing the Memorial Garden for the MVG, and for giving her services free of charge; and to her daughter Penny Pritchard, who drew the plans to scale for submission to the Arboretum. Penny also presented the drawings to us as a gift.

4. Photographs of the dedication may be viewed on the website, together with the order of service. We are grateful to MVG member Keith Andrews for taking the photos for us, and hereby promote him to "official photographer" for the Group!

5. Thank you very much to everyone who has contributed to the Memorial Garden. At the beginning of the year, when we decided to go ahead with the landscaping, we were still short of funds to cover the costs. However, by the time we had to pay for everything, we had sufficient money in the bank to cover the landscaping charges, and enough over to pay another £500 to the Arboretum. Our debt to the Arboretum now stands at £1,500.



We thank Merle Hesp for providing the photographs shown in the newsletter

NMBVA MERDEKA CELEBRATION – 31ST AUGUST 2007- at the NMA.

The Doncaster and South Yorkshire Branch of the National Malaya and Borneo Veterans Association organized a highly successful and enjoyable day to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of Malaysia's Independence, at the NMA. Four members of the MVG joined a large gathering of the various branches of the NMBVA, as guests of the Doncaster Branch. The commemorations started with a midday service in the Chapel, conducted by the Revd. Bernard Ward. Attending the service, along with several NMBVA Standard Bearers, were 4 young Gurkha soldiers and their Commanding Officer.

An interesting service had been arranged, including the singing of two hymns and an address by the Revd. Ward. The first part of the service in the Chapel ended with the National Anthem. The congregation then proceeded down to the NMBVA "Kris" Memorial for the second part of the ceremony, while Members from the attending branches of the NMBVA lined up in Yeomanry Avenue behind the Gurkha Guard and Padre. Headed by the Argyll Pipe Major, Duncan Thomson, the procession made its way down to the Plot, with Standards flying.

The congregation and procession surrounded the Kris for the final part of the service, during which the Last Post was sounded by Bugler Adrian Harper and a Lament piped by Duncan Thomson. Colonel Jonathan Hunt read the poem "For the Fallen" by Lawrence Binyon and the Kohima Epitaph was said following the 2 minutes silence.

As guests of Maurice Humphrey, we joined the NMBVA for a splendid buffet lunch in the NMA Visitor Centre. After the tables had been cleared away, we were treated to the grand spectacle of the Gurkha Kukri Dance by the 4 young soldiers. Performed within the confines of the conference hall, and set to music, the dance involved much twirling of their kukris within a few inches of our noses! We were not too sure how sharp the kukris were.

Before the buffet lunch, the sale of raffle tickets kept us occupied. In aid of the Gurkha Trust, we were cajoled and persuaded to buy umpteen of them by Gillian McAulay. There was an amazing array of prizes, and we felt very embarrassed at winning more than our fair share of them! However, one bottle went to Gillian, in appreciation of all her hard work, and 4 cans of beer went to the 4 young Gurkha soldiers who had enthralled us with their dance routine. They were highly delighted!

At the end of the Raffle it was announced that nearly £700 had been raised for the Gurkhas and a large cheque was presented to the Gurkha Officer. During his excellent thank you speech, he explained the work of the Trust and this was well received.

We are grateful to the NMBVA for their help in the past and continuing support now, and we thank them for involving the MVG in their celebration of Merdeka.

MVG ANNUAL LUNCH – 29th September 2007.

Thirty four members of the MVG met together at 12 noon for their annual lunch, on Saturday 29th September. "The Super Star" Chinese Restaurant in the heart of London's China Town was the venue once again. As a reflection of the MVG's growing membership worldwide, Sheila Allan from Australia and Stephanie Hess from South Africa joined the gathering. A splendid 3 course lunch was served amid much conversation and stories of pre-war Singapore and evacuation ships.

After drinking a toast to the Volunteers, and wishing Veteran JVE Volunteer John Hedley a Happy Birthday, the members settled down to listen to a fascinating talk by Stephanie Hess about her Grandfather Joseph Benedict Dunne of the 1/SSVF Signals Platoon. During his years as a POW, first in Changi and later in Hakodate, Japan, where he worked in a cement factory, Joe Dunne kept a secret diary. This was in the form of letters to his wife and children, who had been evacuated to Perth, Western Australia, detailing his everyday existence as a POW.

Stephanie explained how the diary was written in her grandfather's beautiful hand in faded pencil on all kinds of scrap paper – anything he could find to write on. At first she attempted to re-write it out by hand, but quickly found this task too onerous. So she devised a system whereby she would type out a set number of pages each day, and every evening she would settle down with her 11 year old daughter to read it through. In this way, not only did she find the task much easier, but also she could involve her daughter and encourage her to learn about her great grandfather and his life as a POW.

The diary has now been printed for private circulation to family and friends. It is entitled "Dear Hon", this being the way in which Joe Dunne always started his letters to his wife.

Following Stephanie's talk, conversation resumed until it was time to leave the restaurant sometime after 3p.m. Altogether it had been a most enjoyable afternoon – old friends re-acquainted and new ones formed, and throughout it all a clear message that the memory of the Volunteers is alive and well.

REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY – 11TH November 2007.

We have been allocated 12 tickets for this year's Service of Remembrance at the Cenotaph in Whitehall. Several tickets have already been reserved, but if anyone else would like to attend the Service and Parade, please let Rosemary Fell know. The details and the tickets have not yet arrived, but they will be forwarded to you in due course.

The ceremony is being organised, as usual, by the Royal British Legion. They advise us that, due to the strict security arrangements for the day, members must arrive by the time stipulated on the instructions, usually by 10.15 a.m. This entails a long wait before the Service begins, and then another wait until it is time to Parade along Whitehall to hand in the wreath at the Cenotaph. The marching distance down Whitehall, into Parliament Square and along Horse Guards Road is about 1 ½ miles, possibly in inclement weather.

Last year, the final salute in Horse Guards was taken by HRH The Duke of Kent, and after the playing of the National Anthem, we can disperse. We plan to have lunch together after the ceremony, if anyone would like to join us. Last year we went to a restaurant on the South Bank, near the London Eye. The food was good and not expensive, and four of us spent a couple of very enjoyable hours there.

Food, Glorious Food – by Jennifer Howe (nee Godber)

Foreward

From February 6, 1942, when he sailed from Fremantle, Western Australia, John Godber, Private in the Armoured Car Company FMSVF, kept a diary in which he described the chaos leading up to the surrender and his day-to-day life as a PoW. With pen, pencil – and latterly, with makeshift quill pens and slivers of bamboo – he scribbled first in his little red notebook, then in used exercise books salvaged from an abandoned Singapore girls' school, in booklets of scavenged scraps of paper cobbled together with string, and finally on the backs of labels. He recorded the day-to-day life of a PoW for the duration. While his daily entries were essentially an ongoing open letter to my mother, Thyra, increasingly, they became a litany of food, the lack of it and the getting of it! In this article, I have assembled just a few of the many food-related entries.

"Food, glorious food/I'm anxious to try it/When I'm in the mood/I'm not on a diet ..." – sang the little boys in the musical "Oliver!" But this was no musical and these no well-fed choir boys. Years into his imprisonment, John Godber wistfully recorded a menu for the meal he would order should he ever return to civilization: *Grapefruit, Turtle soup, Roast pheasant with Brussel sprouts, braised celery and roast potatoes. Chocolate Madeline [sic], ice cream with cherry brandy on it. Stilton cheese, pears, grapes and apples ...* But towards the end in Tarsau, suffering from amoebic dysentery, his diet was: *Breakfast 1pt. rice water, Tiffin ¾ pt. weak beef tea, Supper ½ pt. tapioca(very thin) and ½ pt. beef tea ...* and poignantly, he wrote: *This actually is all I want ...*

Years before, on February 18, 1942 in Changi – not long after Singapore fell – John had written in a little red notebook that – the first volume of an ongoing diary: *the general feeling was still one of relief and general thankfulness to be alive ... We had been sent to a lovely spot and though it was very crowded ... we were still getting European food ... The sea was only about a quarter of a mile away and we were allowed to bathe as much as we liked ... we are probably at the highest point in Changi and the view is magnificent. Almost every evening we get glorious sunsets ... We sat every evening and talked and watched the sun go down. It seemed like normal times ...*

A few weeks later, after being transferred to Havelock Road in Singapore City to be part of a work crew the consensus of opinion was that their imprisonment would last no longer than a few months. But rations were already running low and it was here that food began to acquire the status of currency: *Our hut is like the sort of thing you see in chain gang films. In the evenings there is a constant procession of people with things to sell ... articles of clothing, ground sheets, mosquito nets... Things other than eatables have a very low value ... we have fresh egg sellers ... 10 cents a time. Occasionally some one will try to cut the market by selling them ready boiled at the same price. There are coffee sellers, tea sellers and heaven knows what ...*

A change was afoot, and on October 10, 1942, in Havelock Road, John wrote: *There is a sort of carnival spirit in the air and it's a cross between the eve of a long looked forward to and original kind of holiday and going down night of Reading days. It even includes the background of a tinge of regret associated with the latter simile. There is a hint of Christmas Eve when I was young too ... everyone is in a good humour and slightly excited ... a break away from humdrum and the end of this Havelock Road period will certainly be a milestone ...*

They arrived in Ban Pong on October 16, 1942. Never in their wildest nightmares could they have imagined the horrific train journey up the peninsula, nor the shape and taste of this new existence. Slogging through jungle from camp to camp up the river, working on the railway from dawn till dusk and beyond, their bellies would always be empty, vitamin deficiencies and tropical diseases would wreak havoc with their health and the spectre of cholera loomed. He noted that: *Havelock Road was a paradise compared to this ...*

The bill of fare was endless rice liberally laced with maggots. In the downstream camps, John occasionally augmented his diet with eggs, bananas and peanut toffee, which could be traded from the Thais, for watches, pens and other small items; and he would ... *collect odd bits of veg which float down [the river] from the refuse thrown in at the cookhouse higher up ...* However, although meat was always scarce, he drew the line at collecting tripe from the butchering shed. Occasionally, a single pig augmented the communal stew. Intended to feed 1,500, it lent no more than a whiff of pork flavour, with tiny gobbets of meat or gristle for the lucky few. Each meal was a lottery. Once John found a bone in his mess tin and this he sucked then shaved to a powder, which he consumed. On January 4, 1943, John wrote: *Yesterday I killed a 7-foot snake. I carried him up to our hut luckily holding him just below the head ... he suddenly came to life again and started writhing and twisting all up my arm ... no one would help me in fact several people ran out of the hut but I couldn't let go of him ... Eventually I got control of him by standing on his tail ... About 20 of us ate him for dinner ... In texture and flavour it was about half way between fish and chicken ... it doesn't smell at all ... Last night some people in the next hut killed a large Hamadryad ... Snake eating is becoming quite commonplace ... all kinds of lizards also and some people are getting quite good at trapping birds and shooting them with catapults ... I never thought I should come to this ... and ... I was able to steal some salt from the Jap cookhouse. I may say that I have no shame about these thefts [from the Japanese] ... Salt by the way is very scarce and about the most precious thing ...*

As in any closed society, a slang vocabulary evolved. From the planters came Malay words, such as *tukan ayer* (watercarrier), *jagger* (guard), *chungkol* (a digging tool with a right-angled blade) – and more. Of course many words pertained to that paramount topic, food. A case in point: *laggies*: in the daily food queues, the most patient people: *form into a queue as soon as they draw their meal. This queue is known as the laggie queue*

and its most enthusiastic supporters spend most of their lives standing ... competition may be so high that people will queue up an hour before the advertised time ... so these people do all their eating standing up. ...I must explain that the highlight of the day's meal ... in the evening, is the "doova"; this may be a lump of fried rice with a little meat ... John deduced that the word "doova" must have developed from hors d'oeuvre. Laggies were generally the scrapings from the bottom of the pot. Could it be that the word "laggie" evolved from the Malay word "laggie" – (phonetic spelling) – for more?

On July 29, 1943, he wrote in Tamil, presumably to avoid detection: *Yesterday afternoon a stray cow was wandering among the huts. With the help of some others I caught it, secured it with a rope and tied it to a tree ... out of sight of the camp ... I got hold of some Aussies, including a butcher, and offered them the cow in return for a hunk of meat ... They took the cow further into the jungle, killed it. Cut it up, and brought the meat back in the evening. We boiled it and consumed it to the last shred ... the best meal ... These cows are for Japanese consumption ... A frantic search for the missing beast has been going on – no doubt we have committed a capital offence ...*

John soon became obsessed with fishing and he excelled at it, catching so many that he gave them away, mostly to sick friends. Some he salted and preserved – a malodorous procedure which outraged his hut-mates, that is until they realized the benefits, for he always shared. He caught fish on various lines of his own construction and memorably – once – on a rod daringly "borrowed" from a Japanese guard, but most of his biggest catches were fish stunned by rock blasting and these he literally caught by hand. At this point, the diary reads like a veritable Angler's Notebook! On January 21, 1943, he wrote: *We had a very exciting fish blasting this morning. I happened to see the Japs preparing the charge & I had my clothes off ready & I was the first in the water ... there were hundreds of fish. I landed a great many of them but most of them were taken by the Japs. I managed to hide a few away for my friends however, including one very big one ... about 2 feet long and very broad. Catching this fish developed into an international event. I was competing for him with a Jap and a Thai ... He was still alive and kept getting away from us and we were jostling each other for the best position ... It was terrifically exciting. We each had our supporters shouting encouragement to us from the bank. In the end I got a good hold with my thumb in his gills ... I had been in the water about ¾ hour and was completely exhausted ... and on February 20: ... today two massive fish of about 75lbs each were caught. I had no idea that freshwater fish of this size existed – I can quite understand losing the odd hook now and again! And a month later: I think I shall smell forever of fish ... all available roof space above my bed is obscured by little hanging bags full of dried fish. One of these bags is an old Thyra Landon slipper bag others are legs of trousers which have been cut off to turn trousers into shorts. ... Today I am going to cut up my sarong.*

And finally, there were the bees. This event is not recorded in the diary, so did it occur near the end, after he had permanently sewn his diary into his pillow? After he retired from the Far East, he kept bees, but he didn't tell us about this very first swarm until towards the end of his life; so here, in my own words is his account: Dawn after dawn the men tramped to the railhead, barefoot, ragged, starving. At dusk, bone weary, weak with hunger, they struggled back to camp. One evening, John spotted a swarm of bees high in a tree, just off the track. He had always wanted to keep bees! He must find a box.

The following evening, wearing only a pair of ragged shorts, he climbed the tree one-handed, clutching the precious box in the other. Branches whipped, thorns ripped flesh and the low hum became a roar as the bees eddied, stinging his face, arms, chest and thighs. Scooping the enraged bees into the box, only the sweet thought of honey kept him going.

For a long time after slithering down the tree, he lay on the ground, unable to move and almost insensible. Back in camp, he stashed the box of bees in the twelve-inch ventilation space between his sleeping platform and the thatched roof of the hut. The other fellows were pretty browned off, but what were a few bee stings against the promise of honey. They knew he'd share.

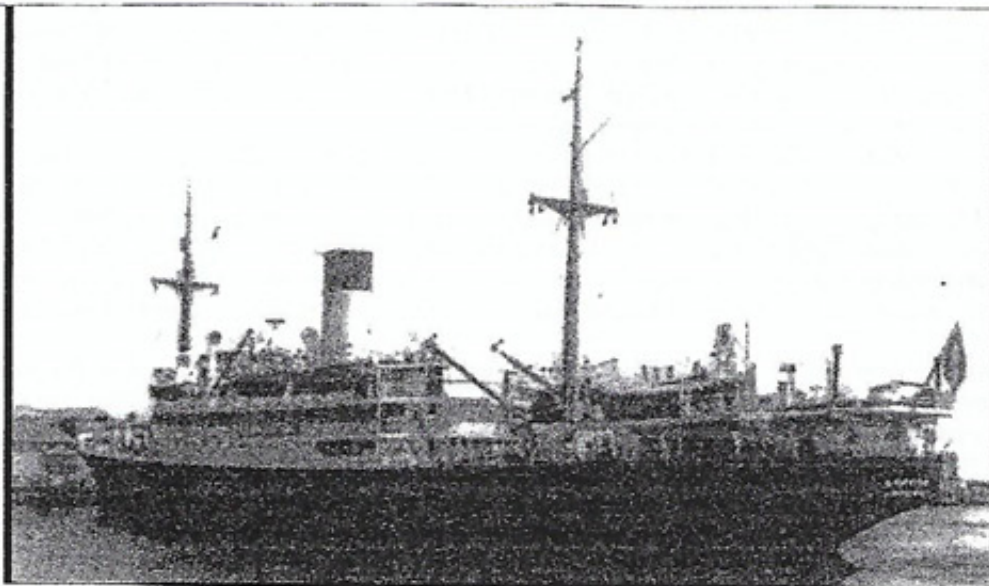
Life dragged on. Scarcely a day went by that he didn't perform some minor act of sabotage – small victories to be recorded in his diary. He lived with the perpetual anxiety that the diary would be discovered. But he wasn't deterred, neither were any of those people who continued to write diaries, steal from the Japanese, build radio sets and secretly pass news up and down the river and along the miles of railway track. John knew that discovery could mean execution or at best a savage beating, so he devised many novel hiding places for his diary – inside a hollowed out bamboo, squeezed into the false base of his tin water bottle and finally sewn into his pillow.

One morning, shortly after acquiring the bees, he was writing in his diary, when a random hut search caught him off guard. He scrambled outside, for to be late for parade could incur a beating. Too late, he remembered that the incriminating diary lay open on his bunk. While the men stood at attention for hours in the mounting heat, the guards surged through the prisoners' huts hurling, scattering, trampling – hunting for maps, clandestine radio parts ... and diaries. John was convinced his hour had come.

Suddenly, howls of rage erupted from the hut. Seconds later, the guards exploded from the hut pursued by streams of enraged bees. They'd nailed it – not his diary, but the suspicious-looking box under the thatch! Years later, it occurred to him that it was only for want of a queen bee that he had never got any honey from that swarm. But he always believed those bees saved his life.

End note: The diary is in the Imperial War Museum, where it can be studied by scholars, researchers, FEPOWs and their families.

GORGON

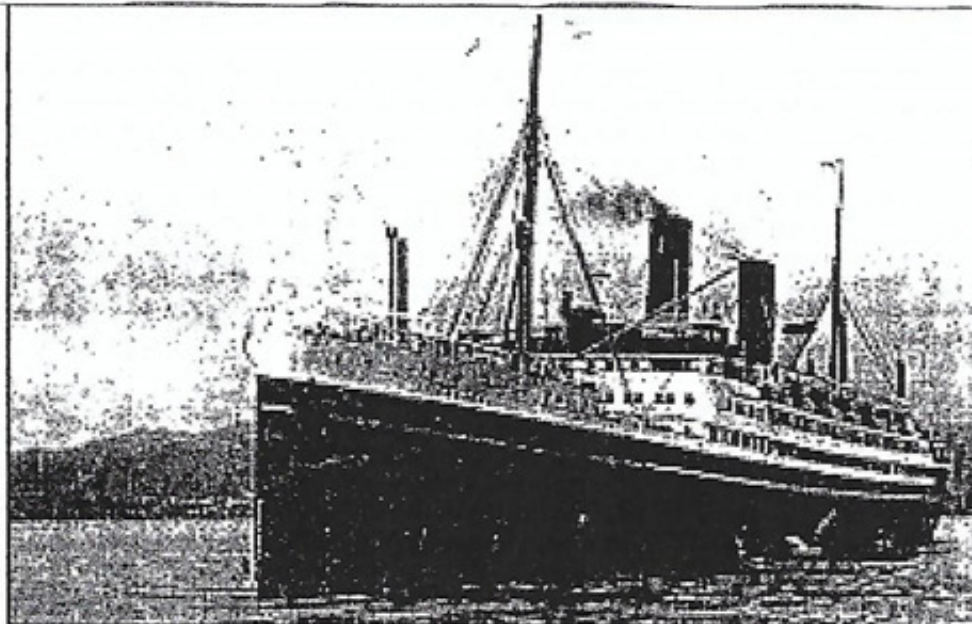


Gorgon and her sister Charon were built for the Singapore-West Australia service. Gorgon was initially owned jointly by Ocean S.S and West Australian S.N., Co., (Bethell, Gwynn & Co). When the latter's only ship Minderoo was sunk in 1935, West Australia pulled out of the trade and sold their share of Gorgon to Ocean S.S. in 1936.

In January 1942 she sailed from Melbourne bound for Singapore in Convoy MS1 and on arrival was continuously bombed by Japanese aircraft. By the 11th of February her Master realized that it was pointless to continue discharging her cargo and so after taking **358 passengers and refugees** aboard he sailed for Australia. She was attacked by high level Japanese Bombers on the 12th on six occasions and was hit three times, two of which caused serious fires, one adjacent to the ammunition store, fortunately both blazes were brought under control. The third bomb however failed to detonate and had embedded itself in bags of flour in one of the holds. Showing great bravery Chief Officer J. Bruce with the assistance of two soldiers gingerly carried the bomb out onto the deck and dropped it over the side, again it failed to explode.

After the Australians' successful defence of Port Moresby the Allies went on to the offensive and in one action landed troops at Milne bay, New Guinea on the 4th of April 1943. Gorgon took part in this. Again she was bombed by Japanese aircraft, six of her crew were killed and much of the ship was set on fire, so much so that she had to be towed to Brisbane for repairs. However, her crew were delighted to report that they had shot down two enemy aircraft. After the war Gorgon returned to her normal service before making her final sailing from Fremantle on the 21st of July 1964, she arrived in Hong Kong for breaking in August of the same year.

AORANGI



Aorangi

LUCKY WARTIME LINER AORANGI

The Aorangi was a modest 600-foot passenger liner built in 1924 by the Union Steamship Co. of New Zealand for service between Canada and Australia. But she went into service in troubled times for the world, and consequently got caught up in the midst of the worst hours of World War 2.

Even though this vessel was utilized as a troop ship, a supply ship, a hospital ship and even an escape vehicle for hundreds of civilians fleeing the war, the Aorangi miraculously emerged from the war unscathed and met her end in a scrap yard.

The vessel's early years were spent doing exactly what she was designed to do. She made regular trips from Vancouver, British Columbia to Sydney, Australia, with stops at Honolulu, Suva, Auckland and Wellington. The Aorangi boasted accommodation for 440 first class, 300 second class and 230 third class passengers. She had a typical liner's profile with two masts and two funnels. She was powered by four propellers and reached a speed of 18.5 knots.

World civil unrest brought the liner in peril beginning in October, 1940, when it was utilized to send troops from New Zealand to Fiji. Then, in the summer of 1941, with the war raging in Europe, Aorangi was requisitioned by the British Ministry of War Transport and steamed from Sydney to the United Kingdom for war duty. After conversion for service as a troop ship, she joined a convoy of large liners carrying troops and supplies for the near east. She carried troops to India, the Middle East and also brought US and Canadian troops to Europe during the war, always escaping the terror of the German U-Boats and bombers from the sky.

In January, 1942, when the Japanese invasion of Malaya was occurring, Aorangi arrived in Singapore under heavy attack by Japanese aircraft, carrying troops from South Africa. The liner successfully got into Singapore harbour and escaped with her decks laden with hundreds of women and children, carrying them to safety in Australia.

During the Normandy Invasion, Aorangi was there as well. She was by then serving as a depot ship for a fleet of about 150 tugs and auxiliary ships, supplying them with food, water, ammunition, engine parts and relief crews. She also served as a hospital ship and provided medical supplies.

From D-Day, which occurred on June 6, 1944, until the end of July, the Aorangi serviced 1,200 vessels and countless other small craft. Her hospital took in wounded men from the beachheads.

After this, the liner was converted to serve as the commodore ship and joined the British Pacific Fleet at Hong Kong. After the Japanese surrender, she remained at Hong Kong as an accommodation ship for men released from the war service and waiting to go home.

It was estimated that during the war years, this ship transported 36,000 troops and evacuated 5,500 refugees from war zones. After the war, the Aorangi was returned to her owners and restored as a liner. She went back into service in 1948, but was then plagued by union problems among the stewards and seamen. Because of demands for higher wages, the liner operated at a loss. She continued to operate with the help of subsidies by the Australian, New Zealand and Canadian governments until June 1953. The liner was retired that summer, taken to Scotland and scrapped.

A POSTSCRIPT TO RICHARD MIDDLETON-SMITH'S ARTICLE - P.9 "APA Khabar" OCTOBER 2006.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES - 31ST December 1946.

THE BURMA SIAM RAILWAY

Sir, - Your recent report of the ceremony held at Thanbyuzayat in Burma in memory of the 15,000 prisoners of war and 150,000 Asiatic labourers who lost their lives in the building of the Siam-Burma Railway prompts me to relate the story of a small band of self-sacrificing prisoners of war but for whose action the death rate among the Asiatic labourers would have been even higher. Prisoners of war working on the railway had ample opportunity to see the pitiful conditions of these labourers and the brutality of the Japanese towards them. Certain of these prisoners, ex-planters, civil servants and business men from Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies, felt a special sense of responsibility towards the labourers, the bulk of whom had been rubber estate and other employees in those countries, and, when the Japanese surrendered, made efforts to contact Japanese headquarters in Siam to see what could be done immediately to alleviate distress. There were considerable difficulties but by August 25th 1945 the Japanese had agreed [a] to discontinue paying off and abandoning the labourers along the railway (which they had commenced to do) and [b] to permit a reconnaissance party of ex-prisoners of war to visit all the camps along the line as far as the Burma Frontier.

The recce. party, comprising of five British and two Dutch officers, and two British NCOs and one Dutch NCO, with a Japanese interpreter, left the Siamese terminus of the line on August 28th. They visited every labour camp, instructed the Japanese to improve food and conditions, reassured the labourers and told them to remain in their camps until the Allied forces arrived in Siam to look after them and send them back to their homes. In September 1945, on the arrival of the Allied forces, the responsibility for these labourers was taken over by the Civil Affairs Staff of Allied Land Forces, Siam, and the camps were prepared for their concentration at Kanchanaburi at the Siamese end of the Railway. As the Civil Affairs officers available were far too few to deal with the enormous task of concentration with the speed essential, some 14 British and 7 Dutch Officers of this noble band of prisoners of war volunteered to postpone their own repatriation and remain until they could be relieved. All of them stayed for more than a month and two remained until well into 1946.

As they were Malay and Tamil speakers and had much experience in handling Asiatic labour, their services were invaluable. Had it not been for the prompt action of these prisoners of war and their self sacrifice, the task of collecting those unfortunate Asiatic labourers would have been well nigh impossible, for they would have been abandoned by the Japanese in the jungle and the loss of life would have been very heavy. As it was, some 32,000 survivors were collected and, after being fed, clothed and given hospital treatment, returned to their homes. All these prisoners of war were suffering in varying degrees from the effects of their own treatment at the hands of the Japanese, which makes their conduct even more praiseworthy.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant, D.A. BARTWELL, late Civil Affairs Officer, AIF Siam.

Richard Middleton-Smith (who was one of the group, as a Malay and Tamil speaker) writes:-

Thank you very much for your letter with the (above) enclosure. I am able to give you names to add to Bartwell's letter. Lt. Col. W.M. James (FMSVF) was in charge of our group. T.F. Carey of the Malayan Civil Service and S. Chamier, a planter, and Major Edge a RAPWI officer were members. There were also a Dutch Civil Servant, a Dutch doctor and medical orderly, whose name I do not have. I don't think we had a British NCO. I never knew who took over the task of actually repatriating the labourers, but assumed it was done by the incoming troops under BMA Siam and BMA Malaya.

I am not sure whether I mentioned that from 28th September to the end of October 1945, I went (alone I think) with Major Edge to South Siam to bring relief to labourers taken from Malaya to build a railway extension to Victoria Point in South Siam. They were a smaller number than on the Burma/Siam bit, but I spent a few weeks visiting camps there before returning to Penang and K.L. with amoebic dysentery!

A few years ago I deposited my "railway" diary with the Imperial War Museum (R.W.A. Suddaby), so I do not have that to refer to.

A FAR EAST TRADER: PERIOD 1927-1957.

Charles Thornton CBE, who had 28 years in a business career with Guthrie & Co., and would also play a part in Malaya's Independence. He was born in Fraserburgh in the north-east of Scotland, and died at 96 in Rotorua, New Zealand, in 2004.

The Guthrie family of brothers, from Angus in northeast Scotland, believed in choosing their employees from the same area as themselves. The presence of local chit-chat they knew, was a powerful influence on behaviour, as the first Highland Regiments also knew when they collected their first recruits from close geographic areas. The Guthrie family had a fine family motto too. It was *Sto Pro Veritate: I stand for Truth*.

It was Alexander who founded the Company. He arrived in Singapore, a sailor-trader, hard on the heels of Sir Stamford Raffles. Some of these first settlers already spoke Malay. They had been trading in South African waters where a number of Malays had previously settled. He was among the first to build a go-down in the scheme planned by Sir Stamford for his new settlement, on the banks of the Singapore River. It was more than likely quite sweet-smelling then – as again now, of course. But when Charles Thornton went out, the smells from the River were penetrating, while the windows in the offices above the warehouse were kept open for air, with no electric fans installed ...

Charles fulfilled the Guthrie local area requirement, being born in 1908 in Fraserburgh of a large family too. He also greatly admired the Guthrie motto, appealing to an idealistic youth as it did. After some earlier work experience, he applied for work as an Apprentice Trainee for the Far East, and soon found himself in the London office then being run by three Guthrie Directors, not of the name, but all three from Aberdeen. This was still the time when clerks stood at their high desks; wore wing collars, and wrote in fine copperplate hand, in smoky London streets. It was not long before Charles went on to Singapore. Ultimately he too, in 1954, would become a Guthrie's Director. He would also become President of the Malayan Chamber of Commerce, over a nine year period, and would represent commerce up to his retirement in 1957. He would be appointed to the Malayan Legislative Assembly in Kuala Lumpur in 1957, and would work as the only European on the committee preparing for Malaya's Independence. He would also be on the Standing Committee for Finance, with both the highly astute Colonel H.S. Lee (later Tun Sir Henry S. Lee) and the first future President, Tunku Abdul Rahman. He served on the Committee that drafted the new Constitution for Malaysia. And notably, all this additional work to his daily round for Guthrie's, was performed without pay or recompense of any kind, neither sought nor given.... He was however, appointed CBE.

Charles arrived out East in the manner of most other young men: i.e. he was handed a list of essential clothing for the tropics (out-dated, of course); and his 1st class ticket for the 28-day voyage. He found himself with 20 stiff-fronted shirts; a dozen or so wing-collars; a dinner suit with two pairs of trousers; an evening tailcoat, and heavy cotton underwear, and of course the tin trunk to put them in. At Port Said he bought an essential pair of light trousers, a perfect fit – until he discovered he had fallen for the Port Said conmen when he first opened the parcel in the heat of the Red Sea, and found his perfect trousers switched for a pair so large they could only be kept up with a tie strung around his middle.... Never take your eye off your purchase he was told! (No doubt he also endured the struggle most young men confessed to – learning to tie that first bow-tie too, aided by the steward....)

On arrival he found himself rapidly flung into responsibility, as most were. He worked alongside a Chinese comprador, who became a very good friend. Charles particularly appreciated the diplomacy with which this man directed him whilst his experience developed.

Traders handled Far East exotica, from the pearls from western Australian waters, brought in by brawny Australians, and by divers from the Rhio Archipelago – to birds nests, abalone and shark fins. Guthries also represented Coutts Bank however. This meant they looked after plantations and properties and land belonging to the heirs of the early pioneers, with rent collections, sales and so forth (and the endless complications of missing/dead owners). He met opium addicts whose opium the government rationed in attempts to wean them from it. And of course young men could make mistakes: Charles fulfilled an early order from the Borneo Government, which became notorious. That government required 100 toilet suites, to be ready for installation. Being a canny Scot, he naturally accepted the lowest tender. Unfortunately this not only cut down his company's commission, but landed the Borneo Government with sets of toilets that became widely and outstandingly notorious: "they could be heard flushing, all over the settlement". (It was a reputation that did not flag, for even I heard them referred to, many years later...)

Charles argued back, however. They were good quality, obtained at a bargain price, so what was a little noise? He claimed he heard no more about them: but he was reminded however, that in future he should *not* forget his company's commission of two and a half percent... His next task soon after that, was when he arrived at his desk one morning, to find 50 Javanese seated on the floor around it, waiting for him....they had been dismissed from an offshore estate and awaited repatriation which, the estate concerned claimed, was Guthrie's job as Guthrie had hired them.

In the Shipping Department next, he learned to solicit cargo, book space, provide loading and unloading gangs as well as lighters, if the ship was in the Roads: he learned that loyalty to the same Chinese labour firm produced the best results. There were manifests and bills-of-lading to prepare, ship-chandlery to carry out – and a strong stomach to develop when politeness required participation in the Captain's obligatory (and often large) tipple or two – to be endured in Charles' case as he was unused to spirits – once business was concluded. He finally plucked up courage to ask for beer.

Charles starting salary was SS dollars 225 a month in his first year, rising annually by 25 dollars per month, and by 50 dollars p.m. in the fifth year of this first contract. Then the first six-months home leave was given, with a free first class passage each way. (At that time the exchange rate was \$8 to the £1). His landlady took \$110 a month: \$15 went to the contract rickshaw puller to take him to the office. There was no Company Provident or Pension Fund until shortly prior to WW2 hostilities beginning. Marriage within the first two contract periods however, would be met by dismissal. Later this period improved for everyone, but visible alcoholics got short shrift.

Visiting cards had their own etiquette, and properly left, could bring invitations for young bachelors. (It took Charles a little time to comprehend the formula however: but Guthrie Seniors kept a close eye on employee appearances, or lack of them, at the correct social functions, and rectified his initial ignorance. Employees were soon into sport – hockey, rugby, soccer, tennis, polo, swimming, golf and possibly some shooting and hunting. Sports participation seemed a major factor in choosing employees in the first place, so many thought, having been asked more about sporting abilities than anything else at their interviews, it seemed. Charles joined the Singapore Cricket Club, and played soccer there. (Seniors demonstrated a little snootiness at times, over soccer playing instead of rugby, but soccer it remained). Charles and his Fraserburgh sweetheart, Johann Esslemont Gatt, had to wait to marry until 1939 – when each still had their halves of the silver threepenny bit, divided at their first parting. Among other Guthrie responsibilities was Singapore's annual payment to the elderly Sultan of Sulu. This was for land originally sold to the British Government through the East India Company, which Sir Stamford Raffles had arranged. Thus, annually a retinue of wives and retainers arrived with the Sultan in Singapore. He had to be ceremonially greeted – by Charles, so Charles discovered – and housed in Raffles Hotel, when the Sultan then required to be entertained. Charles, clad in his (only) shantung silk suit, was briefed. He found the dignitaries attired "in silks and golds and myriad colours to dazzle the eyes, yet dignified and most impressive... it was a useful introduction for the protocol of ourselves as the foreign guests, attending other Sultan functions later in Kuala Lumpur", he told me.

In 1939 Charles was posted north to Guthrie's Estates Department in K.L. – still in the aftermath of a slump, when rubber and tin prices did not cover production costs. Charles, like others, was on a reduced salary because of it, but estates and miners kept their labour forces intact, he said. "The dismissal of hundreds of thousands of mainly Indian (Tamil) employees" (having been brought south from India long prior to this time) "was out of the question for political and practical purposes", he said. But numbers of planters lost their jobs. Guthrie's took the opportunity to re-organise estate management, and to improve productivity. Charles found himself not only doing his normal day's work but also managing a small 1500 acre rubber estate. It was a very difficult time for all planters.

On moving north to Malaya after being in the Straits Settlements Volunteer Force, he transferred to the FMSVF 2nd (Selangor) Bn., Scots Company, in the heavy machine-gun unit. In due course he was fighting the Japanese invasion, first as a Sergeant, and was Mentioned in Despatches. He concluded that part of the war on duty in pillboxes on the beaches of B. Mati island, where a number of attempted landings on the Keppel Harbour area of Singapore were forestalled. After the surrender when most of the artillery gunners on Blakang Mati, as well as most of the Volunteers, were trapped there and communications were down, the Japanese seemed surprised to find them after a long wait. They had witnessed some of the daily killings of the local civilians, taken by tug out from Singapore harbour, thrown into the sea roped together, including women and children, and machine-gunned. On B. Mati the Volunteers buried the hundred-odd bodies washed ashore over that week, where now there is a golf course.

Charles survived the Siam/Burma Railway, but outstandingly. When the war concluded (and they were still on the railway) some Volunteers delayed their return home by two months, to help the thousands of Asian labourers abandoned along the railway line, starving and ill, when Japan capitulated. The group was led by that intense and determined character, Col. W.M. "Jimmy" James also of the FMSVF Selangor Bt., who was an Estate Agent for rubber, coconut and palm oil, employed by Whittall & Co. Also with them was Major Archie Arbuthnott MBE, FMSVF Selangor Bn., and a CA in K.L. who had only one arm following a pre-war accident. There was also Major S.E. Chamier MC of the FMSVF 45 Motor Transport Reserve Coy., a senior planter; also Lt. A. Noel Ross of the Malayan Civil Service, who had served with the regular 2nd Bn. Malay Regiment, and was British Advisor to the Sultan of Kelantan.

Colonel James arrived at the GOC HQ in Bangkok, intent on drawing their attention to the plight of "some 27,000 mainly Tamil labourers from Malaya". The group was immediately attached to the British Military Administration for Malaya to organize the labourers' return to Malaya. The Japanese Command was ordered to send troops, under British supervision, to locate and feed them, while the Japanese would additionally locate the cemeteries of the Allied military dead and clear these of jungle (which they did meticulously, as the cemetery location party sent out afterwards found). A letter from GOC Malaya Command in South-East Asia Command, Lt. Gen. Sir Frank Messervy, acknowledged that the British Military Administration could not have undertaken their duty to help the Asian labourers, without the help and voluntary deferment of their return home, by these men. Charles – who had played a large part in disseminating radio news in his POW camp by official request (but was caught one day with batteries visible – however the search luckily was not by the Kempeitai but by camp guards ordered to look for paper and pencil, not batteries fortunately) – so Charles noted ruefully that despite Messervy's acknowledgement of this group's actions he, Charles, had been smartly returned to the rank of Lieutenant from Acting Captain, "just when the extra pay would have been welcome".

So Lt. Thornton drove Col. James and they checked the state of the main railway bridges south from Bangkok, while the others began organizing the return of the civilian labourers to Malaya. Reception camps were promised to be ready for

them there. Unfortunately, despite this, in practice it is doubtful if these camps materialized in Malaya, given the post-war chaos. Alas too, Charles' wife Jo did not receive the cable Charles had sent her, warning of his delayed return. When he got back to Aberdeen on 31st October, Jo only heard of him the day before he arrived.

When Charles returned to Malaya as the Manager of Guthrie's Estates Department, the new Workers Unions were being encouraged by Britain's Labour Government. These Unions proved a useful platform for Communist activity, Charles believed. A scorched-earth policy, which had also been applied at the Fall to prevent Japanese use of estate and tin mine facilities, was making restitution of industry slow, and companies were required to restore these for production, without any guarantee of government assistance. As the Communist Terrorist threat developed, Charles became increasingly involved in politics. He became Vice-President of the new employer's union: the Malayan Planting Industries Employers Association. It was to counter-balance the Communist-controlled Unions which were developing at the time. Both Asian and European civilians began to be killed by the CTs. Employers Union members became the targets of attack, including their wives and families and the workers too.

"I admired and have the highest praise for the courage of the men on the beleaguered Estates, and their wives who stuck by them", Charles wrote to me. "There were arrangements for the relief of the men in the front line, but inevitably the burden was felt by all of us, from the office to the most distant field. Visiting went on as required, and some protection was afforded by armouring cars as best as possible. If nothing else, it did help to strengthen bonds between the estates and the office people, and where help was needed it was gladly extended. But I came to dread the phone, and that terrible question: 'What kind of funeral, Mr. Thornton?' It wasn't a question of costs, but of the different rites required for European or non-European funerals." Charles' wife meantime, was coping with the visiting dignitaries, as Charles by then was deeply in major politics, as described, and his schedule had become punishing.

But at last they retired: to Edinburgh first, just prior to *Merdeka*, (which was on 31st August 1957). Later for family reasons they moved to New Zealand. Jo pre-deceased Charles there. Charles, a most honourable servant of Company and Empire, peacefully died in his sleep aged 96, on 2 July 2004 in Rotorua. His son John in Rotorua, and daughter Elizabeth in Australia, survive him with children and grandchildren.

Charles never, ever, doubted the value the British Empire gave to its Treaty States out East. He firmly believed the Empire had always been fair, and that its closing days were conducted in the same manner. He argued from a stance of the fullest experience: he had the extensive knowledge of the many spheres covered by Guthrie's trade agency: he had experienced part of the slump era in their Estates Division pre-war, and post-war had been General Manager of that Estates Department too, during the CT period, and with his Directorship from 1954. If there was anything that truly riled him, it was criticism of Empire actions in the Far East. This was most especially if combined – or "when" combined – with what he saw as inadequate knowledge of the surrounding issues, which in those last Empire days he told me was too often the case.

IT SHOULD BE NOTED, that Guthrie's had a proud, and much-appreciated record of care for the families of their employees, wherever they were scattered, following the fall of Singapore. Not all were so fortunate.

Audrey Holmes McCormick: *A long-term correspondent of Charles Thornton CBE.*

INFORMATION EXCHANGE.

Fiona Hunter writes:-

It was with great interest that I read the two editions of *Apa Khabar* that you enclosed. In particular was the June 2007 edition that included a photograph of the Scottish company from Gill Bullivant. There in the front row, 3rd from the right, is my Grandfather!

My Grandfather was a Captain in the 1/SSVF. He joined in 1939 as a 2nd Lieutenant I/C 10 Platoon (Scottish Company). My Grandmother, Father and Aunt managed to leave Singapore on the last flying boat to Australia just before the invasion. They ended up in Perth where my Grandmother worked on the radio, apparently reading recipes(?).

Grandad was also a teacher. He was Senior Master, Malacca High School (1934), Raffles College (1935) before becoming Assistant Inspector of Schools, Singapore in 1937. He taught Science but was also an accomplished concert pianist. He was held in Kitchener barracks from 17/02/1942, Selarang from May 1943 before finally being held in Changi from May 1944. I only hope I have it all correct. He passed away a few years before I was born so much of what I know is gleaned through conversations with Dad, who was a 5 year old when evacuated.

Ros Henry writes:-

The account of the "Double Tenth" in the last newsletter is also mentioned in "A Postal History of POWs and Civilian Internees in East Asia during the Second World War" and it is a good source of information generally.

Although my father was not implicated in the Double Tenth itself, he spent some weeks in one of the cages mentioned being threatened daily with execution for complaining that the guards were taking some of the mens' rations (while he was Mens' Representative). This was a verbal anecdote of his on repatriation.

This book is a mine of information – more details of some of its contents are as follows:-

The full title is :- *A Postal History of the Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees in East Asia. Vol.1 Singapore and Malaya 1942 – 1945. The Changi Connection.* By David Tett. Published by BFA Publishing, PO Box 34, Wheathampstead, Herts AL4 8JH. Chapters 1 and 2 are especially interesting, "Prelude to Captivity" and "The Prison Camps". Also Chapter 11 "The Story of Dr. Stanley and his family". There is a chapter on repatriation (15) with a list of ships, their departure and arrival dates and destinations.

I have done some reading in the Cambridge University Library – Commonwealth Section.

Gareth Owen writes:-

The news items in the newsletters are so many and varied that I have been trying to index them for rapid retrieval. Do you think it would be possible to include a sort of Table of Contents for each newsletter for ease of reference?

You might already know – or be interested to know there is a considerable amount of information on Japanese POW camps in Dutch sources. I have a copy of *Mannenkampen Padang en Bangkinang* by the Dutch researcher van den Bos in which he lists all the Dutch, British and Australian male POWs held in camps in Padang and Bangkinang, Sumatra from 1942-45. My father was among them and I have read accounts of life in these camps written by both Dutch and British internees. Van den Bos last year erected a small monument to all those who died in captivity at Bangkinang, most of them Dutch of course, but several Brits as well. I wonder whether readers would be interested in my father's eye-witness account of the bombing of the *Tien Kwang* in the Straits of Malacca on 14/2/42 and how he escaped by clinging to a raft?

Your website is very interesting and well organized and I must commend the person responsible for it.

N.B. My friend Ian Sampson was also a refugee on the *Duchess of Bedford* in 1942.

Editor:- Many apologies for not getting back to you! Yes, please send us your father's eye-witness account.

Does anyone have any good ideas about indexing the newsletters without wasting too much valuable space? Answers please!

We are all indebted to **Jonathan and Peter Moffatt** for our excellent website – and receive many compliments for it. Thank you very much for all your hard work and expertise.

Anne Scott writes:-

My husband, Gerry Scott, was a Volunteer in the Armoured Cars but was taken out of it in June 1941 for Special Duties. He was a Shell Engineer in Singapore and he with 32 remaining Shell employees escaped on the night of the surrender on the Pulu Bukum Launch which eventually got to the mouth of the Indira River before it collapsed altogether. 28 days later, after some hazardous experiences they got to Colombo. He wrote an account after he reached Colombo, and the original is with the Imperial War Museum.

I enclose the Armoured Cars photograph – very faded, I'm afraid, but I can recognize Gerry 2nd from the left in the back row.

Maybe someone else will recognize a figure they know.

It is good that more and more information on WW2 history in the Far East is getting known. The immediate post-war generation

– except when they had a personal involvement – did not have much interest. They were told more about the war in Europe.

Now, I find, there is a younger lot- grandchildren etc. – who are really wanting to know.



Jill Gibson writes:-

I will pass on anything of particular interest to my brother, Peter. I'm sure the lunch in Soho on Sat.29th will be a huge success. I understand that Penny Dembrey will be there, and she tells me that she's learnt so much this year and heard from people younger than herself who travelled home on the Duchess of Bedford. I would be interested in learning of anyone new who travelled back on the Empress of Japan. My aunt kindly wrote a brief account of her, and our, last hours in Singapore before boarding the E. of J. and her homeward journey to UK. My mother and I got off the ship in Durban to sail for Australia where my elder brother Michael was at school.

Anne Hinam writes:-

My father, Kenneth Dohoo, joined the Malayan Civil Service in 1929, and married my mother on his second leave, in April 1938. My sister Jean was born in Penang, April 1939, and I was born in Johore Bahru, October 1940. In 1941 we were due to go on leave, and because of the war we went to Australia. My mother, sister and I, with our amah, sailed for Perth in August. We were lucky, we didn't suffer the chaos of evacuation. My father joined us at the beginning of his leave in November. News from Malaya grew worse, and he arranged for the Australian Air Force to fly him back to Singapore, leaving on Christmas Day. We never saw him again. Subsequent Christmas Days must have been very sad anniversaries for my mother.

In Perth we knew several families who had been evacuated from Malaya, mothers and children, the fathers interned by the Japanese. I remember playing with Alison and Susan Caldicott, and was delighted to find their names in the MVG address list and get in touch again. Joy Willacy with Judy and Tony, Phyl Aldis with Pat (a boy) and Pam, - Bob Willacy and "Buzz" Aldis were both, I think, planters. Margaret Markham was younger than the rest of us, she was born after her mother reached Australia. And there was Betty Stockham with Thelma and Pat (a boy!)

Joy Willacy had her parents living with her, "Pop" Ansell and Mrs. Ansell, and her younger sister Connie. In Segamat Connie had been courted assiduously by Billy Scott. Could he possibly be the Bill Scott of Newsletter 8, or the W.R.H. Scott of newsletter 9? Anyway, he persisted, and she eventually relented. I attended their wedding on September 18th 1965 in Goring. Connie was over 40 by then, but still dark haired, slim and beautiful. Joy and Connie had a brother, John Ansell. He failed to return from a jungle patrol, in the autumn of 1941, I think, and was never found.

After his return to Malaya my father wrote several letters to my mother. He was unable to say much of what he was doing, as letters had to be passed by the censor. He did promise her that he would do his best to get back to her safely. After the war my mother got in touch with men who had been in camp with him to find out the rest of the story. At the fall of Singapore he got a job as stoker in one of the evacuation boats needing crew. It was sunk or intercepted off Sumatra, he was taken prisoner. He died at Muntok on October 25th 1944, of malaria and starvation. We sailed home to England in May 1945. In August, a few days before V-J Day, my mother received a letter from the Colonial Office informing her of his death.

A few days ago, I received an e-mail from Jonathan Moffatt with the subject: "A tribute to your father". In the published wartime diaries of William H. McDougall Jnr., "If I Get Out Alive", he had found mention of my father, the author saying how well respected and well liked he was. I am very grateful indeed to Jonathan for that.

Michael Doncaster writes:-

I am the grandson of Captain Anthony (Tony) Hewett and the great cousin of Corporal John Tyndale-Powell, both of whom volunteered and fought the Japanese on the Malayan Peninsula in 1941. My grandfather was captured by the Japanese in January 1942 and spent the remainder of the war interned, while John TP was KIA (his death certificate has his name spelt as Tyndall-Powell not Tyndale-Powell, which is correct). Both men are members of the same family, who lived in and around Taiping/Selangor as the family owned and managed rubber plantations.

Unfortunately, the family knows little of the history of both men, although we know more about my grandfather than about John, at least we have some of my grandfather's medals, but none of John's. As family members are getting older and pass on, I felt it important to try to find out more about them so that I could put it all together for direct descendants to understand why things happened the way that they did.

So, to find the website was a real boon, because when I have looked previously, I have not been able to find out much information. So, if you are able to shed any light on what both men did, it would be greatly appreciated.

Firstly, all we have of John TP is that he was KIA. He was born on 26 August 1912 in the UK and spent much of his life in Malaya. We have a fair bit of information about his pre-war life, but nothing after he joined the Volunteers. He served with the Kedah Volunteer Force and that is all I know. His only son died recently and I would like to find out as much as I could for his grandsons and obtain his medals. I will do a search for info on the Kedah Volunteer Force, but any assistance would be greatly appreciated.

My Grandfather, Captain Anthony Hewett, worked for a company called Harrisons Ramsay Proprietary Limited. He joined the FMSVF 2nd Selangor Battalion and undertook full time service from Dec 1941. From a pen entry in a diary that my mother has, we know that he was the second in charge of "D" Company as a Captain and that his CO was Major Roddy Raint. I have a number of photographs of him in his uniform, clearly showing his Captain's rank taken on 23 June 1941 and with the caption on the back of "guaranteed to frighten anyone - even the Japs"!!

I understand again from a short diary entry, that he volunteered to complete Jungle training with DALFORCE under Lt. Col. John Dalley. From there, we know that he was captured by the Japanese as a part of DALFORCE as they went into Singapore with an explosives truck. His diary entry says he was 'scared'. I have no other information about this or his capture because it was

only a one line entry. I do have a copy of a telegram from Harrison's that told his wife, Daphne, then evacuated to Australia with my mother Susan and her sister Lynley, that he had been captured. The telegram is dated 13/1/1942. We know that he was interned in Prisoner of War Camp No. 6, Thailand and he was also in Changi for a period. I know he worked on the Thai-Burma railway for a period and had an exceptionally brutal and ugly tropical ulcer on his leg that flared up regularly and caused him lots of pain until he died in 1982.

With one exception, Grandad never spoke to anybody of his experiences – the only instance that I am aware of was when he invited me to have a beer with him in 1980 before I left Perth to join the Royal Australian Navy, and even then, it was only very general. I don't remember much of his conversation because I was focused on other things at the time. From talking to my mother, aunties and other family members, I know that there was a lot of pain and his service left him indelibly scarred, straining family relationships to the breaking point and I clearly remember some of these things from my childhood. I know that when I took my son and mother up to Singapore, my mother refused to get off the bus and go into Changi, preferring to do the circuit around the island while I took my son to the memorial. Interestingly, the original Changi Chapel is here in Canberra, Australia and I have visited there many times and often feel very close to Grandad when I do.

I have some of his medals, including the medal awarded to British Volunteer Veterans, with the clasp Malaya. I will e-mail separately the contact on your website about medals for both men.

As you can see, there are lots of gaps and I would love to be able to find out more about both men, the men they served with and what they did. I would love to put it all together to preserve it for the family so that it can be handed down. Any assistance that you are able to give me would be very much appreciated.

I have e-mailed Jonathan Moffatt to try to find out more information about them both, and would love to join the Volunteers Group.

Editor:- Jonathan has a copy of Colonel John Dalley's WO344 which is interesting to read. Col. Dalley was on the same boat out of Singapore (The Mary Rose) as Kenneth Dohoo (Ann Hinam's father).

Bill Cranston writes:-

I wonder if you would be good enough to amend my particulars in the next edition of "Apa Khabar"? I am not principally a medal collector, although I do have a number of Malayan Volunteer groups. My main field of collecting and research lies in the Insignia of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei. I am in the process of preparing a book on the subject – the result of 54 years of collecting and research. It will cover all aspects of Insignia – all kinds of Badges, both metal and cloth, buttons and waist belt clasps. My collection dates from the mid 1850s to the present time. It is all embracing, being not only of the Armed Forces and Cadets, but also the Police Forces, Prison Services, Civil Defence, and all uniformed Government and Volunteer Departments. I am seeking information on the Badges worn by the 1940 – 42 Local Defence Corps and the various State ARP Organisations. Any information, including photographs – or the opportunity to purchase such items (I will pay good prices) will be gratefully received. I also need Badge/information of the FMSVF Armoured Car Company.

Thank you in anticipation. Please reply to:- E-mail : b.cranston@tiscali.co.uk if you can help.

Bill Adamson writes:-

Having been a planter myself, I am the son of William and Mabel Adamson, Jong Landor estate, Tapah, situated at the gateway to the Cameron Highlands.

Currently I am researching:-

- (a) all detail relating to Auxiliary Police on the Estates and Tin Mines of Malaya during the Emergency.
- (b) The evacuation of civilians from Malaya/Singapore during December 1941 thru March 1942 and relevant evacuation stories.
- (c) Any records available for Tanglin Boarding School, its pupils and teachers, in Cameron Highlands 1938-41.
- (d) And am accumulating records of Planters in FMS/Straits Settlements/Malaya to add to family notes – most specifically the Batang Padang District of Perak.

Capt. John Bax Retd., writes:-

I am the Step Son of H.J.C.K. Toms, who was with SRA(V) and with others who refused to leave Singapore, and so became a POW. After his release he became Chairman of the Straits Steamship Company and rebuilt the company before retiring and returning to the UK, where like so many of us from the Far East, he could not settle. I was at sea with the Blue Funnel Line (owners of the Straits Steamship Co.) and was there till the British Merchant Navy collapsed. As I could not settle in the UK, I came to Canada in 1967 and have never looked back.

My mother was with The Princess Royal's Volunteer F.A.N.Ys. (First Aid Nursing Yeomanry) who were some of the very first into the camps and also into Changi. Sadly, HQ does have a file on her war service, but it only contains her date of joining and leaving!

Editor:- John was one of only 4 people involved with raising money for the Bidadari Bronze Plaque. This was placed as memorial to all those who were interred at the Christian Cemetery at Bidadari, and then removed when the land was "taken" by the Singapore Authorities for building. In 2004, the Plaque was mounted on one of the old Cemetery entrance pillars which had been relocated to the newly created Bidadari National Park. It was planned to build a Hindu Cupola and a Chinese Temple to cover all the major faiths of those who were buried in and around the original Bidadari cemetery. The Garden itself is situated near the entrance to Mount Vernon camp (Military) and is on Mount Vernon Road off Upper Aljunied Road.

BOOKS

"PRISONERS IN JAVA." Accounts by Allied Prisoners of War in the Far East [1942-1945] captured in Java. Published by Hamwic Publishers. ISBN 978-09547228-8-3

This substantial book, containing the recollections of numerous FEPOWs captured in Java in March 1942, is a remarkable piece of team work by Margaret Martin and other members of the Java Club. The personal recollections are drawn from articles that appeared over 20 years in the FEPOW newsletter, "The Java Journal".

Much has been written about the POWs sent from Singapore to Thailand; the story of the Java FEPOWs and the names of the camps they endured are to many of us less well known.

The story of the Java FEPOWs, mostly RAF & Royal Artillery, is not merely about captivity in Java but followed through, covering such areas as the voyages to the Far East; experiences in Malaya and Singapore; evacuation to Java; capture and escape attempts; hellships to Japan; liberation; repatriation and remembrance. Even with the liberation the anguish did not end – one man came home to a wife dying of TB.

Leslie Audas provides an introduction to the book and tells of his experiences, not only at war and in captivity but while based in Singapore pursuing his interest in botany on expeditions with John Corner, the Director of the Botanic Gardens. The following year he was sent with two thousand other RAF men to the island of Haruka as slave labour – only half survived. There are also substantial contributions from Robert Chapman, co-founder of the Java Club.

Anecdotal history is often criticized by those who perhaps have a limited view of what history is and then selectively use it themselves. In the case of FEPOW histories we are well past the stage where accounts by officers were thought 'sound' and those by other-ranks 'unreliable'. We all recognize that anecdotal accounts may fall short of 100% accuracy but it is the thoughts, memories and opinions of those who were there, not the dry as dust facts that make history interesting.

The book is profusely illustrated with photographs, maps and drawings including interesting, often entertaining cartoons by Sid Scales. It is also very well indexed.

"PRISONERS IN JAVA" is an important contribution to the preservation of FEPOW club literature; a lead to others with substantial collections of newsletters. It adds to the history of the Captivity and contains a wealth of information on the Java FEPOWs.

Reviewed by Jonathan Moffatt. Co-author of "Moon Over Malaya".

POWs from GLODOK Camp in Java



With thanks to Fred Seiker for supplying this photograph. It was sent to him by Val Poss – Executive Director of the 'USS Houston Survivors NG'. It came originally from a man called Walter Ashe, with the information that the men in the photo were from several nations. There is no other clue as to who they are or where this camp was. Any information, please?

"OUR MAN IN MALAYA. John Davis, CBE, DSO. Force 136 SOE and Post-War Counter Insurgency." By Margaret Shennan, with an afterword by Chin Peng. Published by Tempus Publishing. Hardback Book Price £20. ISBN 9780750947107. Due for release 2 February 2007 – but may not yet be out.

"AUSTRALIA'S FORGOTTEN PRISONERS: Civilians Interned by the Japanese in World War Two." By Christina Twomey. Published in Australia. Price AD\$37.95.

Reviewed by Dr. Peter Stanley – director of the Centre for Historical Research at the National Museum of Australia – this book tells the story of the way in which civilian prisoners of the Japanese found themselves treated differently, on their return home, by their compatriots. Not for them a hero's welcome – they were simply ignored, even hounded to repay the cost of their passage home. MVG member Sheila Allan's Diary is mentioned in the book to illustrate the effects of internment on children growing up in the camps – yet another aspect of the general ignorance about civilian internees. Christina Twomey's book seeks to redress the way in which these people have been treated over the decades by their own countrymen. As a former internee explained, "The Japanese treated all their prisoners the same."

"THE FIGHT FOR MALAYA – The Jungle War of Maurice Cotterill." By R.W. Holder. Published by a Singaporean/Malaysian publisher. ISBN 978-981-4217-20-0 Maurice Cotterill was with Tyson, Nona Baker and Vin Baker of Sungei Lembing.

Author of a book called, **"BY EASTERN WINDOWS"** written in the 1950s, **WILLIAM H. McDOUGALL Jnr.** has just produced his diaries of his time as a captive in Sumatra.

For details see: <http://www.uofupress.com/store/product337.html>

"ANN." By Felicity Bartleet. Published by The Memoir Club for her family. ISBN 1-84104-160-2

This is a private publication, but I am sure MVG member Felicity Bartleet would be happy to hear from anyone who would like to read her memoirs.

It is the story of her idyllic childhood in Kuala Lumpur and how she and her mother had to leave because of the imminent war with Japan, and went to Australia. Her father was taken prisoner by the Japanese and later died in a prisoner of war camp in Thailand. She was repatriated to England in 1946 and at the tender age of sixteen she met and later married her husband John. They live in Essex, and are blessed with four children and fifteen grandchildren.

OBITUARIES.

WILLIAM DROWER. MBE.

Bill Drower read PPE at Oxford, and his first appointment was as secretary to the Japanese Embassy, thus acquiring an elementary knowledge of Japanese. In 1940 he was commissioned in an artillery regiment, but his knowledge of Japanese meant that he was transferred to the newly formed Intelligence Corps, and in 1941 he was sent to Singapore. After the fall of Singapore he became a POW, and in May 1942, he was appointed interpreter to an Australian force being sent to Burma. There, he required to relay the orders of the Japanese camp officials and railway engineers to the Australian POW workforce – not an enviable task. He was frequently beaten and spent the last 80 days of captivity in cell. He was rescued on 16th August 1945 by British Officers of Force 136.

Born on January 25th 1915, he died on August 7th 2007 aged 92.

His obituary was recorded in The Times on 3rd September 2007 and may be read online at:

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/obituaries/article2373534>

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL CHARLES WYLIE.

In post-war years, Lt. Col. Charles Wylie was the organizing secretary of the British expedition which conquered Mount Everest in June 1953. But on passing out of Sandhurst prior to WW2, he was commissioned into the East Yorkshire regiment and then posted to the 1st Gurkhas on the North West Frontier. Six months later, the regiment was sent to Malaya, where it was driven back by the invading Japanese, who arrived with air support and tanks – though the Gurkhas attacked the latter with Molotov cocktails which sometimes did not work in the rain. Betrayed by a Tamil, who arrived at the empty bungalow, where Wylie and his men had taken refuge, with the promise of food, they had no alternative but to surrender to the Japanese. "And that was that", Wylie wrote in his book, "Peaks and Troughs", which is still to be published. He added that the Japanese soldiers were "funny little chaps". Wylie said little of his experience on the Burma "death railway", beyond writing that hope had kept him going. He recalled his bemusement two days after the armistice, when prisoners laid out their clothes in red, white and blue to make a Union flag, which attracted an aircraft. Instead of food, it dropped leaflets advising them to boil the water, avoid over-ripe fruit and always to wear a hat – something none of them had possessed for years!

Lt. Col. Wylie died on July 18th 2007 aged 86.

AIR VICE-MARSHALL BILL GILL.

After attending University College School, Leonard William George Gill worked as an aircraft engineer with Airwork at Heston for two years. He gained a private pilot's licence and joined the RAF Reserve in 1936. In November 1937 he was granted a short term commission. After spending a year flying the Fairey Battle, he completed a flying instructor's course, and in September 1938 he sailed for Singapore, where he was attached to the recently formed Straits Settlements Volunteer Air Force (SSVAF). This had just been established as tension increased in the Far East. For the next two years, he trained new pilots on a variety of old biplanes. In 1940 it was decided to create a similar Burma Volunteer Air Force (BVAf), and in October Gill was sent to Rangoon with a small group of instructors to train Burmese pilots on the Tiger Moth. In early 1941 he was sent with some of his pilots to watch for possible Japanese landings on the Kra isthmus. Following the landings on December 10/11th the BVAf was forced to return to Rangoon. In April 1942 the BVAf was re-located to Dum Dum Airport, Calcutta. Early in May, Gill evacuated the Governor and his senior staff from Burma, just before the arrival of the Japanese. He was mentioned in dispatches. Air Vice-Marshal Gill died on 13th July 2007 aged 89.

JOHN LOVE. OBE., MCS.

Lt. 2A & SH POW Singapore to Thailand 10.42 Ban Pong 13.10.42, Kanchanaburi 1.45 - 6.45 to Nakorn Nayak 6.45 - 8.45. Postwar Commissioner of Local Government FOM. Retired 1963. Living in London 1999. Died 8.7.07 [88] Ipswich. Wife Jean.

JOHN E.R. PARSONS.

Born 1914 Glatton, Hunts. Assistant Planter, Rengam Estate, Johore. On leave in Australia 11.41 - returned. Sapper 778 JVE escaped Singapore. Worked the Sumatra escape route 2.42. POW Padang, Sumatra. Died 26.7.07 [93] Peterborough.

CHANGI SHIELD.

We have heard from the Changi Museum about our proposed Memorial Shield. Sadly, the shield is deemed too large for the space designated for it in the Museum. The Director has suggested that instead of the Shield, the 4 Badges of the SSVF, FMSVF, JVE and KVF, are mounted on a horizontal board, and that the "V" band is put as a background print with the write-up. Suggestions for a write-up were sent to the Museum together with a tracing of the proposed Shield. This was along the lines of the wording on the board in the Library in the Thailand-Burma Railway Centre Museum in Kanchanaburi. As the reply from Changi was only received on 24th September, these suggestions were put to the members at the Annual Lunch in London on 29th September. The general consensus was that we should go ahead with the board, as suggested. We must make a decision soon, so that there is time for the badges to be made. It is still hoped to present the Memorial Board to the Museum on 15th February 2008, following the Memorial Service which is held every year for the Civilian Victims of the Japanese Occupation at the War Memorial on Beach Road. If anyone has any objections or suggestions, please let Rosemary Fell know as soon as possible. We hope that some of you will be able to attend this ceremony.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY.

Remembrance Sunday - 11th November 2007.

Please let Rosemary Fell know if you would like tickets to take part in the march past the Cenotaph. Details will be sent later.

Presentation of the Memorial Board to Changi Museum, Singapore - Friday, 15th February 2008.

See above for details.

2nd International Conference at the National Memorial Arboretum - Saturday & Sunday, 31st May - 1st June 2008

Researching FEPOW History Group.

FEPOW and CIVILIAN internment in SINGAPORE, MALAYA & HONG KONG, 1941-1945.

International Keynote Speakers

Mr. Jeyathurai A. (Jeya) - Director of the Changi Museum, Singapore

Tony Banham - Founder of the Hong Kong War Diary website

Sears Eldridge PhD - FEPOW camp entertainments

Guest Lecturers

Peter Francis - Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Dr. Nigel Stanley - Medical aspects relating to FEPOW and civilian internees

David Tett - FEPOW mail and postal history

Peter Thompson - author of "The Battle for Singapore"; speaking on aspects of the Pacific War

Special Guests

Roderick Suddaby - Imperial War Museum

Roger Mansell - Director of the Center for FEPOW Research, USA

Fred Seiker - FEPOW.

Cost & Booking

£100 per delegate for the two days (deposit £40 now, balance Feb 2008. Registration form:- www.researchingfepowhistory.org.uk or contact Meg Parkes on:- e-mail: mm.parkes@talktalk.net or write to: Kranji, 34, Queens Road, Hoylake, Wirral CH47 2AJ.

ANNUAL ACCOUNTS

The accounts have been prepared by SJA Accountants Limited, from 6th April 2006 - 5th April 2007, AT NO COST TO THE MVG. Please send a sae to Rosemary Fell if you would like to have a full set of these accounts. A copy of the Income and Expenditure Sheet is printed on the back of the list of New Members (July 2007- October 2007). We thank the Accountants for their kindness.

CONTACTS.

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SANDY LINCOLN. For the MVG Lunch and contacts with other Volunteer Children.

19, Burke Street, Harrogate, Yorkshire HG1 4NR. E-mail: anlulincoln@googlemail.com Tel: 01423 500351 **NEW E-MAIL**

ROSEMARY FELL. Editor of "Apa Khabar"/Membership/Subscriptions/Donations.

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