

The Records of the Bureau of Record and Enquiry (BRE), Changi, discovered at the National Archives, May 2011

by Keith Andrews

I have been researching Far East Prisoners of War over the last 11 years (my father was captured at Singapore in February 1942) and there has always been speculation regarding the fate of the files created and collated by David Nelson and the Bureau of Record and Enquiry at Changi POW camp in Singapore.

On April 22nd 2011, there were a large number of documents released into the public domain at TNA and the BRE records, or most of them, were amongst that release. These particular files over the years have been given the nickname, "The Holy Grail". This discovery prompts two questions, where have they been? and why have they been released now? The answers to those questions are the subject of ongoing research.

When I became aware of the significance of these files, I compared the list at TNA with the list in Appendix A of David Nelson's book, 'The Story of Changi, Singapore'. The first area to explore was the Regimental Nominal Rolls to see how they compared. I discovered that they are all there except five, and one of those along with the duplicate roll is noted as missing in September 1945.

These Regimental Nominal Rolls are, to me, the most important as they will help those researching their next of kin to perhaps complete information missing from the Japanese POW Index Cards, and for those that came home and completed one, the Liberated POW Questionnaire.

Having done that, I then decided to look at some of these files to prove, if possible, that they were the originals from the BRE. Each file is as described in the book down to the use of target paper for the pages, the roll number which matches that in the book and finally, the signatures of members of the BRE are on some of the covers. The covers

themselves are made from whatever was available at the time, a number of them using old Changi Prison correspondence from the 30's.

Also there are the Master Rolls of Prisoners of War in the Far East compiled at Changi. At the time of writing these are on the list to be studied in depth to see just how complete they are and the areas covered. Certainly one test case found the name of a POW captured in Java, but as his regiment was captured at Singapore that may be why.

The master rolls I studied were handwritten on dark green paper, other rolls were handwritten or typed on yellow or dark orange paper.

To list all of the newly-released BRE documents that are at TNA at Kew would be a huge task and I have by no means carried out an exhaustive search, but comparing what I have found with Appendix A in the book, the bulk of the files appear to be there. I have yet to locate the Royal Navy and RAF files.

This report is focusing on the files of the BRE. Within the release are numerous Far East files that were not BRE files and these will be the subject of further research and further reports to be posted on this website in the future. I will also attempt to index the contents of certain BRE files to give a breakdown of what they actually contain.

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