

NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2016

Researching FEPOW History Group

In this issue:

2017 conference

Research updates

Cambridge Changi archive

Book news

We're Heading Back to Liverpool!

LEGACIES OF FAR EAST CAPTIVITY: SHARING FAMILY ARCHIVES, HISTORIES AND THE POST-WAR IMPACT OF HEALTH ISSUES

9 – 11 June 2017, Liverpool

In conjunction with the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM), we are co-hosting the 6th International FEPOW History Conference, 9 – 11 June 2017.



Featuring FEPOW camps in Taiwan and Borneo; *Friday Night at the Flicks* – FEPOW history in film; PTSD and tropical disease, the post-war aftermath for FEPOW and their families, plus much more. Topics will emphasise biographical material and narratives.

Confirmed speakers include: Anne Wheeler (Canadian film producer and creator of *A War Story*); Frank Taylor (Australian military history tours, Borneo camps); Rod Beattie (Thailand-Burma Railway Centre); Jeya Jeyadurai (Changi Museum Singapore); Michiel Schwartzberg (International Committee of the Red Cross); Flora Chong (ALPHA Education – teaching younger generations about the war in the Far East).

A registration form is included on the back page, and at: <https://fepowhistory.wordpress.com>

Delegate Fee held at £120 for the weekend. BOOK EARLY! – registrations must be received before mid-September 2016.

Please send enquiries to Lizzie Oliver: lizzie.oliver@outlook.com

RESEARCH UPDATES

FEPOW ART STUDY

~ Meg Parkes

As reported at the 2015 conference in Liverpool, the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine's (LSTM) study, Medical Art Behind Bamboo, has produced a wealth of new material documenting the medical and psychological battle to survive Far East captivity.

Discussions about staging a major exhibition in Liverpool to showcase this material are progressing and a decision about the venue is expected in the summer. Once the venue is secured applications can then be submitted to funding bodies. It is still early days but the research is exciting considerable interest.

We continue to gather material so if readers know of any examples of the artwork of British military personnel created during captivity, please get in touch with Meg Parkes (meg.parkes@liverpool.ac.uk).

UBON POW CAMP

~ Ray Withnall

For 3,035 POWs, Ubon was their liberation camp and the start of their journey home. It was established in



Image: Ubon POW Airstrip. © Ray Withnall.

February 1945 for the purpose of constructing an airstrip for the Japanese Air Force to defend the area in the event of a retreat from the west, in particular following their heavy defeats in Burma in 1944.

The camp's detailed medical records list 705 admissions and a total of 8,475 bed nights in the six months the camp was open. Cases of malaria and dysentery were the most common complaints, but there was a wide range of other illnesses the medical staff had to deal with.

At the time of liberation, the Seri Thai (Free Thai) Movement in North

East Thailand, were being trained and armed by the Special Operations Executive Force 136, under Major David Smiley. His role changed when the Japanese surrendered in August 1945 and he became responsible the POWs and the

rounding up and disarming of the Japanese troops throughout the area.

Most of the British, Australian and Dutch POWs were

on their way home by the end of September, but the Dutch had to wait a little longer mainly due to internal conflicts in the Dutch East Indies, where most of them lived before the war started.

Japanese troops were interred in the camp guarded by the Royal Thai Army until they could return to their homes, via Bangkok.

Further information, including a database of POWs held at Ubon, can be found at:

<https://fepowhistory.wordpress.com/ubon-airfield/>

WRITING A NOVEL ON THE POW EXPERIENCE

~ Toby Norways

In February 2015 I was awarded a studentship by Newman University, Birmingham, for a PhD in Creative Writing. My novel is based on the experiences of my father, William 'Bill' Norways (1918 - 1986), a FEPOW in Singapore and on the Thai-Burma railway.

Bill Norways was a commercial artist before being drafted into the 2nd Cambridgeshire Regiment, and created a large portfolio of over 200 sketches, paintings and photographs recorded 'in extremis' within the POW camps.

My novel inevitably covers the extreme brutality of life as a POW under the Japanese. However, the story also focuses on the unlikely friendship Bill struck up with one of his Japanese prison guards, Kameo Yamanaka. The two men never met after the war but corresponded between Cornwall and Japan until

Bill's death in 1986. Despite a pledge in the correspondence that their two families would remain friends forever, the connection was lost when Bill died.



Image: Kranji Dysentery Ward.. Bill Norways, 1944. ©Toby Norways.

The autobiographical side of my novel follows my attempts to track down the living relatives of Kameo Yamanaka and the discovery of poem written by my father engraved on a tomb in Japan, and a meeting with the Yamanaka family.

The full story of Toby's journey to Japan is told in the following *Guardian* article:

<http://gu.com/p/4bhea/sbl>

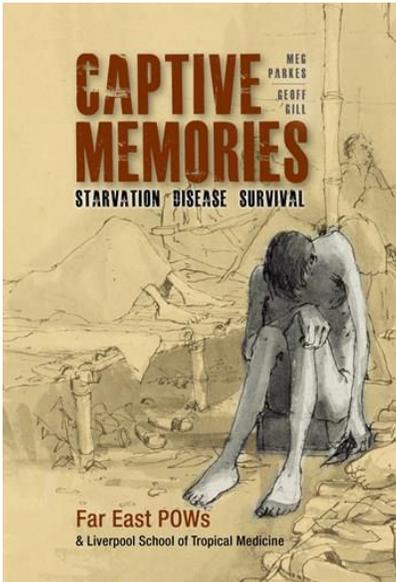
GET IN TOUCH

Toby is interested to hear from any FEPOWs or COFEPOWs, particularly those with a connection to the 2nd Cambridgeshire Regiment.

You can email Toby at:

Toby.Norways@beds.ac.uk

BOOK NEWS



Following extensive media coverage around the publication of *Captive Memories, Far East Prisoners of War and Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine* (Meg Parkes and Geoff Gill, Palatine Books, May 2015), the book is now in its 2nd edition, having sold out within six months.

A 50-minute audio-documentary based on *Captive Memories*, and featuring several veterans interviewed by Meg, was commissioned by the Wellcome Trust. *Unspoken: The Forgotten Prisoners of War* was launched on 8

December on Wellcome's prestigious online magazine, Mosaic Science (<http://mosaicscience.com/story/far-east-prisoners-of-war>).

Meg and Geoff were invited to host a public event at the Wellcome Library on the evening of Thursday 10 December. One of those attending was FEPOW veteran Dr Jan Bras, younger brother of Dutch medical officer Gerrit Bras. The brothers were captured in Java, sent to Thailand and later transported to Japan

Surviving the Death Railway

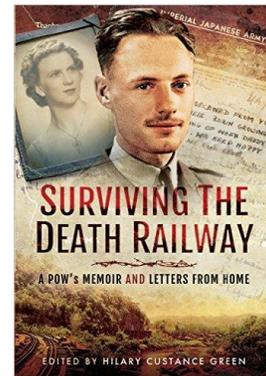
~ Hilary Custance Green

Each person caught up in the conflict in the Far East in WWII has a unique story. This is particularly true for those FEPOWs sent in groups to different parts of the Japanese-conquered territories to labour in mines, on airfields, in shipyards and, most notoriously, on railways. As groups moved on, individuals became detached from their units and their mates, held up by sickness or sent on the whim of their captors in another direction.

My father, Barry, captured with the 68 men of his Signals unit, worked on the Thailand-Burma Railway. He wrote his memoirs – stories of building the Wampo Viaduct by hand, attending the cholera pyres,

assisting at amputations by day and dancing as a chorus girl by night. He told us about the men for whom he felt responsible, 27 Line Section, and how when he was near death, weighing 5 stone, 13 lbs, two of them, skeletons themselves, gave up a precious rest day to carry him 7 kilometres.

He also told us about my mother, Phyllis, and her role in keeping hope alive among the wives, mothers and other relatives of the missing 27 Line Section men. Women from the tenements of Glasgow to the villas of the home counties wrote to her. Their letters are preserved and give an insight into the personalities of these persistent, loyal, but devastated women and men, left in silence in Britain.



I have put these letters and memoirs together to record this part of our history from both fronts. 'Surviving the Death Railway: A

POW's Memoir and Letters from Home' will be released by Pen and Sword on June 30th.

You can find Hilary at: greenwritingroom.com



Image: A Cholera Tent at Hintok Camp. Courtesy of Jack Chalker.

BURMA RAILWAY MEDICINE: A NEW BOOK FROM THE LIVERPOOL SCHOOL OF TROPICAL MEDICINE (LSTM)

~ Geoff Gill

Following the success of *Captive Memories*, a second book from Meg Parkes and Geoff Gill is scheduled to appear in late Spring 2017 entitled *Burma Railway Medicine*, also published by Palatine Books. It is the result of a 10-year project led by Geoff and is the first in-depth study of disease, treatment and mortality on the Thai-Burma Railway. It will cover the fall of Singapore from a medical perspective, as well as the early appearance of dysentery and beriberi in Changi Camp, and how the medical officers responded. The move to Thailand and Burma followed and as well as dysentery, malaria

and beriberi; the railway presented medical officers with the particular challenges of tropical ulcers and cholera outbreaks. These major medical problems had to be responded to with little in the way of drugs and equipment, and the book will recount in detail the remarkable inventions and innovations used by the medical staff, supported by individual POW experts and camp workshops. There will be a chapter concentrating on oral history memories of disease and treatment on the railway, and finally an account of the disease aftermath (both physical and psychological) suffered by many returning POWs.

As with *Captive Memories*, profits from *Burma Railway Medicine* will be used to support further Far East POW projects at the LSTM.

UPDATE FROM KEW

~ Keith Andrews

Following the anniversary events on 15 August 2015, there was a large increase in the number of research enquiries, so much so that I have been going to The National Archives at Kew almost every Saturday. While not complaining, as I believe it is important to assist those seeking information, the downside is that

my research projects are on the back burner so to speak.

Those projects are: The Long March – June to August 1945; The Singapore Coast Guns – completing the research started some time ago; compiling an index for WO361 (Far East Section) and if possible organizing the information as a research aid; Force 361 and the SOE in the Far East, War Crimes Affidavits – researching to find what information is in the Archives.

A number of enquiries have caused one to question the validity of the information found, and the important message coming from that is never to trust one source of information – cross check it against other files to prove or disprove if at all possible. This applies in particular to the dates on the Japanese POW Index Cards in WO345. That is my experience over the past 5 years.

DIGITISATION OF CHANGI ARCHIVES

~ Dr John Cardwell

Supported by
wellcometrust

The Royal Commonwealth Society Collection at Cambridge University Library is carrying out a project to conserve and digitize the archives of two Second World War civilian internment camps on Singapore, generously funded by a Research Resources Award from the Wellcome Trust. In August 2017, the records of the Changi and Sime Road Camps will be made freely available via Cambridge Digital Library. They will be of immense interest to the families of internees, academic researchers, students and the general public, since few survivors ever spoke of their traumatic ordeal. The existence of this unique archive is largely due to the determination of Hugh Patterson Bryson (1898-1977), a career member of the Malayan Civil Service, who himself had been interned in Changi. From 1952 to 1967, while serving as Secretary of the British

Association of Malaysia and Singapore, Bryson collected original documents and encouraged association members to record their experiences.

The archives vividly reconstruct the lives of Singapore's civilian internees. They include official records of the camps' internal administration. Nominal rolls document personal data: an internee's name, date entered camp, marital status, occupation, age, nationality, and camp address, and were arranged in three parts – men, women and children. Other sources shed light upon accommodation, camp discipline, relations with the Japanese authorities, work parties, diet, health and hygiene, recreation and leisure, the delivery of mail, and repatriation at the end of the war. Newspapers circulated within the male camp, such as the 'Changi Guardian', reported upon events,

disseminated news of sporting, musical and theatrical societies, and published fiction, poetry and humour. These official records are complemented by the correspondence, diaries and memoirs of individual internees – very poignant personal accounts of the psychological and emotional experience of internment.

The project team in Cambridge is eager to get in touch with surviving civilian internees and their families, and would be very grateful for any assistance from readers.

For more information about the project, please visit the RCS website:

<http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/departments/royal-commonwealth-society/projects-exhibitions/changi-project>

CONTACTS



The RFHG blog can be found at fepowhistory.wordpress.com. For smart-phone users, the QR code for the new website is copied to the left.

We also have a Facebook page at 'Researching-FEPOW-History' and are on Twitter: @FEPOW_History

RFHG

Treasurer: Mike Parkes – mike.parkes@talktalk.net

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Editor: Lizzie Oliver – lizzie.oliver@outlook.com

RFHG members: Bernice Archer, Keith Andrews, Martin Percival

Web: fepowhistory.wordpress.com

Editor's note: *If you have any suggestions for articles, or wish to submit an article for the next edition of the newsletter, I am very happy to hear from you. Either email Lizzie (lizzie.oliver@outlook.com), or via the 'contact' page on the RFHG website.*



Researching FEPOW History Group's
6th International Conference, in association with
the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM)



**LEGACIES OF CAPTIVITY: SHARING FAMILY ARCHIVES, HISTORIES AND
THE POST-WAR IMPACT OF HEALTH ISSUES**

Friday 9 – Sunday 11 June 2017

REGISTRATION FORM

Please complete in block capitals and black ink, one form per delegate

Name: (title)

Address:

Postcode Tel No:

Mobile: E-mail:

Are you related to a FEPOW? If so, please give brief details:

What areas of Far East captivity are you specifically interested in?

Delegate fee: £120 per person for the weekend

Deposits – a non-refundable deposit of £60 per delegate payable now; balance due by 31st March 2017.

- I enclose my deposit of £ (cheques payable to **Researching FEPOW History**).
- Reservations must be received by 30 September 2016**

Programme – see website for full details.. Please indicate interest at this stage in the following options:

- Friday night supper at the Liverpool Medical Institution
- Conference supper, Saturday night
- Mersey ferry trip, Sunday evening
- Visit to local archive/museum, Monday 12 June

Hotel: The Liner, Lord Nelson Street (behind Lime Street station) is offering preferential rates to conference delegates Thursday to Sunday nights (<http://www.theliner.co.uk/>; tel:0151 709 7050).

Delegates must make their own reservations, quoting The Liner's discount booking code: **1706LSTM**. Whether booking at The Liner or elsewhere delegates make their own arrangements.

Signed: Dated:

Please return completed forms with cheques to:

Mike Parkes, Kranji, 34 Queens Road, Hoylake, Wirral CH47 2AJ; email: mike.parkes@talktalk.net

For further information or any enquiries please contact: Lizzie Oliver: lizzie.oliver@outlook.com