

Researching FEPOW History Society

The Newsletter

No 1 November 2006

Introduction from our Chairman

I'd like to thank you all for the tremendous response to the April 2006 Conference which created a great spirit of togetherness and interaction and fired many of us up to get out and research. For myself I have got back into the regular habit of visiting the National Archives, Kew; renewed my research on the Argylls and helped develop a Malayan Volunteers Group website.

For some of you a particularly rewarding experience was to meet FEPOWs who had been in exactly the same POW camps as your loved ones. This 'consultative' role of FEPOW delegates we hope to continue at future Researching FEPOW History events.

In May 2007 we will be holding a one day Beginners Seminar at the NMA and look forward to seeing some of you there. As well as our professional archivists from the NA & IWM, Keith Andrews & Martin Percival will be joining the team to share their research expertise and experiences.

Plans are already being made for the 2008 Conference and we already have a number of very interesting UK based and international speakers pencilled in.



Delegates at the National Arboretum May 2006

We hope you enjoy our first newsletter.

Jonathan Moffatt, Chair

To Boldly Go, Again and Again

It's Saturday morning and the alarm going off means it's 5.00am, so it's fall out of bed, shave, shower, something to eat and drink, and then on the road by 6.45am latest.

Yes, here we go for another day at the National Archives in Kew, Surrey, and in case you were wondering, I live north of Leicester, hence the early start. I tend to go to Kew on a Saturday to avoid the weekday traffic and, trust me, that is a bonus. If I have major project work on for someone, then I plan a weekday visit of a few days, and stay with my brother in law who lives in Ewell, Surrey. The distance may be shorter, but the travel time is just as bad.

I normally arrive at Kew around 9:00, in time for breakfast before the Archives open at 9:30. The only downside, if you like, for going on a Saturday is the fact that records ordering and copying close a little earlier than on a weekday, but you cannot have everything. In planning the trip, I will have a reasonable idea of what I want to achieve, and will have planned for it, and

searched the Catalogue from home. The documents can then be ordered in advance of my visit through the National Archives Web site, but to do this you need a reader's ticket, and this will not be issued to you until your first visit.

A typical Saturday will start with a hunt for a particular Japanese POW Index Card or Liberated POW Questionnaire. Depending on the information that has been given, which in some cases is no more than a name, or perhaps date of birth as well, will affect how long this will take, and how successful the search will be. The ideal is to find the POW Index Card, but if the box is out, and there is no chance of it being returned that day, that then goes on the menu for the next visit.

As an example, I was contacted recently by someone who was looking for information about her great uncle. All she knew was his name, that he had he served in India before the war, and his date of birth. Now the name and the date of birth are the key things there, but to narrow the field

further I asked for more detail. I then had his wife's name, his parent's names and where they had lived. All of this will or should appear on the card, and in this case it did.

Not all of that detail will appear on the questionnaire, so the card is the item to go for as it gives service number, unit, and branch of service: all important for obtaining service records. I could not recover the card on my first visit, more success on the second.

If the person concerned did not return home, then the Japanese POW Index Card is all that will exist in the archives.

Liberated POW Questionnaires are not always guaranteed to be there, and if they are, may not be as complete as we would wish. This can be frustrating as these forms, if completed in full, should list the camps, the dates the FEPOW was there, and the camp commanders. If that information is not there, then there is little you can do but grind your teeth and think damn!

Some forms may not be in the files concerned and my own thoughts are that some may be in the American Archives. A number of searches for those liberated by the American's from Formosa (Taiwan) or Japan are not at Kew. Others may be in War Crimes files and tracking these is something I am just starting to do.

Going back to the example above, this great uncle's questionnaire was also recovered. He had been captured in Singapore and shipped out to Formosa. To find more detail I sent an e-mail to Michael Hurst MBE, the Director of the Taiwan POW Camps Memorial Society to see if he had any information, and he had. The end result was that he put me in touch with the FEPOWs granddaughter, I put her in touch with the person who asked me to look in the first place, and two sides of a family who had never met now have.

A happy ending this time, but that is not always the case. So, that takes up the first part of my day, and these searches are for others seeking information, and who cannot readily get to Kew.

As I have both of the Index Card and the POW questionnaire relating to my father, it is on with the rest of my day. I tend to try to spend the next few hours on various projects that I have set myself, or feel that should be investigated on the chance that some information may come to light that may help fill in the missing details regarding my father's time as a FEPOW. However I am also looking for information that may well give more details about the full FEPOW story.

My logic for this is very simple and a little naïve: if Lt. Col. Toosey, for instance, left a report on conditions on the Railway, who else did?

Answer: a number of others, Lt. Col's Swinton, Knights, and Lilley to name but three, and there are others covering various aspects of life as a prisoner of the Japanese, very satisfying when you find them, raising even more questions when you read them. This does not apply only to the Burma-Siam Railway, but to other areas.



Keith Andrews and Rod Beattie outside the Imperial War Museum, London

Looking for the Liberated Questionnaires of senior British officers is another project I am involved in, concentrating on the Burma-Siam Railway first, and then expanding outwards to cover other areas where there were FEPOWs. Great when they have the details; makes you wonder when they are blank. There is no way to my mind that a lieutenant colonel could get away with submitting a blank form, or not submitting one at all, so this could indicate that there is a file with a report somewhere, all I have to do is find it. In the case of Lt. Col. Holmes, the senior British officer in charge of Changi, his reports to date are in three files; at least that is all that I have found at the moment. There was no questionnaire on file, so I am still searching.

One other major area of search is that for the Forms Q, the War Crimes forms, that to date have not been found in any quantity. Now it could well be that these, along with some questionnaires are in the War Crimes files, but to be honest until the research starts in depth, I cannot be too sure of that. These files so I am told are filed by the name of the accused, and place of trial. Terrific! Just how many ways are there of spelling the same Japanese name, the record to date is three.

If time permits, I also look through the catalogue at the National Archives, be it on line or the good

old paper index to see what I can find of interest. Time consuming, but it should be remembered that the title of a file may not reflect its contents, for example a file titled "Prisoner of War Lists for the Far East" which looks like a potential goldmine of information, may only contain detailed information as to how these lists should be constructed. That would go on the "not of much use to me at the moment" list. Frustrating yes, but at least there is one less file to worry about.

Each visit will vary, but the basic framework remains the same. Although at times exasperating, it can be incredibly rewarding and satisfying. Remember that this is a 60 plus year old jigsaw puzzle, with many missing pieces, and I suspect many buried ones too; anything you find is a bonus and all the work described here only covers the WO (War Office) files.

I am not a professional researcher; I have a day job. What research skills I have I have picked up the hard way, or learnt from John Brown who has become a friend over the past few years. He is researching a particular area of interest in relation to his own father's time as a FEPOW, and he, like me, has a day job. We bump into each other at Kew from time to time.

Research is both fascinating and rewarding. If we can do it, anyone can.

© Keith Andrews

Fallout

Much has been said, although only a little written, about the inspiration for the wholly successful and memorable inaugural conference held at the National Memorial Arboretum this April. It is not the intention here to go over the ground covered by the RFH website on the subject of the conference but to recap on it, six months down the road, from a slightly different angle.

All of us who attended will have ringing in our ears the extraordinary applause that Rod Beattie received when presenting his piece on the research he has done for the families of prisoners on the Thailand Burma Railway and the extraordinary difficulties he has encountered along the way to establishing the TBRC (Thailand Burma Railway Centre). There was a pulse in the meeting room after his talk that kept coming back to me over the summer and I am looking forward to an all too brief visit to the TBRC en route for a lecture and research tour of Australia in a few weeks time.

This, it struck me, as I was preparing this first newsletter, was one thing that our organisation is all about. Making connections between people and places; understanding our own places in the history of the last sixty years and above all, understanding how to appreciate the value and importance of it.



Back row L-R: Ernest Muston, John Pratt, George Duffy, John Baxter, Sid Tavender, Tom Jackson. Front row L-R: Geoffrey Mowat, William Lawson, Fergus Anckorn, Harry Hesp, Ron Mitchell

The fall out from our inaugural conference in April 2006 has been just what it should be. Warm and surprised. Warmth for the feeling of being among friends and like minded people, surprise that one is not, after all, alone.

The most important message for me was the interest in people: fathers, brothers, uncles, grandfathers may have been in the prisoner of war camps but there were also sisters, mothers, wives, aunts and grandmothers in the civilian internment camps. People with names and a past. All the facts and figures collected together by researchers and authors only really make sense when one remembers that behind each statistic are real people.

There was an immediate and unconditional yes to the suggestion that a further conference should be arranged and staged in the spring of 2008. As Jonathan mentions in his introduction, the organisers will be seeking speakers of international standing to address the second conference and hope to cover areas of research that were not addressed in this year's conference as well as hearing updates on research undertaken over the next two years.

Meanwhile we plan to publish two newsletters a year and would welcome any comments from you or suggestions for what you might like to read in future editions.

Julie Summers

New Book

Prisoners in Java - available shortly.

The Java FEPOW 1942 club has met annually in Stratford-upon-Avon for over 20 years. It is still a thriving club and to celebrate the fact they are shortly to publish a book entitled: Prisoners in Java – Accounts by Allied Prisoners of War in the Far East (1942-45) captured in Java.

This is a collection of articles which have appeared over the years, written by members and published in the club's Java Journals quarterly newsletter.

For anyone who like me is researching FEPOW history relating to those who were captured and held in Java, this book will be a mine of information. Watch out on our website (www.researchingfepowhistory.org.uk) for full details (and a review), when the book is available, hopefully before Christmas.

Meg Parkes

Forthcoming Events

11th November 2006

BBC Radio 2 at 9:45pm after the Armistice Day Service from the Royal Albert Hall

'Beyond the River Kwai' presented by Terry Waite

Interviewing FEPOWs and historians, Terry Waite takes a look at the whole subject of the church in captivity. The programme will be available on the BBC 2 website for a week after broadcast in case you miss it or want to listen again.

5th May 2007

From the feedback we received from delegates at the inaugural Researching FEPOW History conference in April this year, we have arranged a specific event for beginners to FEPOW research.

The one-day seminar will go ahead if there is sufficient uptake and we will confirm with all interested parties at the beginning of February.

FEPOW History Research for Beginners

Saturday 5 May 2007 at the National Memorial Arboretum, Alrewas, Staffs

Guest speakers include:

Roderick Suddaby, Keeper of Department of Documents, Imperial War Museum in London and Alan Bowgen, Research, Knowledge and Academic Services, The National Archives, Kew.

Also contributing: Keith Andrews (Q forms), Martin Percival (FEPOW Club Newsletters), Jonathan Moffatt, Meg Parkes and Julie Summers. In addition several FEPOW will be joining the group for the day.

The seminar will focus on how to get your formal research started, interpreting personal records and accessing information from national collections.

£40 per person (cheques payable to Researching FEPOW History)

www.researchingfepowhistory.org.uk

Committee

Chair: Jonathan Moffatt
JonathanMoffatt@aol.com

Secretary: Meg Parkes
mm.parkes@btinternet.com

Treasurer: Mike Parkes
mm.parkes@btinternet.com

Newsletter Editor: Julie Summers
info@juliesummers.co.uk

Postal address for correspondence: Meg Parkes,
Kranji, 34 Queen's Road, Hoylake, Wirral, CH47
2AJ