

# THE BURMA CAMPAIGN SOCIETY

## NEWSLETTER

March 2005

Number 6

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### A NOTE OF APPRECIATION.

In a letter to Phillida Purvis saying that he would be pleased to speak at the Symposium entitled *Enemy and Friend, Britain and Japan at War and Peace* on September 9th, His Excellency the Japanese Ambassador wrote the following:

“I am informed of the continuous efforts the Burma Campaign Fellowship Group and Burma Campaign Society have been making for the cause of peace and reconciliation between the veterans of Japan and Britain. May I express my admiration and gratitude for all the work you and your members have done for promoting peace and friendship between our countries.”

John White

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### SAD NEWS.

Mr. Susumu Nishida has died on 25th February 2005 at the age of eighty three.

He was a most courageous army officer, who in March 1944 fought the battle of SanGshak as a Company Commander with eleven bullets lodged in his body. Later, in June 1944, as the Adjutant of General Miyazaki's brigade, he fought to continue cutting off the Kohima-Imphal road after the main 31 Div had retreated from Kohima.



After the war he acted as the President of many ex-army Associations until contracting diabetes. In 1984, he was the leader of the visiting team from 31 Div who came to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Susumu Nishida

Masao Hirakubo

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### THE KOHIMA WAR RECORD.

We had no bullets, no food and, of course, no reinforcements either of men or arms. We stood before the enemy's overwhelming iron power, holding the position we had captured in Kohima solely under orders to 'defend unto death' and our strong conviction that we would never capitulate and that victory was at hand. Our group had not experienced a single defeat since fighting in Central China. No matter how much more strength the enemy had; no matter how much bombing we received, so long as the enemy did not enter our position, we were confident enough to take off our loincloths and remove lice in the dugout.

When the enemy appeared before us, or when we had orders to attack, our duty was only to bring down who ever was in front. We all accepted that that was our only means of survival. When enemy tanks came, we had no option but to attack them. Using handmade bombs, petrol-filled soda cans or yellow gunpowder wrapped in cloth, we ran towards the tanks and aimed at the caterpillar tracks.

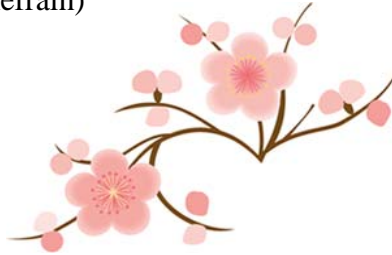
Such battles that put iron-power against human-power inevitably resulted in painting the hills of Kohima red with the blood of young soldiers. Leaving grief-torn hearts in the hills of Kohima, we retreated into the rainy mountains of Arakan, threatened by hunger, disease and the enemy. There was nobody to console us in the battlefields of foreign lands, and sometimes I longed to comfort myself. At such times, I reflected my feelings in words to a tune I learned in the vulgar world. I sang 'Tha-a-ank you, tha-a-ank you, for all your trouble'. The song touched a chord with many of my fellow soldiers and eventually it came to be sung throughout the battalion. The song could be heard

in the midst of the bloody fighting in Kohima and during our muddy retreat in Arakan with wounded mates on our backs. It came to be known as the Kohima War Record.

#### The Kohima War Record.

1. 7378 Ukhnul  
Sangshak, Tuphema and Kohima  
Kicking about without a moment's breath  
Not even a blade of grass escapes the 58 Regiment  
Tha-a-ank you, tha-a-ank you, for all your trouble.  
(Refrain)
2. In the jungle, covered with green  
Afternoon showers of bombing  
Vegetation scattered, turning to empty field  
Not a bird song to be heard  
(Refrain)
3. Planes in the day, mortars at night  
Bullets coming down like rain  
The flesh attack team leaves again today  
For motherland one has to say  
(Refrain)
4. When there is no more rice, we eat grass  
When there is no more tobacco, we smoke weeds  
When there are no more bullets, we fight with flesh  
The flag of the rising sun raised in Kohima  
(Refrain)
5. The battle of Kohima, hiding in a hole  
Sleeping with a tank mine in one's hand  
Dreamt of capturing alive an enemy tank  
Victoriously shouting 'Banzai'  
(Refrain)
6. Seizing enemy pillbox  
One lights a victorious cigarette  
Another day in safety  
The crescent moon also smiling in the sky  
(Refrain)
7. With only three shells per mountain gun  
Even 58 Regiment soldiers  
Cannot hold Kohima  
If only they had shells, but we can only shed blood  
(Refrain)
8. Arakan in the rain, forever  
Wandering with stretchers in hand  
No rice supplies in sight  
We move searching for food  
(Refrain)

9. Suffering from malaria and beriberi  
 Though have come to Humine, Humine  
 One Koa cigarette among three soldiers  
 A cup of rice to last seven days  
 (Refrain)
10. Fellow soldiers rest in peace  
 Your military courage will live forever  
 For the defense of motherland  
 And as a cherry blossom in Kudan  
 (Refrain)



Lieutenant Shosaku Kameyama  
 Commander  
 2nd Heavy Machine Guns Coy  
 58 Infantry Regiment, 31 Div.  
*Trans. Keiko Itoh*

## RETURN TO SINGAPORE AND SABAH.

With the sudden end of the war against Japan, the British and Indian forces in Burma had rapidly to occupy a vast area of South East Asia to repatriate allied prisoners of war and intern and repatriate Japanese Surrendered Personnel to Japan. The 20 Indian Division was sent to French Indo China. From September to December 1945, I was head of the Civil Food Control Organization in Saigon, responsible for food supplies for the civil population, as the Annamites, as we called them then, blockaded the main cities at the beginning of what became the Vietnam War.

On 26th December 1945 I sailed from Saigon with 32 Indian Infantry Brigade to take over responsibility for military and civilian supplies of food, petrol, oil and lubricants in Borneo, Sarawak and the Celebes Islands (now Sulawesi) until May 1946, when I returned home for demobilisation.

We landed on Labuan Island off the north coast of Borneo, where I established my Headquarters. To the west was Sarawak, ruled by the last of three white rajahs. Across the bay was Brunei, then a village on stilts. To the east was the Chartered Company of North Borneo, the last territory run by a company, and now Sabah. All was peaceful and it was wonderful not to have to carry a revolver. It was a tropical paradise with palm trees, sandy beaches and coral strands. I traveled everywhere by Sunderland Flying Boat.

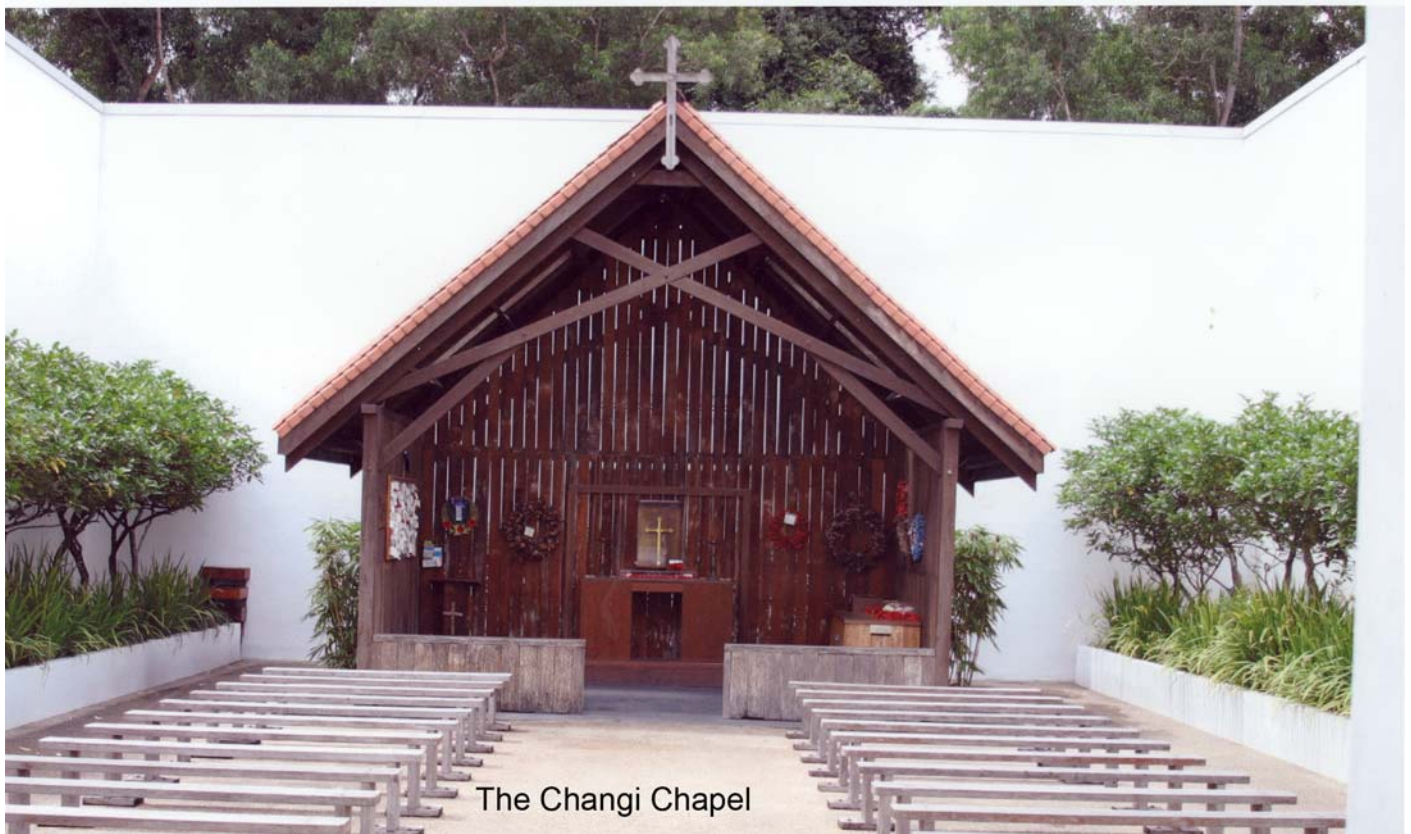
I returned to Singapore and Sabah, for the first time after fifty-eight years, on a Royal British Legion Pilgrimage, the first ever to follow the route of what is known as the Borneo Death March.

I was aware of the huge developments which had since taken place in Singapore, but I was still amazed at all I saw. We went to Kranji Commonwealth War Cemetery at the western end of the island, where 24,346 men and women who died, the majority after being taken prisoner, are commemorated. We visited the Museum and Chapel at Changi, where the old prison, in which Commonwealth prisoners of war were held, has been replaced by two modern prisons.



The Cross of Sacrifice in Labuan

I was even more astonished at the development of Labuan and Sabah, which form part of Malaysia, with their fine modern housing, hotels and airports, and their apparently thriving economies. The population of Labuan had increased



The Changi Chapel

from 6,000 to 75,000 and Jesselton, a village, as I remember it, had become Kota Kinabalu, the capital of Sabah, with a population of 400,000. Many still live happily in houses on stilts over the water.

We attended Remembrance Sunday at Labuan Commonwealth War Cemetery, where 3,908 war dead are buried. It was a most moving occasion with huge support from the local people and Christian and Muslim services in different parts of the Cemetery.

A fine road through the jungle now runs from Sandakan via Ranau to Kota Kinabalu, following the course of the Borneo Death March in 1945. According to the Memorial Stone at Ranau, all 2,000 Australian prisoners, except six who escaped, died, and all 750 British prisoners also died on the 160 mile march from Sandakan to Ranau.

We interviewed Yumpil Huron, an elderly man who had witnessed the prisoners passing through his village. I was so glad that the local people today bore no ill will against the Japanese. Our highly intelligent guide, Mary Ann Chew, who had also acted as guide to parties of young Japanese, said that they were totally ignorant of the fate of the prisoners of war, and were deeply shocked at finding out what had happened.



Yumpil Huron

Keiko Holmes was with us and we felt humbled and crushed by the memories of the suffering of the prisoners of war, but so glad that the graves of those who died lie among such friendly people, who remember their sacrifice with sorrow and gratitude, and warmly welcome British and Japanese alike to their country.

Philip Malins

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## THE ANIMALS IN WAR MEMORIAL.

The Animals in War memorial was unveiled by the Princess Royal at Brook Gate, Park Lane, London, three hundred yards south of Marble Arch, on 24th November 2004. It stands in the broad grass area between the two carriageways and will be seen by thousands every day.

In the early days after David Backhouse had won the competition to design and sculpt the Memorial, he discussed his ideas with the late Lt. Colonel Charles MacFetridge of the Mountain Gunners, a BCS member, and myself, a

Mule Company Commander. David explained that he wanted the central feature to be an equine animal, their losses being the greatest of all. The Cavalry naturally wanted a horse. Charles and I wanted a mule. We prevailed, but the question then was should it be a Mountain Artillery or an Animal Transport Mule? Although there were much fewer of them, we all admired these superb, larger mules, and I supported Charles in championing a Mountain Artillery Mule for the centrepiece.



**The Animals in War Memorial**

After more thought, David decided on a curving wall in Portland Stone, some seventy feet wide with a cleft in it. The centrepiece was to be a full size bronze Mountain Artillery Mule leading an Animal Transport Mule up towards the opening through which the public could pass to a magnificent one and a quarter size bronze horse with dog at heel. On the front of the wall are carved full size profiles of an elephant, camel, and other animals. David has thus achieved a masterpiece, and the Memorial looks set to become the best loved in London, if not in the country. In addition, the Indian Army is planning a similar memorial.

So real are the mules that I can feel myself back in Burma, with the wonderful feeling that they are alive, bringing back all the nostalgic, joyous and poignant memories of these marvelous animals which served us so devotedly. You can look up into the eye of the immensely powerful horse and see gentleness and kindness.

The inscription on the front reads “This Monument is dedicated to all the Animals that served and died alongside British and Allied Forces in Wars and Campaigns throughout time. They had no choice.”

That on the reverse reads “Many and various animals were employed to support British and Allied Forces in Wars and Campaigns over the centuries, and as a result millions died, from the pigeon to the elephant, playing a vital role in every region of the world in the cause of human freedom. Their contribution must never be forgotten.

# ABERYSTWYTH SCHOOLS - A FIRST.

Tenweddig Welsh School and Penglais English School in Aberystwyth have become the first collective subscribers to the Burma Campaign Society.

Behind it lies the wonderful story of how, nearly twenty years ago, Gwilym Davies, a Corporal in the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, who fought in the Battle of Kohima, met Frank Evans, who had been a prisoner of the Japanese. They decided together that the time had more than come for reconciliation.

Gwilym, then Chairman of the Mid-Wales Branch of the Burma Star Association, telephoned the Japanese embassy, saying he wished to go to Japan to seek reconciliation with his former enemies. The Embassy put him in touch with Masao Hirakubo, a Japanese Burma Campaign veteran, then a businessman resident in London, who was also seeking reconciliation.

Masao, Gwilym and his friend, the late Hirwin James, another Burma Campaign veteran, went to Japan together for twenty one days at their own expense.

Gwilym felt that there was so much hate in the world that it was their duty to seek reconciliation, and they received a wonderfully warm welcome from members of the All Burma Veterans Association of Japan. The late Mr. Susumu Nishida, their President, suggested that it was particularly important that hatred should not be passed from generation to generation and that a great effort should be made to create lasting friendships and understanding between school children and the younger generations.

The outcome was that for the past fifteen years Gwilym, with the great help of the Japanese Embassy and magnificent cooperation from the schools, has arranged for parties of British and Welsh children to visit Japan each year, where they stay in Japanese homes, and for Japanese children to stay in the Aberystwyth area with families whose children have been to Japan. Friendships have thus been formed which will last a lifetime, not only between the children, but in many cases between parents in Wales and Japan. In addition, a Japanese lady is provided by the Embassy to visit schools and talk about Japan and its culture.

The Burma Campaign Society is delighted to welcome these two schools as the first collective subscribers and pays tribute to Gwilym Davies, the heads and teachers of the two schools, together with the parents and the children, for their deeply inspiring work in furthering friendship and understanding between our two countries.

Philip Malins

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## COMMITTEE NEWS.

As part of the Chairman's Report at the Committee Meeting on 31st January, Masao Hirakubo, whilst preparing the joint memorials at Three Wheels and at Canterbury and Coventry Cathedrals, tried to review, after sixty years, how he had spent 1945.

**1st Jan.** I was in the 124 Army Hospital at Taunggyi in Shan State.

**21st Jan.** I was discharged from hospital and transferred to 15 Army Retraining Unit at Khaungdaing on the west shore of Lake Inle, for a month. The Commander sent me as an additional Accounts Officer to feed the Unit and procure food and drink from nearby towns. There was a valuable hot spring and my weight increased by 10 kilograms a week.

**22nd Feb.** Left the Retraining Unit to rejoin the front line forces along the Irrawady River through Meiktila, Kyaukse, and Tada-u to Myotha, where I returned to HQ 31 Div and was assigned to the 4th squad of the Action Unit. I opened a delivery post at Chinthelet and closed it on 11th March and retreated in the monsoon season to Tada-u, Kyaukse, Nagu, Kalaw, Pinlaung, Loikaw and Kemapyu towards the Mawchi Mountains.

- 14th Apr.** Seconded to 111/ 31 Battalion as its Accountant Officer.
- 15th June** Arrived at Ontabin, thirteen miles north of Martaban, where all aimed to regain the soldiers' high spirit and power.
- 20th July** Moved to Kawtamalein to prepare a strong position for mountain guns.
- 16th Aug.** Heard the Emperor's Ceasefire Decree at 2.30 from the Battalion Commander. Lethargy, and how to explain to my men about the Ceasefire
- 20th Aug.** Reassembled at Ontabin and moved towards disarmament at Para on 20th October.
- 20th Oct.** Japanese Surrendered Personnel at Zemathwe Camp.

Masao Hirakubo

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## **REPORT FROM THE ALL-BURMA SOCIETY.**

At the Memorial Ceremony held on 14th November 2004 at the British Commonwealth War Cemetery at Hodogaya, Yokohama, a wreath was laid for the All-Burma Society by Mr.Ren-ichi Sugano and for the Burma Campaign Society by Mr.Shuichiro Yoshino.

On 5th December, a thanksgiving party was held at Kudan Hall for three students from Burma who had completed their studies at the Asia Institute in Utsunomiya.

On 22nd December a Memorial Service was held at Shinagawaji for the more than a thousand who died taking criminal responsibility in the second World War.

The All-Burma Society's monthly reunion takes place on the second Wednesday at Kaikosha.

Masao Hirakubo

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## **LET WAR MEMORABILIA COME HOME.**

I received a request from our Email Committee Member, Kiyoshi Nishiha, for help in returning Japanese war memorabilia, which can be identified, to Japanese soldiers or their families. The Japanese have been most helpful in providing Japanese memorabilia and military equipment for 2 Division Kohima Museum in York.

The most likely items for return are the Japanese Military Note Books carried by each Japanese soldier with his name and address in the front. These will be immediately identifiable in Japan. There are severe restrictions on the import of swords into Japan and it is not proposed to return them.

I shall be grateful if anyone who wishes to return memorabilia will send them to me at 11 Dorchester Court, Dorchester Road, Solihull, B91 ILL, for forwarding to Japan, where Japanese veterans will do their best to trace the soldier or his relatives and send it to them. In case of doubt, please telephone or fax me beforehand on 0121 686 4691.

Philip Malins

*The communication referred to runs as follows:*

Dear Friend,

If you have Japanese memorabilia from World War II and wish to return them to the original owner or family, you are welcome to send us a photo of the item(s) to be posted on this website. In the photo, please be sure to include any clues that may help to identify the original owner. Letters, characters or numbers will be helpful, even if not legible to you. This information can also be sent separately if it cannot be shown in the picture or is not clear enough.

Please provide your contact information so that we can keep you informed of our progress and notify you if the recipient is located.

Feel free to send your comments, questions or wishes so that this website can be an effective and satisfactory service to you.

Kiyoshi Nishiha  
Nishinomiya JAPAN  
nishiha@rose.sannet.ne.jp

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## COMING EVENTS.

**Tuesday, 12th May: 11.00 am - 2.00 pm: Third Annual General Meeting of BCS** at the Mitsukoshi Restaurant, Lower Regent Street.  
**6.00pm – 8.00pm : A discussion meeting** at the Nippon Club **About the importance of Mule Transport in the Burma Campaign** will be led by Philip Malins.

**Saturday, 20th August: 2.00 pm: Annual Reconciliation Ceremony at Three Wheels.**

**Sunday, 21st August: Annual Services of Reconciliation** at Canterbury and Coventry Cathedrals are in the planning stage. Full details will follow.

**Wednesday, 7th September: 10.00 am: A Symposium, *Enemy and Friend, Britain and Japan at War and Peace*** in three sessions entitled *The War in the Far East*, *The Aftermath*, and *Today and Tomorrow* will be held during the morning and afternoon. The list of speakers and all other details will follow.

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*Erratum: The masthead of the September 2004 Issue erroneously stated that it was Number 4, when it was in fact Number 5.*

### **Editor's Note.**

*For comments, criticisms, and questions concerning the Newsletter, please contact John White, 25 Cadogan Place, London, SW1X 9SA, Tel/Fax 020 7235 4034. Material for inclusion in the September 2005 Issue should reach me at the above address by 31st August at the latest.*

Edited and Produced by John White and Lucien Chocron

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