BIRMINGHAM ASSOCIATION OF FEPOW FAR EAST PRISONERS OF WAR

Chairman - Mr Keith Andrews, Vice-chairman – Mr Anthony Truett, Treasurer - Mrs Margaret Walton, Joint Secretaries - Mrs Barbara James and Ms Angela Lane,
Committee Members - Mrs Annette Hughes, Mr Rowford Bowditch, Mr Richard Gibbs

BAFEPOW NEWS SHEET FOR NOVEMBER 2026



Welcome to the November News Sheet and at this time of the year we are beginning to plan for Christmas but this month we also have the special time when we especially remember those who spent at least three Christmases away from home and under atrocious conditions. Here in Birmingham we are getting ready to meet together for our Christmas lunch event at the Holiday Inn on Tuesday, December 8th, meeting from 10.30 onwards and sitting down for lunch at 12.30. So, why the wreath above? Well, in November some of us have the honour of laying one of these wreaths during a Remembrance service or on Armistice Day in honour of the FEPOW, the Internees and the Romusha and it seemed appropriate with all the festive decorations around at the moment that our lunch is heralded with our very own special wreath.
The seats are limited so take a look at what's on the menu, it will only cost you £15 each and you will need to contact me to reserve your place as soon as possible. We do a great job of remembering those who suffered under Japanese occupation and we continue the tradition of an Annual Christmas Lunch as the FEPOW had and enjoyed together in Birmingham and at other FEPOW Association Clubs!

THE BAFEPOW CHRISTMAS MENU

STARTER– Roast Cauliflower Soup, truffle veloute, cauliflower crumb (vg,ngci)

MAIN MEAL - Roast Turkey – potato gratin, honey glazed parsnips, roasted carrots, pigs in blanket, pan jus
or Beetroot and Mushroom Wellington – potato gratin, tender stem brocoli, pan jus (vg)

DESERT - Millionaire's delice, chocolate, caramel & honeycomb (vg,ngci) or fresh fruit salad and cream

Tea, coffee & bon bon

So you've looked at the menu and you know how good the company is, so, you can send me an email at bmjames142@yahoo.co.uk or contact me on 07954104857 and book yourself a seat but remember that the seats will soon get taken. Hope that you can make it – BJ

Now to return to the news sheet and more serious business! I'm sad to say that we have reached the final installment of Brian Williams's amazing work/advice on researching FEPOW History – what an epic and we are so grateful to him for transferring his own expertise that he had gained whilst researching his father-in-law's FEPOW history for his wife into this excellent guide. This had also been used as the basis for a presentation on this subject that he gave at the Museum of the Hussars in Warwick to which I had the luck to attend some time ago. I persuaded Brian to transfer his presentation to go into our news sheet and it has since attracted interest from other interested groups such as COFEPOW and the Birmingham Midland Institute. Well done, Brian and a very big thank-you for contributing this to BAFEPOW!

Researching Far East Prisoners of War – Part 6

The End of Hostilities

On the 5th and 9 th August 1945, the USA dropped atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki respectively. This led directly to Emperor Hirohito declaring an unconditional surrender on the 15 th August 1945, though the surrender document wasn't signed until the 2nd September.



Hiroshima after the atomic bombing (Copyright Australian War Museum)

August 15th has been recognised as VJ (Victory over Japan) Day ever since.

Repatriation

Immediately hostilities ended, RAPWI (Recovery of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees) Teams were parachuted into PoW camps with the aim of providing medical help, arranging further drops of food, medical supplies and clothing and arranging repatriation to home countries. The Japanese guards had left the camps to the prisoners to administer, though in some cases, Japanese guards were retained to protect the inmates from outside violence. As the surrender wasn't formally signed until the 2nd September, prisoners remained in their camps, leading to the RAPWI teams, with some element of military humour, being renamed Retain All Prisoners of War Indefinitely Teams. Sadly, some prisoners died in the interval due to the conditions in some camps having deteriorated considerably.

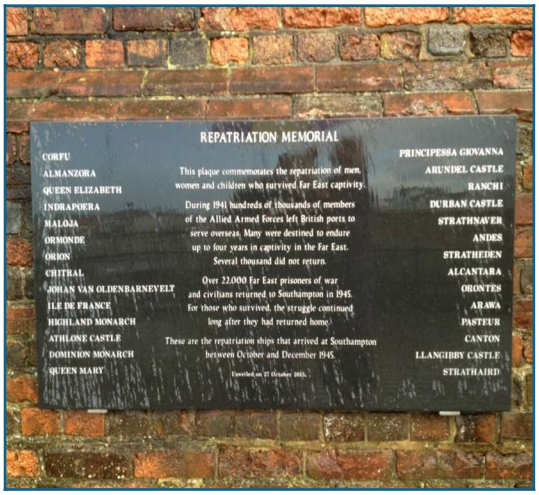
British internees on the Japanese mainland and islands were repatriated by the American military using hospital ships, warships and troopships back to the west coast of America, thence by train across the USA and Canada to the east coast where they were shipped back to the UK landing, mainly, at Liverpool, Glasgow and Southampton.

Internees from the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia), Singapore, Burma (now Myanmar) and other outlying camps, were moved back to Singapore by whatever means were available and from Singapore boarded troopships for the journey back to the UK via Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), the Suez Canal, Gibraltar and then to UK ports. Similar routes were taken by troopships leaving Hong Kong for the UK. A very few were flown home, sadly, some lost their lives in aircraft crashes. Most of the repatriation ships arrived back in the UK during October and November 1945

Some of the ex-prisoners were too sick to return directly to the UK and were hospitalised in Australia and South Africa, not returning home until the spring of 1946.

By the time they had returned to the UK most ex-prisoners had recovered the weight they had lost during their imprisonment and had also been issued with new uniforms. Upon landing in the UK, they were debriefed by military intelligence officers and sent home on leave.

The landing sites at both Southampton and Liverpool have repatriation memorials listing the numerous repatriation ships arriving at these ports.

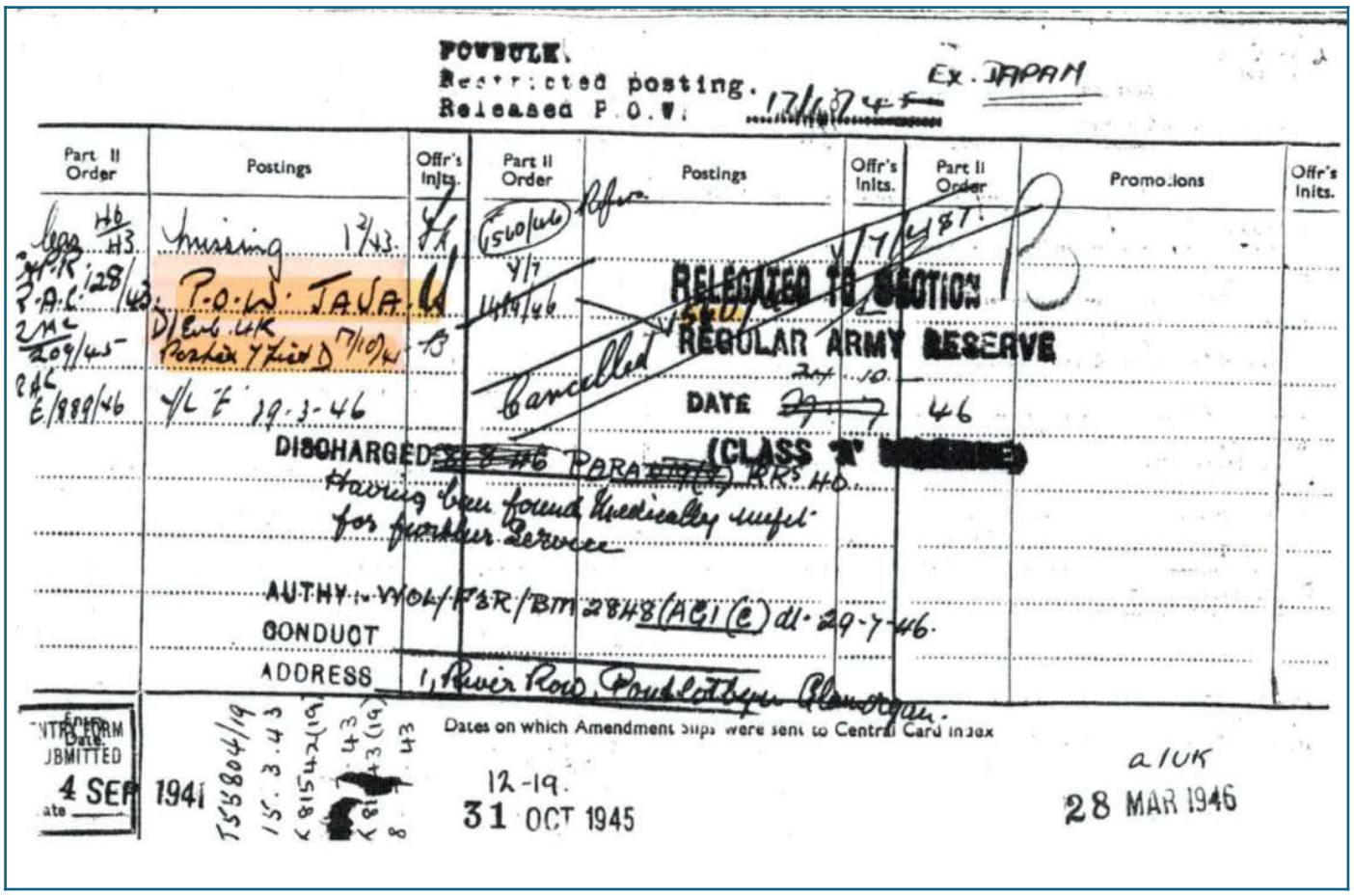


Southampton Repatriation Memorial

Sadly, none of the passenger lists for UK ships appear to have survived, but there are many passenger lists for US-bound ships held at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in the US.

Because of the lack of UK-bound passenger lists, the only way I have found for finding repatriation details is by referring to the Individual Service Record (covered in Part 2), which will usually give the date they arrived back in the UK and then try to match that with the date of a repatriation ship docking in the UK.

Using my late father-in-law's Service Record as an example, the highlighted entry shows that he was 'P.O.W. Java' followed by the line:
' D/Emb UK, Posted to List D. 17/10/45'. (Disembarked UK, Posted to List D, 17 Oct 1945)



The Researching FEPOW History Group website lists repatriation ships docking at both Liverpool and Southampton. By matching arrival dates with the disembarkation dates from the Service Record, we discover that the only ship arriving on the 17 October 1945 was the *SS Almanzora* which departed Singapore on the 15 September 1945. I believe that 'List D' refers to an army list where soldiers awaiting intelligence debriefs were nominally posted prior to returning to their units.

They all returned to a very different Britain than the one they had left behind!

Further Research
Though briefly covered in Part 2, a useful source giving a wider picture of family life can be found by obtaining copies of birth, death and marriage certificates from the General Register Office (www.gro.gov.uk) which will greatly help to 'flesh out' the family circumstances , maiden names, occupations etc.

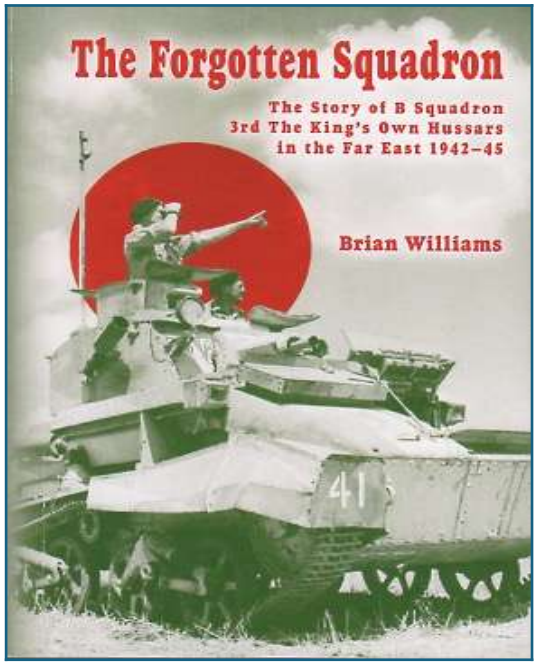
Census returns for every 10 years prior to 1921 will also provide details such as the size of the family, occupations, ages of parents and siblings, home addresses etc. The census is only carried out every 10 years , but there was also a National Register carried out in September 1939 (interestingly, also used to set up National Health Service records on the birth of the NHS in 1948), and this register was maintained for a number of years thereafter, very useful if searching for post September 1939 marriages.

Conclusion
Some final tips:

- **Document your research.**
- **Only document what you can prove.**
- **Do not accept others work unless you have proof.**
- **Keep looking!**

… and finally:

Don't let your research go to waste. Write it out, perhaps just to become part of your family history, or to donate to a museum or County Archive, or perhaps you have ambitions to write a book. Many books about the FEPOW experience are still being published today. Will your book become one of them?



Epilogue

I hope that you have found this series of articles of use, or at the very least, interesting.

The articles are based on a presentation I gave at the Museum of the Queens Royal Hussars in Warwick (well worth a visit) and adapted for this series. Your Secretary, Barbara James, attended the talk and with a bit of arm twisting (not too much though) persuaded me to write this series. I am grateful to her for her advice and support.

By the very nature of the subject, it is impossible to cover the whole range of materiel that inform the FEPOW experience. I have spent over 15 years just researching one, small, army unit, and haven't finished yet.

I don't profess to be an expert, but my years spent researching have given me a useful insight into where to look and how to interpret the information found. If I can be of help to those of you who want to learn more, then feel free to email me at ocsservices@btinternet.com. Please put 'FEPOW' in the subject line and I will do what I can to help.

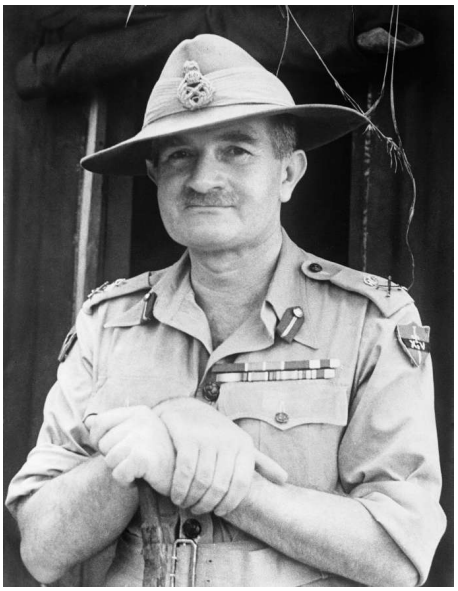
Enjoy your Researching!

Once again, thank you so much, Brian, for sharing your experience of researching FEPOW History whilst looking into your wife, Jeanette's father's time as a FEPOW and I can recommend the book that arose from that work, 'The Forgotten Squadron', which is a link also to Edwin Coy who was one of our committee members. A copy of your book was presented by yourself at one of our meetings in Birmingham when Edwin's son, Ken, who later became Vice Chairman of BAFEPOW, was celebrating his 80th Birthday a few years ago. Time passes by but we have a third generation member, Richard Coy, as a member, and a possible fourth as Richard's young son, Freddie, takes up the wreath laying at local events and does a very mature and respectful job of it. The Hussars who were out in the Far East are not the most widely known of all those who were involved so it has been good to have your insight of their history and from your own family link which ties in with the Coys who have been important within BAFEPOW.

FORTHCOMING BAFEPOW EVENT ON TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 24TH

"There are no bad regiments, there are only bad officers"

The above is a well known quote by William Slim, 1st Viscount Slim and the more one learns about military history and we look back to the survival of our own FEPOW whilst in captivity, it becomes even more apparent that, not only is the ability and skill to formulate strategies and tactics an essential, an officer needs the very special skill of communication with and understanding of his troops' 'psysche' to get the best from them – Uncle Bill certainly possessed those skills!



Viscount, General Slim



A disc in Bristol commemorating Slim & his men

We will be very fortunate to be joined at the discussion group meeting on Tuesday, November 24th by Gerald Gardiner whose father served with General Slim in Burma and he will talk to us about 'Uncle Bill' from his father's experiences. Of course Viscount Slim is very special to us here in Birmingham and after WWII he was awarded the Freedom of the City of Birmingham in recognition of his bravery and leadership when he commanded the British Fourteenth Army during the Burma Campaign where he oversaw and directed the broader conventional military strategy. There is a blue plaque on the house where he lived in Bearwood and he had a distinguished diplomatic career post war as the Govenor-General of Australia.
So, please do come and join us and make Gordon welcome as I know that he will be very interesting. Gordon was also once a chaplain to the RAF Cadet Corps at Birmingham University some time ago so he has fond memories of his time here in our city.
This meeting will be quite informal and should get underway between 11.00 and 11.30 am.

REMINDERS OF FORTHCOMING FEPOW EVENTS

The Annual Service of Remembrance at Alrewas

The annual Service of Remembrance will take place at the NMA (RBLNRG) on Sunday, November 8th and COFEPOW is hoping that as many of their members as possible will attend. They will meet up there at 10.15 (don't forget to book parking in advance to save money) for the general service and then there will be a small private wreath laying in the FEPOW Memorial Grove. If you are thinking of attending then do contact Chris Wills if you are a member at:- events@cofepow.org.uk
Or, if you aren't a member, you can still attend but do wrap up warm - it's always chilly there!

TALK BY PHIL BRADSHAW AT THE BMI ON MONDAY, NOVEMBER 16th 2026

We're always so pleased when our member, Phil, travels to Birmingham to join us at one of our meetings. His research on the 196 RAMC which just started with him researching about his grandfather has grown into two large folders covering an amazing amount of history of this important area of FE-POW history – truly epic! So, it was no surprise when he was approached by the folk at the Birmingham and Midland Institute to do a presentation about this topic. Below is a flyer giving the details of this event and I do hope that you will come along and support him -

Field Ambulances at the Ready!

Birmingham People's History Archive

A lunchtime talk by Phil Bradshaw, at 1.00-2.00 pm on Monday 16 November, at Birmingham & Midland Institute, 9 Margaret Street, B3 3BS



Join us to hear the fascinating stories of four West Midlanders who served with field ambulances in the Far East during World War Two.

Phil's background is in IT. His interest in Far East Prisoners of War (FEPOW) developed from research into the life of his grandfather, Private Alfred J. Bradshaw – a R.A.M.C. nursing orderly who was taken prisoner by the Japanese during the Fall of Singapore.

BOOKING Pay £5 at the door or use the Eventbrite link
https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/field-ambulances-at-the-ready-tickets-2002309380257?aff=oddtdtcreator (funds to BMI)

Website: bpha.online Instagram: @birminghampha
Email: gill@bpha.online

Suez Maru Families and Research Association

Sinking of the Suez Maru commemoration service at 11.30 on 29/11/26 plus a talk afterwards

First, join us as we gather at the Suez Maru Memorial that we built in 2013, to remember the 551 Suez Maru men on the 83rd anniversary of the sinking and atrocity.

After lunch (your self service at the NMA cafe etc, own costs) bring your cup of tea though to the AGM.
SMFRA members (you can also join on the day) are invited to please gather in a private room at the NMA for our first SMFRA Annual General Meeting. We want to hear from as many members and families as possible, so please join us.
After the AGM we will host a slide talk in three parts: the archaeological research of Liang PoW camp; the 2025 trip to Ambon; and the itinerary for the Walking in their Footsteps Ambon 2027 trip for SMFRA members.
Please use the try booking link to register* (all the above are free of course). We anticipate the day will finish by 4pm.
* try booking link here to register.
https://www.trybooking.com/uk/events/landing/119983
Please email us with any questions & please join us for this special day.
Thanks
~ SMFRA committee (Heather, Nicki, Simon, Jacquelyn)

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 for November has been 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