

Chairman - Keith Andrews, Treasurer - Margaret Walton , Secretary - Barbara James
Committee Members - Angela Lane, Annette Hughes, Rowford Bowditch, Tony Truett, Richard Gibbs

BAFEPOW NEWS SHEET FOR OCTOBER 2025

MORE FROM THE VJ80 COMMEMORATIONS STARTING WITH THE BAFEPOW VJ80 LUNCH ON TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 2ND

PEAL OF BELLS RUNG FOR THE 80th ANNIVERSARY OF THE END OF WWII



(Members of BAFEPOW join at St Phillips Cathedral, Birmingham On 01/09/2025)

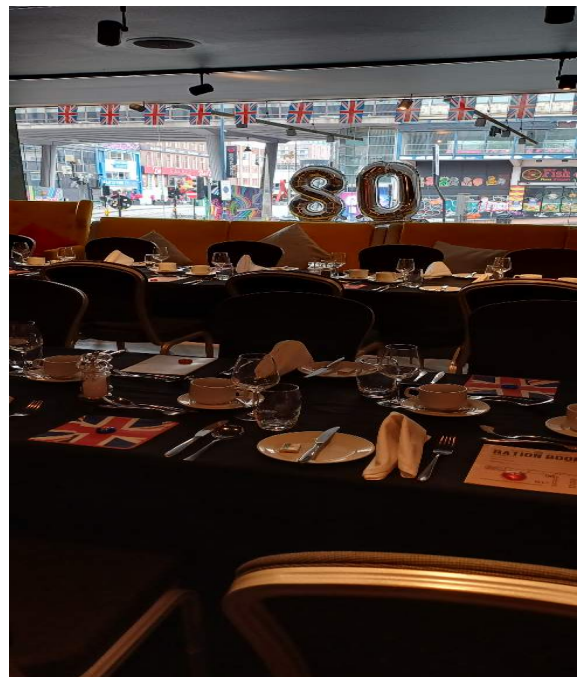
Many of us are aware that the date, 15/08/45, was not the final end of WWII but it was the date that Emperor Hirohito offered to surrender and also that he had accepted that he was not a deity. A somewhat complicated couple of weeks then followed and the final surrender was signed aboard the USS Missouri on 02/09/45 in Tokyo Harbour. The date that we accept as VJ Day was in agreement with the FEPOW Associations and the USA had opted to commemorate it as 14/08/45 because of a dateline difference.

In 2020, the BAFEPOW committee tried to find out if a peal of bells had been rung in Birmingham to celebrate VJ Day 1945 as one had been rung months earlier in May for VE Day. This information could not be found but we were very fortunate to have a peal rung at St Martins in the Bullring on 02/09/2020 to commemorate VJ75. During planning for BAFEPOW's VJ80 commemorations, the committee agreed that we should try to have a peal rung to commemorate VJ80 and that for this one to take place at St Phillips, Birmingham Cathedral where Bishop Leonard Wilson had been the Bishop of Birmingham shortly after his return to the UK from Singapore where he had been Bishop and also a prisoner of the Japanese. This was not as easy or straightforward as we thought it might be and time went by with no response from the bell tower team and a couple of visits to the cathedral by myself resulted in a very disappointing lack of interest in anything to do with VJ80 – unbelievable when there is a tribute to Bishop Wilson set into the floor on the approach to the altar of the cathedral! Not to be

put off I began a series of emails to various members of the bell tower and just a few weeks before VJ80, an email arrived from the captain of the bell tower who explained that it was difficult for them to ring the bells at certain times due to 'noise'!! It is understandable to be unable to ring a peal because of getting sufficient experience ringers to get together to ring twelve bells for around three hours but noise!! A polite email was sent back saying that it seemed very sad that with the Bishop's connection to WWII in the Far East, it would seem fitting to commemorate him and his connection to BAFEPOW with just perhaps a short sounding of the bells to which some members might be able to come and listen.

At last some success! An email arrived from the tower captain to say that he had arranged for a full peal to be rung on the evening of Monday, September 1st commencing at six thirty in the evening and lasting for up to three hours – a proper peal! The date was not a bad one as it was on the eve of the 80th anniversary of the signing of the surrender and the eve of our VJ80 lunch – the only disappointment being that we would not be able to go into the cathedral which would close at six o'clock. This was not a problem as the important thing was that those of us who were able to, would meet up in the square and would know the significance of the bells. As you can see in the photo on page one, nine of us assembled and for the next hour and a half we listened, we chatted, we remembered Bishop Wilson and those he helped through the extremes of being a FEPOW and we remembered the important role played by the clergy and other religious leaders who held services, participated at funerals, ran confirmation classes and kept morale up when people were low and, most of all – we remembered our own FEPOW and we did this for them!

THE BAFEPOW VJ80 COMMEMORATIVE LUNCH ON 02/09/2025



From 10.30 onwards, BAFEPOW members started to assemble for our very special VJ80 lunch which was being made even more special as we were welcoming a very special guest of honour to join us along with his daughter. While we all chatted about the VJ80 events over the previous couple of weeks, the staff of the Holiday Inn were busy getting our usual seating area where we hold our meetings ready for the meal and Bernie and the team pulled out the stops by decorating the tables with Union Jack serviettes, ration books and chocolates with Union Jack decorations. I had brought in my two BAFEPOW flags and bunting but the highlight was the '80' balloons that Bernie had herself thought to have made for us – she is a star!

It was so good to start to welcome some members who we don't see often as they live at a distance but do keep in touch with us and we were also very pleased to welcome the Reverend Richard Brooker who is the new padre for COFEPOW and is stepping into the shoes of Sir David Childs who has now retired. I had met him at the NMA and he is the grandson of a FEPOW and is looking forward to

taking on his new role and meeting fellow FEPOW descendants at future COFEPOW services at the NMA.

And so it was time for our guest of honour to arrive and we were delighted to welcome Ken Tinkler accompanied by his daughter, Jayne. I had met Ken at a recent VJ80 service at St Nicholas Church and our committee asked if we could invite him to our lunch when I told them about him and his connection to VJ 80. Ken, aged just eighteen, was a radar operator in the Royal Navy serving aboard the destroyer, HMS Quadrant, throughout the Pacific campaign and they had to go round the islands of Tokyo Bay in August 1945 to tell the Japanese kamikaze torpedo boats that the war was over. He was part of a small escort party who went aboard the USS Missouri when the Japanese surrender was signed marking the final end of WWII.

Ken was introduced to the members who were present and then it was time for us to take our seats for our lunch. There were twenty five of us who were very pleased to be present for this special occasion and Keith, our chairman welcomed everyone and told Ken how honoured we were to have him and Jayne with us to mark VJ80. After the first course there was a pause for a toast which was performed by Tony who made a very touching plea to all of us present to 'keep the spirit going that kept them going' (This phrase "to keep the spirit going that kept them going on" encapsulates the purpose of the Yasume Club, a social group founded by FEPOWs in Cambridge to provide mutual support and connection after their wartime experiences in the Far East. The phrase reflects their desire to maintain the same resilience and camaraderie that enabled them to survive their time as prisoners of war, ensuring they could continue to support each other and adapt to life after their release) Tony then asked us all to raise our glasses and toast all those who were prisoners of the Japanese in WWII. We then enjoyed an excellent lunch together, after which there was a collection which raised £125 and we asked Bernie and the Holiday Inn staff to join us so that we could thank them for, not only today's event, but for all of our meetings throughout the year when they make us so welcome and look after us so well. What a brilliant time we had and Ken is such an amazing character – he had us all in fits of laughter with his jokes and quips. Bernie and the hotel staff couldn't believe that he will shortly be 99 years old – thank you for joining us, Ken, and making our lunch even more special – bless you!



At the end of our lunch Ken was the centre of attention for everyone who wanted to shake his hand and chat with him. Bernie was especially amazed by his sharp wit and wicked sense of humour – a typical sailor! She is seen giving him a hug in the photo on the left and there were so many photos taken of him with us all and he was the 'star of the show!'

NEWS FROM OTHER VJ80 EVENTS

In last month's news sheet there were photographs that our member, Chris Broadhurst, has sent for us to see and she also sent me the following news but there wasn't space to include it, so, thank you, Chris, for sharing it with us about your Birmingham FEPOW dad, Herbert Lester.

HONOURING MY FATHER, HERBERT 'BERT' JOHN LESTER

As I was unable to attend the British legion service at the NMA on VJ Day due to a previous commitment, I felt that I really wanted to be more involved. Lesley Clarke, Chairman of the Java 42 Club, had asked all members to ensure everyone was aware of VJ Day as this was the 80th anniversary year, so I decided to approach our local newspaper, The Redditch and Alcester Standard.

After a long conversation with the Editor, an article about my father's POW experiences was published on Friday, 1st of August. The Editor asked if he could pass my name on to the Chairman of the Redditch RBL and this led on to an invitation to lay a wreath at their service on Saturday, 16th August. Followed by a reception.

We gathered outside our local theatre, The Palace, for 11.30am for photos (*these were in last month's news sheet*) before the procession to St Stephen's Church War Memorial where, at midday, a short service was to be held. Led by two standard bearers carrying the Union flag and the Redditch RBL standard, we marched along with the Lady Mayor, representatives from the local and county councils, the police and fire service, ex-service men – some of which were Grenadier Guards, RBL members and invited guests such as myself.

The service was conducted by the Revd Canon Paul Lawlor and in his speech about the War he mentioned me as being an honoured guest as the daughter of a FEPOW. Wreaths were then laid, mine on behalf of BAFEPOW as my father had lived his life in Birmingham. I was very honoured and touched to discover that the Redditch RBL had arranged for a wreath to honour the Prisoners of War in the Far East but also in special memory of my father. A special moment occurred when a young Asian lad laid a Lamp of Peace on the memorial.

At the afternoon tea, which was held at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church Parish Hall, I was presented with a British Legion Teddy Bear and a plaque which as well as inscribed with VJ Day and the dates, has a quote from Clement Attlee, "Japan has today surrendered. The last of our enemies is laid low".

The plaque will take pride of place with my father's photo, badges from our various anniversaries and memorabilia my father brought back from Sumatra.

Thank you, Chris, for telling us about your VJ80 commemoration!

Committee member, Angela Lane, attended the VJ80 service at the Shirley RBL and has somehow managed to be out of the shot on these photos that she has shared. Our member, Richard Coy, as well as organising this service can be seen bearing the standard to the left of the monument and, in the absence of Freddie, Angela laid the FEPOW wreath which is on the left in the front row.



I received an email from Tony, one of our committee members, whose sister, Annette – also one of our members, had sent to him. She has been in touch with a fellow FEPOW descendant and he was inspired by the VJ80 commemorations to write a poem about his dear Dad. He told Annette about his poem and then sent her a copy of it. Annette was deeply moved by what David had written and she wanted to share it with us as David's words will, I'm sure, resonate with all of us – they certainly do so with myself. So, thank you, David, for letting us share your moving poem and for Annette/Tony for sending it to me for inclusion in our news sheet.

**A POEM WRITTEN BY DAVID MONK, A FEPOW'S SON, INSPIRED BY THE
VJ80 COMMEMORATIONS**

Who Was This Young Man?

Who was this young man who, eighty years ago,
emerged half starved, almost naked, jungle jaundiced,
sleeper slave worker weary.
Each step to freedom counted in countless lives,
hobbled by ulcerations, broken by lacerations.
Who lost friends, one sunk by friendly fire,
starved on paltry supplies.
Beaten by men with death in their eyes.
Who - battle blasted, blooded, bruised,
defeated defender of a dying empire.
Who was he, who returned silenced -
a lonely figure walking up the lane,
home without fanfare.
A man with a shadow in his heart.
A man with tangled disarticulated nightmares.
Who was this young man who now passed, but not alone?
His many memories eternally unshared,
too deep, wounded and buried in Thailand's distant land.
So, just a dash and a dot here and there
an odd word or snatch of story,
never any talk of pomp or glory,
no waving of vengeful flags
no documented divulgence of daily horrors
of his incarceration eighty years ago.
But, at the end, an old man -
proud that he had survived,
proud of his FEPOW fellowship,
reconciled to some extent,
but unforgiving the cold cruelty
of his gaolers, groomed in blind brutality.
Who was this young man?
That man, my friend, was my Dad!

David Monk

August 2025



My Dad's full name was Henry Frank Monk but he always preferred Frank. He was born in 1919 in Clavering, Essex but the family moved to Bishops Stortford. When he was originally called up, he was enlisted with the Suffolks but was transferred to the 2nd Battalion of the Cambridgeshire Regiment where he was a driver. The 2nd Battalion were sent to Malaya to reinforce the 15th Indian Brigade at Batu Pahat. Dad spoke of this once describing how they were told it was "every man for himself" when they were forced to withdraw to Singapore. He spoke of the evacuation to the island by sampan. He was captured in Singapore and his records show that on June 24th 1942, he was transported overland to Thailand with the First Mainland Party. He was on the 4th train from Singapore to Thailand with 600 FEPOWs. The camps he was listed at were :- Banpong, Chungkai, Kinsayok and Petchburi – I believe the latter was an airstrip. He spoke of how he nearly lost his leg due to a severe tropical ulcer. I'm not sure if he came into contact with Weary Dunlop but he certainly spoke highly of him. His best friend, Gordon Ell, died on the Hellship, Hofuku Maru. Like most of the FEPOWs, Dad rarely spoke in any detail of his experiences but he was a proud member of the FEPOW Association and he and my Mum attended most of the reunions at the Royal Festival Hall. He died the day after his 92nd birthday in 2011.

(Written by David Monk)

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Social meetings

Tuesday, October 14th
 Tuesday, November 11th
 ** Tuesday, December 9th
 Tuesday, January, 13th
 Tuesday, February 10th
 Tuesday, March 10th

Discussion Group

Tuesday, October, 28th
 Tuesday, November 25th
 NO MEETING – HAPPY CHRISTMAS!
 Tuesday, January 27th
 Tuesday, February 24th
 Tuesday, March 24th

**This is the date of the annual BAFEPOW Christmas Lunch at the Holiday Inn. Do come and join us! It will cost members £15 per person (plus a contribution to our usual collection afterwards) and this should be paid in advance to Margaret (our treasurer), please contact me, Barbara, for the bank transfer details.

WELFARE GRANTS FOR FEPOW, WIVES AND WIDOWS

If you need help with a grant towards hospital stays, Nursing Home costs, alterations to the home, mobility aids etc, then please get in touch with:-

Mr Stephen John, the Java Club by email:- stephen.su.47@gmail.com

Mrs Pauline Simpson, NFFWRA by email:- enquiries@nationalfepowfellowship.org.uk

The BAFEPOW news sheet is put together by the association secretary, Barbara James, and hopefully it contains items of interest to all members. You are very welcome to suggest future topics or to submit items for future inclusion. You can contact me via email:- bmjames142@yahoo.co.uk or by phone:- 07954104857

