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THE BAFEPOW NEWS SHEET FOR FEBRUARY 2022

MARKING THE FALL OF SINGAPORE ON FEBRUARY 15TH, 1942



Thanks again to Keith Bettany for sending me this picture that his father, Des, created in 1945. Des himself did not leave any comments as to what his thoughts were behind his depiction of Churchill being confronted by a Roman legionnaire but I have my own feelings about the Fall of the Far East being down to Churchill's total mishandling of the situation out there and the vulnerability of a poorly equipped force and the potential political and economic repercussions if Japan managed to take over the whole of the area. This picture says a lot to me (BJ) so take a look at it yourself and see what it makes you think - then follow this link and read what comments have been made about it by others who have looked at it - very interesting! Could at least one of the ships represent the Exeter or are they the Repulse and the Prince of Wales. Some suggest that news of the Normandy Invasion could have inspired Des to draw it but see what you think and you can add your own comments:-
<https://changipowart.com/archives/1025>

It isn't really necessary to go into detail of what 15/02/1942 means to ourselves as members of BAFEPOW. This is just one of the dates that saw the IJA and other Japanese forces continue their sweep across the Far East which began in December 1941 but it is probably the most significant as it was the biggest defeat/surrender by the British Armed Forces in military history and, if Churchill had listened to requests for equipment/supplies, it may have been avoided. The Japanese themselves had not envisaged capturing this iconic British territory with such comparative ease and they certainly did not have plans for coping with the huge number of POWs that were suddenly under their command. About 80,000 British, Indian and Australian troops in Singapore became prisoners of war, joining the 50,000 taken by the Japanese in the earlier Malayan campaign

We tend to focus our attention on the fall of Singapore but we must also remember that Hong Kong fell on Christmas Day 1941, Borneo fell on the 16th December 1941, Sumatra fell on the 14th February 1942, Java fell officially on the 8th March 1942 and the Philippines finally fell in April 1942. French Indochina was given over to Japanese control in 1940 after the fall of France to the Germans.

War in the Far East did not begin with the attack on Pearl Harbour. The Japanese had been heavily engaged in war from the early 1930s and their atrocious treatment of their chosen enemies during this time was not unknown to the wider world. Questions should be asked as to why Japan was allowed to get away with what they were doing in the Far East but the United Nations did not exist back then and Britain was not equipped in any way to challenge the usurpation of one nation over another in Europe let alone the Far East, though after the experiences of the first world war, it could be argued that it should have been, along with France, Russia and America as well.

So, when and where did war involving Britain, its Empire and America break out in the Far East? The notorious date is Saturday 7th December or Sunday 8th December 1941 depending on differing time zones. It can be confusing to envisage time using different zones so putting the times in terms of Singapore time : -

On Sunday 8th December : -

At 30 minutes past midnight, North Eastern Malaya was invaded by Japanese and Thai forces.

At 2.30 am on 8th December Pearl harbour was heavily attacked by the Japanese.

At 4.30 am Singapore was bombed by the Japanese.

At 8.00 am Hong Kong was attacked by the Japanese.

At 12.30 pm the Philippines were attacked by the Japanese.

All this within a twelve hour period which was amazing by any standards of armed conflict at that time. It was Japan's form of blitzkrieg (or lightning war), after all, Japan seems to have modelled its approach to warfare based on that of Germany, just as it modelled its Kempeitai on the Gestapo. (or 'jest a po' as Churchill would say)

In conclusion, when we commemorate war in the Far East at this time of the year we ought to think about the suffering which took place over the wider area of the Far East from half past mid-night on the 8th December onwards and not just Singapore on 15th February. We ought also to think about the suffering of the indigenous populations of the various countries in the Far East. Their sacrifice will never be reckoned or recognised and yet it is very much deserved.

And so, let's not go over the events that resulted in the FEPOW, the Internees and, ultimately the Romusha, starting the long and awful imprisonment that caused them to have the utmost cruelty and deprivation imaginable inflicted upon them and which caused many thousands of them to die from their maltreatment so far from home and their loved ones and just say - "We Will Remember You!" After the end of the war, our own FEPOW were repatriated slowly and by many different routes and they returned to a very different homeland to the one they had left. Many had great difficulty adjusting to 'normal' life again and around the country numerous FEPOW Associations were set up to provide support to them. This was mostly in the form of 'welfare' and those in need received small payments but, as much as anything, they could meet up with comrades who knew of and understood what they had been through and how those memories dwelt with them and affected them. Over the years many of these clubs have closed or amalgamated with others and our own BAFEPOW is an example of this and we are so lucky to continue meeting and remembering them.

In remembrance of what they were facing from those fateful dates as the Far East fell to the Japanese, below is an extract from an address made after the war by a well known POW Padre of the time -

Excerpt from Padre Noel Duckworth's address at Ely Cathedral, 17th February 1946

When the time came to lay down our arms, disappointment, rancour, was in most of our hearts. We were to spend three and a half years of our young lives and face some of the

most impossible, fantastic and incredible hardships they or any human being could imagine in his wildest flights of imagination.

During those grim days, clad in the slimmest of clothing, existing on the smallest possible amount of food; we laboured in conditions of squalor and filth and horror that no European mind could ever imagine. We were engaged in manual tasks of labour often from five in the morning to nine at night, with no messages or news from the outside world, taskmasters who drove and bullied and tried to defeat us in spirit, and asked us to do the most impossible feats of labour which elephants were wont to refuse. Yet we kept ourselves together, knowing that in God's good time we would return.

This was written by Padre Duckworth with his first hand knowledge and experience of what had lain ahead of them and even those who did not share his religious conviction would surely agree that they kept themselves together in comradeship, determination and the hope of an end to suffering so that they could be re-united with their loved ones once more.

It had been hoped that we as a group would have been able to organise our own commemoration in Birmingham for the 80th Anniversary but sadly due to Covid it has not been possible. Travel restrictions also led to the abandonment of plans to travel to Singapore for this event for some of us but Tony Truett's idea of sending a wreath there that his friend, Dr Wei Shin Leong, has very kindly offered to lay on our behalf so that we can at least feel that we are there in spirit if not in person. The lovely staff at the Lady Haig Poppy Factory were so wonderfully helpful to me in arranging for a wreath to be made and dispatched to Singapore on our behalf and I got quite used to having a chat with Diane at the factory during my contact with them to arrange this.

I am so grateful to the Lady Haig Poppy Factory staff for their help, their friendliness and interest in making our commemoration go ahead. The wreath has already arrived safely at its destination in less than a week from being dispatched and in next month's news sheet I hope to be able to let you know how the commemoration has gone. Sadly the High Commission in Singapore has decided not to observe this anniversary but we are extremely fortunate to have been invited to join in a service to be held at the Kranji Graveyard by the Malayan Volunteers Group.

To my delight Diane at the Poppy factory sent me a picture of the wreath and, even better than just that, a photograph of the wreath maker himself. I felt that it merited being included in our news letter and below is the message that she sent to me (BJ) along with the pictures:-

Good Morning Barbara,

Thank you once more for your order for the Birmingham Association of FEPOW poppy wreath with carriage to Mr Wei Shin Leong in Singapore. A huge thanks also for the additional donation of £8.20 to our welfare fund.

Our head wreath maker and King's Own Scottish Borderers veteran Alastair Skene made the wreath this morning and I have attached photographs for you so that you can show them to your fellow association members. I also passed on your very kind comments about the service and how much you like the wreaths made here in the factory to Alastair and his face lit up when I told him. Our veterans take great pride in their work here and it is extremely heartening to hear such lovely feedback.

Your wreath will be dispatched today.

Thank you for your patience in waiting to make your much valued order.

Keep safe and well.

With kind regards,

Diane Hogg
Sales and Office Assistant



SOUTHAMPTON FEPOW IS AWARDED THE FREEDOM OF THE CITY



One of the last living survivors of the Burma Railway in World War Two is to be awarded the freedom of the city of Southampton.

Bert Warne, 102, spent three and a half years as a prisoner of war and his weight at the time dropped to six and a half stone (41.3kg). He worked on the Burma and Thailand line while a prisoner of the Japanese.

The honour is being awarded to Mr Warne because of his "commitment to ensuring that those who served in the Far East theatre of war are remembered", Southampton City Council said.

Mayor Alex Houghton said bestowing the honour was a "great privilege" and the highest the city council could give to someone.

He added: "His own story of survival and his continued work to support prisoners of war is both inspiring and incredible."

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, the Java Club by email:- margaretmartin1944@sky.com

Mrs Pauline Simpson, NFFWRA by email:- enquiries@nationalfepowfellowship.org.uk

The BAFEPOW news sheet is put together by the association secretary, Barbara James, and, hopefully, it contains items of interest to members. You are very welcome to suggest future topics or to submit items for future inclusion. You can contact me via email:- bmjames142@yahoo.co.uk or by phone:- 07954104857

