



Honorary Chairman - Mr Ron Mockford  
Treasurer - Mrs Margaret Walton  
Committee Members - Mr Keith Andrews, Mr James Whiskens

Vice Chairman - Mr Kenneth Coy  
Secretary - Mrs Barbara James

### BAFEPOW NOVEMBER 2020 NEWS SHEET

#### WISH WE COULD MEET UP AGAIN!

So, how are you all getting on? We're all back in lockdown as the second wave of Covid-19 threatens to overload the NHS and to possibly even cause Christmas to be cancelled! If you are, like George and myself, finding that nothing much has changed as we never really stopped being in isolation, the main difference is that it is now too cold to sit in the garden and enjoy the glorious sunshine. Still, lets hope that when the Spring returns in 2021, we might be over the worst of it and can learn to live with this virus as it won't just disappear. I just imagine what all those FEPOW, Internees and Romusha were facing in captivity and I think I should be so grateful to have as much freedom as I have got despite lockdown and so many comforts to make life tolerable at home - there's no comparison.

Quite a few of you have been in touch either by phone or by email and it has been great to keep in touch. Jan sent me some lovely photos of her dear Dad, Fred and I understood how being in lockdown means that we have the time to sort through various things and to reminisce. The many FEPOW photos and stories that have been on Facebook may well have resulted from folk having more time in lockdown to look through things. We will stay positive and as soon as it is safe we will all meet up again and catch up. BAFEPOW is a very special group and I feel very fortunate to a part of it as, apart from sharing an interest in all things FEPOW, Internee and Romusha, we are true friends and all enjoy our meetings and not being able to meet up has been really sad. I do try to keep the news sheet devoid of personal items but if there is something that you would like to share with us, do get in touch or you may just need a chat, perhaps we could look into having a 'Room' online so that we can link up.

#### REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY AND ARMISTICE DAY

The latest lockdown restrictions have prevented the annual Remembrance Sunday Services and the Armistice Day Services from being held in their usual way. I will still be able to lay the BAFEPOW wreath, hopefully, at my local RBL in a much reduced and social distanced way. I will include feedback on how things went in the December News sheet. However the RBL has suggested that we all stand on our doorsteps at 11.00 on Remembrance Sunday in honour of past wars and those who fought on our behalf - We Will Remember Them!

It has been very strange not to have the usual RBL Poppy sellers out on the streets or in the shops but it has been interesting to hear an increase in interest over why we wear them and should they be just the red ones. There are also purple ones for the animals involved in wars, white for pacifists and now rainbow ones for LGBT folk. It brought back to me a poem that was read at one of our BAFEPOW services at St Martins in the Bullring and I had come across it again in the September edition of the COFEPOW News letter. I had been touched by the poignance of the poem's words for our dear FEPOW, perhaps in contrast to the relevance of the poppy that we take for granted as a symbol of nature's resilience even in the midst of conflict in the fields of Europe, whereas the orchid could have been more appropriate in the Far East. Many of us may have either bought or received an orchid as a gift and they are very beautiful. Having visited some botanical gardens in the Far East where these flowers bloom in abundance maybe we should attribute them to the memory of the FEPOW. Now, when we see orchids, we will think of and remember those who did not survive captivity. For the majority who died in captivity, their remains were interred within the beautiful and peaceful grounds of the Commonwealth War Grave sites but there are those whose remains were never found and who lie 'in a corner of a far off land'. Maybe an orchid grows over them and marks their last resting place -

Here is that poem :-

**NO, NOT THE POPPY** written by FEPOW Dennis Griffith - was on the Thai/Burma Railway

No, not the poppy in this remembrance,  
But the pale orchid, hidden by the clumps of thick bamboo,  
Shadowed by black banana leaves  
Stencilled against a golden sky,  
A brilliant night.

No, not the poppy in this remembrance,  
But the pale orchid  
Alone and flowering  
Above the scorpion,  
Crawling with all its deadly sting,  
Where the snake curves and  
spits out venom.

No not the poppy in this remembrance  
But the pale orchid,  
Leaning toward the unknown graves,  
Long overgrown and lost for ever,  
Hiding the bones whose flesh was once concerned with parishes  
Through half of England, down from  
Northumberland and through the fields of  
Lincolnshire and Norfolk:  
cricket in Cambridgeshire ,and all of Suffolk, down to the Sea.

No not the poppy.  
But the pale orchid blooms in the dark of this remembrance.

**WELCOMING A NEW MEMBER!**

It is with great pleasure that I introduce our newest and youngest member of BAFEPOW. He has very kindly written an item for inclusion and I am very grateful to him for doing that. Thomas, on behalf of BAFEPOW, welcome to our group, we look forward to you joining us at future meetings:-

Hello, my name is Thomas Horrobin and I have been asked to write some paragraphs on the BAFEPOW's and my Great Uncle Joe, who was a member of the organisation.

I first became interested in military history such as World War 1 and 2 at around the year 2018 when I was 11 years of age, as I was now becoming more enticed to learn about the true history of the wars and what really happened. This was because I was growing up more and I was hearing more about my great Uncle Joe. My dad showed me a documentary on the FEPOW's and WW2 in general, but also how appallingly the prisoners were treated, after this I wanted to learn more about the subject. I wanted to find out why these things happened and the reasons for these atrocities. I started to indulge myself into history and documentaries, to feed my interest, but then I found out that my great uncle was one of the prisoners captured when Singapore fell, as I knew he served in the army in World War 2 but I didn't know where.

However, I didn't get to speak to Uncle Joe about his troubles (not that I thought he would want to) as he later died at the age of 98 in 2017, and that is when I was presented with some replicas of his medals for service on the infamous Burma Thailand railway. I started to ask questions about him such as where he was held, and when he came back from overseas what was he like? And as you would presume, he was a changed man, he could not sleep in a normal bed after years of sleeping on a dirt floor in a hut with little food or water. He, like many of his brothers in arms, came back unhealthy to the point where you could see the rib cage of his body. He could barely eat as his stomach had shrunk due to the lack of nutrition. I once visited his apartment in West Bromwich before his passing and I was asked to help put his belt on but he did not want me to as only people such as my grandparents or father could because he was not so fond of my presence. I assumed this was due to the harsh treatment of the Japanese war camps and his anxiety from that awful experience.

All of this inspired me to become a member of my local Air Training Corps, to see what the lifestyle was like, and that is exactly what I did. I am now (after 6 months) finding the organisation, remarkably interesting and fun as it provides structure, as you must address people as their rank with

no consideration for their age whether they are older or younger. This is just a taster, into the structure of military life that many of the FEPOW's and those throughout World War 2 would have experienced. Furthermore, it provides opportunities that would be impossible for me to achieve elsewhere, but most importantly for me it shows the advancements in things such as aeroplane technology. Also, we must learn about many techniques new and old. Furthermore, my grandfather on my mother's side of the family served in the Royal Air Force for over 30 years which adds to my military interest. All these different aspects make me feel proud to be a part of a broader military family.

The realisation that I am able to wear a uniform that, although it has been changed, represents the same proud meaning that we will never give up and always keep fighting as many of the FEPOW's did, which is immense and it gives me goose-bumps every time I come to think of it.

Another proud moment for me is, when I get to lay the wreath in memory of my Great Uncle Joe and the FEPOW's. I will be full of pride as I get to do something for many of the lost and present people who endured such tragedy and sorrow. I know that I will feel very anxious as I would not want to do anything wrong during the ceremony, however I am sure that my sense of pride will overcome my nervousness on the day.



**Thomas Horrobin Age 13 Air Cadet 2078 Boscobel Squadron**

### CATCHING UP WITH RON

Following on from Ron's return home from hospital, I gave Maggie a call and I also had a lovely chat with Ron. He is so amazing and chatted away, telling me about the new stairlift that he has had installed and I could imagine him riding up and down on it just for the fun of it. It made me remember how he took to the mobility scooter at the RAF Cosford Museum on our visit there and how much he enjoyed driving around the museum on it - if it had had wings I think he would have taken off!

I would also like to send our very best wishes to Ann Coy. At our last meeting in March, Ann was due to have an operation on her arm . Unfortunately Ann had to have further surgery and has also been having some follow up treatment since then. We have sent her a gift on behalf of us all to let her know that we are thinking about her and wishing her well. Ann, we wish you a speedy recovery, get well soon, we look forward to all being together again and catching up.

### NEWS FROM THE COMMITTEE

As you know, we are still unable to hold BAFEPOW committee meetings, but we are in touch with each other when necessary to monitor and to continue the matters that may arise during this pandemic. In the item above, I gave an update on our much loved Honorary Chairman, Ron Mockford, who was in hospital recently and is now home again. To make his life easier and also to help his daughter, Maggie, to assist him, he has had a stairlift installed. As a committee, we decided that, out of fondness and respect for our dear FEPOW, and in the spirit of the original FEPOW welfare ethos, that we would like to make a donation towards the cost of the installation of this important piece of equipment. After phone calls and emails between the committee members, it was agreed that we should donate £500 towards the stairlift that will make such a big difference to both Ron and his daughter, Maggie. A cheque has been sent out to Ron along with the very good wishes from all the members of BAFEPOW.

### TONY'S CHRISTMAS LUNCH TOAST AT 12.30 - 13.00 (or at whatever time you eat lunch)

Just a reminder that our member, Tony Truett, suggested that, as we are not able to be together on Tuesday, December 8th for our annual Christmas lunch, we should all raise a glass and make a toast in remembrance of the FEPOW who spent so many Christmases in captivity away from their families and friends on the other side of the world. As each Christmas in the Far East camps rolled around and many had already died from sickness, starvation, cruelty (murder), they must have wondered if the war was ever going to end and if they would be reunited with their loved ones.

'We raise a glass in honour of those who didn't return to their homes to enjoy Christmas with their loved ones, and we also toast those who came back and faced the return to a very different Europe from the one they had left - We Will Remember Them!'

### VJ75 1000 GALLERY OF HEROES

It was quite a challenge that Pam Gillespie and Gail Taylor took on when they set up the VJ Day Gallery of Heroes page on Facebook and invited people to become members. We were asked to submit a photograph of our 'Hero' with a target of 1000 entries before 08/11/2020. Well, after a slow start, word got around and very soon the 'heroes' started to take their places in the gallery, including quite a few from our own group, and the target was achieved on 20/10/2020! The final photograph was of Captain Sir Tom Moore who had given his permission to be the final one.

What a great achievement by Pam and Gail and I sent them my own personal thanks for the work that had gone into creating this very special montage. As well as transferring the photos and basic info onto the gallery (if there wasn't a photo, the subject was given a plain background + their info so that they could still be included), the original post was put on the site and I read most, if not all, of them as they came up. Some really tugged at the heart strings as you can imagine.

### WELFARE GRANTS FOR FEPOW, WIVES AND WIDOWS

If you need help with a grant towards hospital stays, Nursing Home Costs, alterations to the home, mobility aids etc, then please get in touch with:-

Mrs Margaret Martin of the Java Club:- [enquiries@thejavafepowclub42.org](mailto:enquiries@thejavafepowclub42.org)

Mrs Pauline Simpson, NFFWRA:- [enquiries@nationalfepowfellowship.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@nationalfepowfellowship.org.uk)

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