



COFEPOW Scotland

Occasional Newsletter No 5

November 2020



At this time of year, I would have hoped to be meeting fellow members at a lunch to reminisce, exchange stories and memories – to remember. As this was not possible, members were invited to write instead. Thank you to those who have shared their stories, a wonderful selection – some heart-breaking or painful while others show a lighter side. All are testament to what our relatives endured over 75 years ago. We begin in 1940 with an entertaining report submitted by Jon Cooper:

‘My research (for a PhD) has primarily revolved around the life and times of Scottish soldiers in Singapore, not only during the fighting and within the first year of the Interment but also in the years preceding the outbreak of the war as two battalions served as garrison troops on the island.

(From the local Straits Times newspaper 1st of December 1940.)

HEWN WOOD GIVES A TOSS

By the end of November there were enough Scottish battalions in Singapore to stage the biggest Highland gathering in SE Asia. The Straits Times reporter commentated on the music and costumes on display. Again, there was an underlying theme of creating the myth of a formidable fighting man:

‘Men of brawn, men of endurance and men of agility met in contests which took the memories and hearts of Scots men and women who watched them back to the misty island of Skye, Braemar and Strathallan, Central Scotland.’

The event was organised by the St Andrews Society and raised money for war charities. Unfortunately, when it came to the tossing the caber event things did not go to plan. Despite the best efforts of those men of ‘brawn’ and ‘agility’, there had been no successful ‘tossings’ during the opening rounds of the competition. It was only halfway through the competition that the judges realized that the caber [cut down from the local tropical forest] was not only made a little too long but was also made of some of the heaviest mahogany that could be sourced! Not wanting to undermine the reputation of the flower of the Scottish soldiery there was a quick discussion as to how best to proceed. Eventually it was decided to take a saw to the caber and remove a couple of feet of wood. This allowed for successful tossing to become the norm much to the admiration off the on-looking crowd. It would not be the last time the Scottish soldier would succumb to the mysteries of the Malay jungle but at least for the time being the reputation of the Highlanders remained intact.

Jon Cooper

EDMUND WARD, Royal Scots 2nd Battalion, Hong Kong

He became a FEPOW at twenty and was transported on the first ‘hellship’ to Tokyo. With other POWs he was forced to construct Camp Omori, ruled by the notoriously sadistic Mutsuhiro Watanabe. There, Edmund managed to nurse a badly injured man, Fred Marshall, through three years and eight months in terrible conditions. Despite the risks,

Eddie's forced labour at the Tokyo dockyards allowed him to sequester sugar as well as tins of fish, which he smuggled into Omori in oversized shoes and layered trousers. These nutrients kept fatal diseases at bay until liberation on 15th August 1945.

After repatriation, Fred made sure that Eddie got a job interview with a company looking for young men to learn the tea trade in India. In October 1946, at 25, Eddie began a new life as a tea planter in Assam.

Upon India's independence, on 15th August 1947, he was asked to select someone to raise the Indian flag. He happened to choose a little girl of seven facing down much protest. It was a day of triple liberation for him - a country's independence, the second anniversary of VJ-Day, and a rare moment when the sweeper's daughter, deemed 'lowest of the low' was herself a symbol of freedom from a different kind of tyranny.

Michael Ward

JOHN WILKINSON HMS *Exeter*

John originated from the North East, hence the nickname 'Geordie'. He served on board HMS *Exeter* as a stoker on her final commission. On 1st March 1942 the ship was sunk by the Japanese Navy. With the rest of the survivors, he was collected from the Java Sea by the Japanese and interned as a POW at one of their camps at Macassar on the island of Celebes. Prior to joining *Exeter*, Geordie had used his size and power to do very well in the RN Boxing competitions, but because of his size and manner he was disliked by his captors and his senior officers.

One day whilst taking some extra food to his sick shipmate, he was caught and found guilty of stealing and smuggling. For this offence he was placed on the camp lashing post and the "person" in charge, Yoshida, then took his favourite implement, a baseball bat-like stick and proceeded to deliver blows on Geordie's back and legs.

Such was the power and temperament of Geordie that he withstood the beating, still standing after 207 blows. An exhausted Yoshida finally gave up, and kicked Geordie to the ground, the sign that the punishment was complete.

Geordie survived the beating and the internment, living into his eighties.

Yoshida was later found guilty of war crimes and sentenced to death.

Tom Jowett

JENNEFER MARTIN (nee DAVIDSON) born Singapore 1942

Jackie has asked me to write about my birth, and you may be thinking, "She was there all right, but how can she remember anything about it?"

You are of course quite right, but many years later, after she was already a grandmother, my mother was asked to talk to the local WI about internment in Singapore. She said, "I can't do that!" I replied, "Why not type it out and then, if you get stuck, you can read it." So she did, and I still have that typescript which she titled *Cover my Defenceless Head*. I sat at the back of the hall and learned a lot about the first 3 years of my life which I never knew before. Later, we were able to talk about it more.

My mother had been interned in Changi Prison where "E block" was set-aside for some 600 women and children. About 3,000 men were also interned in the rest of the prison and it all became somewhat overcrowded.

Most of the women had to walk the distance from the town to Changi, but with other women who had small children or were pregnant, my mother Daphne Davidson who was 4 months pregnant was driven in a truck with a bench set in around the open back. Her sister Diana was with her as she had a 8 month old baby, but their sister Isobel had to walk the whole way.

By July, the internees were relatively settled 'though never well fed or comfortable in their quarters.

When my mother began labour, she was sent to the local hospital called Kandang Kerbau Hospital, (which means 'Buffalo Pen' in Malay, so the family joke is that I was born in a buffalo pen!) I was born early in the morning of 31st July delivered by an Indian doctor. Some kind Chinese friends heard that Mummy was in hospital and kindly sent an *amah* (a Chinese nanny) to look after us, and during the fortnight that she was there, this lady looked after me and pestered the cook to produce some good nourishing food for Mummy. She also took me up to the flat roof, and came down to say, 'The ladies on the roof think your baby is beautiful'. All newborn babies are of course beautiful, but I must have looked quite odd to these Asian girls with my red hair and pale skin!

Later, Mother found out that they were some of the 'comfort women' forced to accompany the Japanese army on their march down through the peninsular, and they had been accommodated in the rooms vacated by the British and Australian nurses on the top floor of the hospital. They were very badly treated and sexually abused throughout the war.

When the time came to return to Changi Prison, a jeep came to collect us and, just as on the previous journey, beside the driver sat a guard with a fixed bayonet. Mother always wondered what he would have done if she jumped out suddenly! I think it must have simply been the regulation for any prisoner who left the jail for any reason.

Jenny Martin

CAPTAIN RICHARD LAIRD, RASC

Offered the option by his company, Sun Insurance, of a posting to their Shanghai office in 1937 my father, Richard Laird, jumped at the chance. Within weeks of his arrival in the International Settlement he found himself in uniform as a Private in the Shanghai Scottish company of the Shanghai Volunteer Corps during the 1937 Sino-Japanese War. Once things calmed down he got on with enjoying life in Shanghai, before being transferred to Singapore to take over the company's office there shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War. After just a year, during which he also served as a Bombardier in the Singapore Volunteer Corps, he was commissioned into the Royal Army Service Corps and posted to Penang as the Adjutant to the Commander RASC Northern Malaya.

Following the Japanese invasion of northern Malaya on 8th December 1941, Penang was quickly abandoned and he found himself back in Singapore. Here he renewed his acquaintance with the girl who was eventually to become his wife, Bobbie Couper Patrick, who was working for the Special Operations Executive (SOE). They became 'unofficially engaged' on Christmas Eve. Following a brief spell in Johore with West Force, Richard became a POW when Singapore fell. Two weeks before the Fall Bobbie had escaped to Batavia, then Australia, and continued to work for SOE throughout the War.

In April 1943, Richard was selected to join the 'F' Force Thailand-Burma Railway work party. After a gruelling 300 kilometre march northwards from Banpong, he arrived at the Songkurai No2 work camp, 15 kilometres from the Burma border. Following 4 months work on the Railway through the height of the monsoon he was evacuated to the Hospital camp at Tanbaya, in Burma, eventually returning to Changi in December 1943. He was one of only 400 survivors of the 1600 men who had arrived at Songkurai No2 in May 1943. Following the Japanese surrender in August 1945, he was contacted by an SOE operative who was the first outsider into Changi, with a message to get to Ceylon where Bobbie was then working. They were reunited there in October 1945.

The full story is told, in the words of their Memoir and letters, in the book 'From Shanghai to the Burma Railway', published by Pen & Sword.

Rory Laird

CORPORAL ROBERT HALL, RAF

My Dad, Corporal Robert Hall, was a mobile radar operator with the RAF, based in the east of Singapore Island. They were the first to spot Japanese bombers approaching and were ordered to evacuate. They escaped on the ferry "*Tien Kwang*" which was bombed and sank off Pom Pong Island. Dad and others swam over 30 miles via small islands to the coast of Sumatra, reaching the mouth of the Indragiri River and an escape route to Padang. There were over 1000 men there and the senior officer organised them into the unofficial British Sumatra Battalion. Sumatra fell in March 1942 and 500 of the men were sent to begin work on the Thai- Burma Railway, from north to south, the only British POWs to do so.

After harrowing voyages on two hellships they reached Moulmein in Burma, stopping en route to repair Japanese airfields.

After three and a half years of working in more camps than any other group, and losing over 100 mates, Dad arrived home, hoping to take up a pre-war offer of a grant from Bristol City Council to study chemistry at university; this was refused. My Grandma, all 4'11" of her, marched off to a council meeting in the grand City Chambers, plonked herself down on a chair, and refused to move until they heard the story of the suffering of these men. Dad, and any others, got their grants. He graduated MSc and became a research chemist. He died in 1995 after weeks of nightmares, shouting "Pow days"

Stella Henderson

ALEXANDER (ALEX) GERRIE RCOS

From his diaries, written in pencil and sometimes difficult to read:

14th August 1945 News received of Jap surrender (unofficially).

17th Work parties returned to camp.

9th September Repatriation begun, sick first.

10th Allowed out of camp went aboard HMS *Activity* (aircraft carrier)

11th Concert by ENSA. Beginning to get European diet in small doses.

13th Went to Naval Base. On *Attacker*. Had a good time, well looked after by good set of fellows.

20th Everything one could wish for, all services out to give us a good time. Steamed out of harbour 8pm. All too short, given deafening farewell as left, hooters, shouting, lamps flashing. A wonderful reception, a day one will never forget.

21st Sailing along as fast as possible, sea choppy.

22nd 393 miles in 24 hours, beer issue half bottle per man.

24th 373 miles, choc issue, beer issue, still rough and windy. Cinema show.

25th Cape Guardufv, Italian Somaliland on port side, now in Gulf of Aden. Very hot, smooth sea no wind.

26th Now in Red Sea. Beer issue one bottle per man.

28th Film More the Merrier with Jean Arthur good. Beer issue lemonade issue.

29th Arrived Port Said.

30th Ashore all day. Drew winter clothing, cinemas, bands, shows etc available.

1st October Left at midday, good send-off.

4th Vaccinated. Passed Sicily, cold whisky issue.

7th Passed Gibraltar at 8am. Picked up mail, got cable from home, brandy issue. 1240 miles to go.

8th Brandy issue, all ready, sea smooth.

9th Rum issue, issue of tea 1lb.

10th Arrived at bar in evening. Anchored until next day.

11th Sailed into Liverpool Docks at 3pm. Terrific welcome. Streets lined with crowds. Went to reception camp and had good meal. Medical, dental and x-ray. More kit and gifts pay. Filled in lots of documents finished at 24:00 hrs.

12th Went to NAFFI, open all night, had a few beers, stayed up had breakfast, more forms then on the train, left at 09:40. Arrived Aberdeen 20:58 and taken home to Inverurie by car.

Ian Gerrie

THOMAS QUEEN RCOS

My father Thomas Queen (Tommy) was called up and posted to Malaya in 1940 just before the war started as a Signaller in the Royal Corps of Signals. As a four year old I remember little about him except for the one occasion when we were walking in a Park somewhere in Glasgow and I was kicking stones. He told me off and pointed to other children also walking in the park who had no shoes, From that day on I have never kicked a stone!

He was taken prisoner and died in Kranji in early 1942 very soon after he was captured. Over the years, his grave at the Kranji Military Cemetery has been visited quite regularly by my mother, myself and other members of the family. My last visit was in January 2019 after staying with my daughter in Melbourne Australia. My cousin Joe from East Kilbride visited Singapore last year and, on visiting his grave, found someone had placed a poppy. His was the only grave with a poppy and to this day I do not know who planted it.

Michael J. Queen

DOUGLAS (DOUGAL) THOMSON RA

On 4 February 1941, during his one week embarkation leave, Dougal married his sweetheart Kate Cameron in Edinburgh. On 21 March he sailed from England to India and then on to Singapore. A prolific letter writer, he continued writing letters home until his capture after the Fall of Singapore 15 February 1942. He was rescued on 28 August 1945 and sent his first letter soon after. The following excerpts are from some of these letters.

7 September 1945 Thailand

Rescued (typed). [A cable had already been sent.]

Sweetheart, a line to tell you not to expect me on the first parties to return because I am not in the best condition to be travelling too far. It was a great relief to know that we were free, especially as the party of 1000 men that I was with was stuck in the dense jungle with a starvation ration. Apart from the meagre issue from our hosts, it was too far from civilisation to even buy an egg.

All my love, sweetheart, and you might remember me to Dad and Mum.

Yours ever, Dougal

14 January 1946

Leave Poona tonight for Bombay. Expect to sail on the 15th January and believe the name of the ship is HMHS *Somersetshire*. I'll be seeing you. Love, Dougal

26 January HMHS Somersetshire [nearing Port Said] I can't tell you the exact date we will arrive in England but can only guess it will be round about the 10th Feb., probably Liverpool, but you don't need to worry about that. When we arrive in England I'll wire right away and remember DO NOT GET EXCITED whenever I do get in, just take it nice and canny ok?

Cheerio and all my love, yours aye, Dougal

On 13th February 1946 Dougal eventually got home to Kate, stepping alone from the train at Pittenweem station in Fife. They had not seen each other for five years. Later they moved to Anstruther and, with two daughters, Elizabeth and Anne, lived to celebrate their Golden Wedding Anniversary. Dougal died on 22nd July 1991.

Elizabeth Thomson

IAN FARGIE LYLE RAPC

My father was born at Lothianburn in 1916. In 1935 he enlisted in the Royal Scots and trained at Glencorse Barracks. In 1937 he transferred to the Royal Army Pay Corps (F9) and trained at Tidworth and Aldershot.

In 1939 he was posted to Hong Kong and captured in 1941. He was initially held in Shamshuipo but sent on the 6th draft on the ship '*Soon Cheong*' to Nagoya 2B and then 8B Tateyama along with Portuguese, Dutch, French, and Russian prisoners. The prisoners were forced to work for the Mitsubishi Aircraft Company. American prisoners soon joined them perhaps notably Samuel B Moody U.S Air Force who went on to be a member of Congress and gave evidence at the War Trials. His book '*Reprieve from Hell*' is interesting. The camp was liberated by the Americans and Ian returned to Edinburgh via Manila, Australia, Canada, and America.

Following discharge from the army, Ian studied and took up forestry but was forced to give this up due to ill health. A chance meeting with his former Colonel led to him taking up the post of museum curator at Glencorse. There he built up a comprehensive collection of weapons for which he was well respected for his presentation and knowledge.

Ian was one of the founder members of the Scottish Returned FEPOW Association which had an office at 13 Alva Street, Edinburgh. He was the welfare officer and during this time had several discussions with Eric Lomax "The Railway Man". He was also one of the founder members and welfare officer of the Penicuik Branch of the British Legion. He was able to help many ex-servicemen obtain disability pensions.

Not long before his death in 1972 he was interviewed on the BBC programme '*Down your way*'. (It is hoped the recording will be soon be transferred to a CD.)

Jokingly he said that his favourite piece of music was '*Don't fence me in*' sung by Bing Crosby and the Andrews Sisters.

Donald Lyle

M ELIZABETH ENNIS nee PETRIE

In 1976 while visiting Australia, my mother made extensive enquiries to track down the whereabouts of one of the now famous Changi quilts. She knew that one had been given to the Australian Red Cross, but no one in that organisation seemed to know about it. Mum was a determined lady and not easily deterred. We travelled to Melbourne to ask in person at their office with no success until an elderly volunteer said, "I remember seeing something like that in the cupboard at the top of the stairs."

Sure enough, when we followed her up three flights of stairs to a dark, dusty cabinet on a landing – there was the quilt bundled up at the back of the shelf. Mum's joy and pride were tangible, as well as something much deeper when she touched the square that she had embroidered with the words '*Homeward Bound*', the message of hope for my father in the men's camp. The quilt is now in the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.

Another incident with my mother was more disturbing. We were walking together near Sydney Town Hall and noticed a group of young Boy Scouts in front of us. The young boys were with two Scout Leaders. The group was Japanese, and all were wearing khaki

coloured uniform. As we neared the intersection, one of the men turned around, smiled politely and asked directions. My mother swayed and appeared to faint with shock. After a minute or so, she recovered, and we thanked the young man for his help and concern. Mum explained that in her mind she had seen him as a Japanese soldier, and momentarily thought she was back in Changi. This fear had been lurking with her for over fifty years. Fortunately, my mother and father survived and cherished their friendships from that awful time. They lived to enjoy sixty-three years of marriage that began amongst the chaos of Singapore on 11th February 1942, their wedding day. Occasionally I have been asked 'Did my parents wartime experiences influence me?' Most certainly. Now as I grow older and hear more about "COVID lockdown" I appreciate more and more what dynamic people all these FEPOWs were, as individuals and with their friends. I am proud to share these memories.

Tish (Patricia) Ennis

Thank you again to all contributors for sharing these stories and memories
of their relatives.
We will remember them.



Please keep all our FEPOW and veterans in your thoughts and
support the work of Poppy Scotland

Thank you to Poppy Scotland for allowing use of their logo.

Jackie Sutherland, November 2020