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Press Release

Monday 10 October 2011

New memorial to honour Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees who survived captivity in the Far East.

A new memorial at Liverpool's historic Pier Head will pay tribute to the thousands of men, women and children who survived captivity in Japanese Prisoner of War and Internment camps and returned to Britain in the autumn of 1945 to rebuild their lives. The plaque is believed to be the only memorial of its kind to those who *survived* their ordeal.

Over 37,500 British Forces and more than 2,000 civilians returned to Britain from captivity in South East Asia and the Far East. Of these more than 20,000 servicemen and over a thousand civilian internees disembarked on the Pier Head at Liverpool in just eight weeks from October 8 to December 10, 1945. Many of these servicemen had started their journey to the Far East from Liverpool in 1941, or even earlier.

Some twenty or more former prisoners of war together with their families will return to Liverpool on Saturday, 15 October 2011 to witness the unveiling of a granite plaque raised by public subscription. They will be among over 350 invited guests, including civic dignitaries and members of the public who will take part in a service at the Pier Head. The ceremony will include contributions from former POWs, as well as a younger generation who wish to honour the sacrifices made by their grandparents and great-grandparents.

Lay Minister Pauline Simpson, Chaplain to Far East POWs and Secretary to the National FEPOW Fellowship Welfare Remembrance Association (N.F.F.W.R.A) and herself the daughter of a Far East POW, will co-officiate at the service. Merle Hesp, widow of Harry Hesp, a crew member on the *Empress of Asia* who spent three and a half years as a civilian internee in Changi Goal and Sime Road camp in Singapore, will read from the Bible. Her husband returned to Liverpool on the *Nieuw Holland*, on 15 October, sixty-six years ago. Erin Hawkin, nine, will read a tribute she has written herself to her great-granddad, Jack, who worked on the Burma-Thailand Railway and returned to Liverpool in November 1945.

Former POW Maurice Naylor CBE, ninety-one, will unveil the plaque. Maurice was a member of the 135th Field Regiment and served under Commanding Officer Lieutenant Colonel Philip Toosey. Two of Colonel Toosey's great-grandchildren, Zach and Eliza Parsons, nine and seven, will lay a wreath in memory of all repatriated Far East POWs and Internees after which a bugler will sound the Last Post. In the event of bad weather and an indoor service this will not take place.

The war in the Far East is sometimes known as “the forgotten war” because in the decades immediately after the end of World War Two films and books concentrated on the experience of servicemen and women in Europe. For decades after the war Far East POW felt unable to share their experiences and it is only in recent years that survivors have started to talk about their captivity under the Japanese.

More than 50,000 British Forces were captured between the fall of Hong Kong in December 1941, the fall of first Singapore in February and finally the Netherlands East Indies in March 1942. Many were used as a slave labour force and one in four died due to untreated disease, neglect and brutality.

While most returned home to try to resume their lives some went on to become well-known figures. Ronald Searle became a celebrated graphic artist and created the St Trinian's cartoons. E.W. “Jim” Swanton returned to his career as a cricket commentator and “Jumping” Jim Halliday won a bronze medal in 1948 Olympic Games in London

despite weighing just than 6st (38kg) when he arrived home. Searle, Swanton and Halliday all worked on the Burma-Thailand Railway.

J. G. Ballard's account of his experiences as a boy interned in Shanghai, *Empire of the Sun* became a successful film directed by Steven Spielberg in 1987. Hermance van den Wall Bake, who was born in what is now Indonesia, was held in a Japanese internment camp with her mother and sister. After the war she married an English man and gave birth to Nick Clegg who would later become Deputy Prime Minister.

The idea for the plaque came from the Researching Far East Prisoner of War History Group (<http://www.researchingfepowhistory.org.uk>) who realised there was no memorial to repatriated POWs and internees in either Liverpool or Southampton who had had to contend with the long-term physical and mental effects of captivity.

Meg Parkes, whose own father was held in Java and Japan, is chair of the group, and commented:

"This memorial is significant because it pays tribute to the survivors of war, not to the war dead. For many of these men the struggle to survive simply continued once they were back home. For some that struggle proved too much, for others it continued for years - even for the rest of their lives. Their scars - mental, physical and emotional - stopped many of them talking about what they had been through - even with their own families. This silence cast a shadow over many homes. There was also a growing sense among ex-Far East prisoners of war that no one was interested or cared about the years of neglect and isolation they had suffered.

"The memorial also highlights the pivotal role that the port of Liverpool played in the lives of thousands of servicemen, being both the port of embarkation to, as well as disembarkation from, foreign parts.

"The Researching FEPOW History Group exists to share the history of these men, women and children with those who are interested to know more. This memorial on Liverpool's Pier Head will, we hope, remind generations to come that survival from

captivity does not always mean liberation; it can sometimes lead to another war that has to be fought for, and hopefully, won.”

Meg, who is studying for an MPhil that will focus on the long-term effects of captivity and its aftermath including how doctors and medical orderlies saved lives through their ingenuity in captivity, has conducted over sixty interviews with former Far East POWs as part of oral history projects run by the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine. The School formed a unique scientific and clinical collaboration with Far East POW which has lasted over six decades. In the early years it played an important part in treating the many tropical diseases and medical problems they caused, which returning POWs suffered from – some of which still affect survivors today.

Former POW Maurice Naylor commented:

“It is an honour and a privilege to have been invited to unveil this Memorial on behalf of the former prisoners of war and civilian internees of the Japanese. It is 66 years since we arrived back in this great port of Liverpool to the sound of ships sirens and the cheers of multitudes of onlookers and well-wishers. There are not many of us left now and soon there will be none.

“It is therefore to the great credit of the Researching FEPOW History Group that they conceived and have seen through to completion this lasting memorial to those who, having survived, nevertheless had to contend with the long-term physical mental and emotional effects of captivity. It is a memorial, too, to the girlfriends, spouses, parents and grandparents who had to put up with us and our idiosyncrasies.

“And we must remember those many thousands of our fellow prisoners who, sadly, died during their captivity from disease, neglect and brutality in atrocious conditions. Their families continue to suffer too. Their sacrifice should never be forgotten.”

For further information, or to arrange interviews with ex-POWs, internees and their families and those who welcomed them home please contact:

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Images – Print Media

It will be possible to take a group shot of POWs, internees and widows on the steps into the Cunard Building after the service. We can also put you in touch with local newspaper archives that hold contemporary images.

Moving Images

Pathe News has a clip of the first repatriation ship, *Monowai* returning to Liverpool (Film ID: 2058.10). It shows cheering crowds, servicemen coming down the gangplank carrying their kitbags and one airman receiving a joyful welcome from two women.

Note to Editors

The unveiling ceremony will start at 11.00am and, weather permitting, will be held outside at the Pier Head. In case of wet weather it will be held in a nearby building (marshals will direct people on the day).

For more information see the attached “Brief History and Order of Service”. The Liverpool Shanty Kings will accompany the hymns and Army bugler, Sgt Beaumont, from the Kings Division Band at Preston will sound the Last Post and Reveille.

Extracts from the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine’s Far East POW oral history interviews can be found at: <http://www.captivememories.org.uk>

Combined Cadet Force and 2184 Upton ATC cadets will be in attendance, along with pupils from Pensby High School for Girls who have been learning about Far East POW history as part of a Heritage Lottery funded project run by the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine in collaboration with their school.

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