



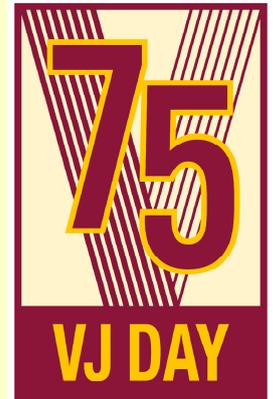
THE ROYAL
LEICESTERSHIRE
REGIMENT



VJ Day 75

Saturday 15th August 2020

#VJDay75



Whilst VE Day marked the end of the war in Europe in May 1945, many



thousands of Armed Forces personnel were still involved in bitter fighting in the Far East. Victory over Japan would come at a heavy price, and Victory over Japan Day (VJ Day) marks the day Japan surrendered on the 15th August 1945, which in effect ended the Second World War.

Fighting in the Asia-Pacific took place from Hawaii to North East India. Britain and the Commonwealth's

principal fighting force, the Fourteenth Army, was one of the most diverse in history - over 40 languages were spoken, and all the world's major religions represented. The descendants of many of the Commonwealth veterans of that army are today part of multicultural communities up and down the country, a lasting legacy to the success and comradeship of those who fought in the Asia-Pacific.



Images copyright: Imperial War Museums.

This year we remember the contribution of all Commonwealth and Allied Forces, without whom victory and the freedoms and way of life we enjoy today would not have been possible.

Marking VJ Day 75 in Leicester and Leicestershire

With a continuing need for us all to remain vigilant to the threat of coronavirus and the need to continue practicing social distancing, we are again turning to the digital platform for our commemoration of VJ Day 75. Please read on to see how we plan to pay tribute to the Second World War generation.

In this issue:

Why commemorating VJ Day is so important

Watch our virtual service from Leicester Cathedral, featuring HRH The Duke of Gloucester

The Far East Campaign – an overview

The Malaya Campaign – The Burma Campaign

The Chindits – who were they? Watch our interview with Chindit veteran, Jim Posnett

The Far East Prisoners of War – read personal accounts from members of COFEPOW

Hell Ships – Creating a Roll of Honour – Further online content

This weekend... the Union Flag will be flying in tribute at City Hall, the Town Hall and County Hall.



Why commemorating VJ Day is so important

The Far East campaign was one of the longest fought by the British during the Second World War. Remote from the experience of most people at home, and often side-lined in the contemporary press, it became known as the 'Forgotten War'; the troops serving there were the 'Forgotten Army'.

Because the war in Europe took understandable priority, resources allocated to the Far East were necessarily limited and put allied forces at a distinct disadvantage. Many men were killed in the action and their ultimate sacrifice has to be remembered.

Many men became prisoners of war and suffered considerably under their Japanese captors for the 3½ years of their captivity. As illustrated in accounts later it was clear that the experiences of survivors of the war in the Far East adversely affected many men for years afterwards.

The war in the Far East was fought in two phases: The first phase of the war (December 1941 – May 1942) was all about trying to resist the Japanese invasion. The second phase (November 1942 – May 1945) was all about regaining the land taken by the Japanese in 1941/42.

As part of a special televised service from the National Memorial Arboretum The Prince of Wales will lead the UK in a national moment of remembrance and thanksgiving for all those who served in the Far East. His Royal Highness will lead the tribute at 11am.



We are honoured that HRH The Duke of Gloucester, Patron, National Far East Prisoners of War Fellowship Welfare Remembrance Association, has graciously agreed to contribute to our commemoration of VJ Day 75, here in Leicester and Leicestershire. As part of our virtual Cathedral service (see below for details) His Royal Highness reads an extract from the speech given by HM King George VI on the occasion of Victory over Japan.

A virtual service to commemorate VJ Day 75 from Leicester Cathedral



Please join us for a virtual service of commemoration from the Cathedral. The service will be led by the Dean of Leicester, the Very Revd David Monteith, and Bishop Martyn will preach. The service includes a special contribution by HRH The Duke of Gloucester.

[Join the service online](#) ready for 5pm on Saturday 15 August.

The Far East Campaign

Between December 1941 and August 1945, British Commonwealth troops and their allies fought a bitter war against the Japanese in Asia. The fighting took place in malaria-ridden jungles during drenching monsoon rains and on remote islands in searing tropical heat, but always against a tenacious and often brutal enemy. To learn more about the Far East Campaign visit the [National Army Museum website](#).

Robin Jenkins, Senior Archivist with the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, provides this summary of the Far East Campaign and how the Leicestershire Regiment was involved.



**THE ROYAL
LEICESTERSHIRE
REGIMENT**

The surprise attack on the American fleet at Pearl Harbour, on 7th December 1941, is infamous. Less well known are the attacks which followed closely on British and Dutch possessions in the Far East. On 8th December Japanese forces bombed Singapore and landed on the northern coast of the Malayan peninsula. The forces deployed against them, from both the British and Indian Armies, included the 1st Battalion of the Leicestershire Regiment.

Despite a series of fierce and bloody engagements at Jitra, Gurun and Kampar, the British, Indians and Gurkhas were driven slowly back down the peninsula and onto the island of Singapore. Without tanks and with too few aircraft, it was impossible to halt the Japanese advance. After a fortnight's heavy fighting the British units were so depleted that it was decided on 19th December to amalgamate the remaining Leicesters with the 2nd Battalion the East Surrey Regiment to form the 786-strong British Battalion.

On 15th February 1942 Singapore surrendered to the Japanese. Only 265 of the British Battalion were still fit to fight. Slowly gathered from hospitals and other duties, the Battalion eventually numbered 800 men; destined to spend the remaining years of the war in Japanese prisoner-of-war camps. The horror and callous brutality of those camps in Thailand and Burma; the illness, starvation and sadistic discipline will never be forgotten.

Although the war with Germany may have seemed more immediate to those at home, with fighting in Europe and the Middle East and the threat of bombs and later V1 and V2 rockets, the conflict with Japan never ceased. Until June 1944 the Japanese had continued to advance through Burma towards India and it was only then, with the turning of the tide at Kohima, that the British (with their Chinese allies) began slowly to drive back the invaders.

Two battalions of the Leicestershire Regiment, the 2nd and 7th, were heavily engaged in Burma. It was a largely forgotten war and fought at the end of a very long supply line, in the worst possible conditions of jungle and monsoon. The 2nd Leicesters were selected to join the élite 'Chindits'; trained to carry the war far behind enemy lines, raiding and destroying, and supplied by air or living off the land. The 7th Leicesters also operated in two columns, ranging deep into enemy territory, battling sickness, terrain and the weather as much as the Japanese.

In 1946, in recognition of its outstanding service in all theatres of the war, HM King George VI was graciously pleased to ordain that the Regiment should become [The Royal Leicestershire Regiment](#).



In general, those men who fought in the (phase one) Malaya Campaign were awarded the Pacific Star medal ...and those men who fought in the (phase 2) Burma Campaign were awarded the Burma Star medal.



The Malaya Campaign (Phase One of the Far East Campaign)

The Malaya Campaign and subsequent captivity in numbers

(By Ken Hewitt - son of C/Sgt John Hewitt)

- 936 men of the 1st Btn Leicestershire Regiment took part in the Malaya Campaign.
- 100 were killed in action (KIA) on the mainland of Malaya.
- 87 were captured on the mainland to become 'Early POWs' and held at Penang, Taiping and Kuala Lumpur.
- A further 80 men died in the fighting on Singapore Island.
- 75 were evacuated or escaped from Singapore around the time of surrender - 45 returned home safely, 13 became POWs and the fate of 17 remains unknown (KIA).
- Of the 197 men killed in action, 150 have no known grave and are remembered on the Singapore Memorial at the Kranji War Cemetery.
- Following the surrender of Singapore to the Japanese on 15th February 1942, 694 men of the 1st Leicesters were to become POWs in Malaya (87), Singapore (594), Sumatra (12) and Java (1).
- In Singapore the POWs were initially held in the Changi POW Camp area but over 450 were soon forced to labour in various work camps around the island.
- 53 men remained in Singapore for the duration of their captivity - 10 of whom would not survive.
- 30 men were included in the Early Overseas parties to Burma (5), Taiwan (8), Borneo (6) and Japan (11). Of these 30, 5 would never return home.
- 600 were sent to Thailand and Burma to work on the infamous 'Death Railway' where 106 men died of starvation, hard labour, illness, disease, brutality and allied offensives.
- 5 men of the battalion attempted escape during their time on the railway. 2 were recaptured, returned to Singapore and sentenced to 4 years solitary confinement. 1 was recaptured and executed for trying to escape. 2 were successful in their escape, having been protected by local Thai villagers and the Thai Resistance Movement before being flown out to India and safety.
- After the railway was complete in December 1943, 140 men were returned to Singapore but the majority remained in Thailand to work on railway operations or other projects around the country.
- Of the 140 that returned to Singapore, 100 were loaded aboard 'hellships' bound for Japan. 12 others were shipped to Saigon and 28 remained in Singapore.
- 26 men died on these hellship voyages to Japan, 5 of illness and 21 by drowning following sinkings by allied forces. One 1st Leicesters man survived the sinking of his ship and was rescued by a US submarine after surviving 3 days in the sea.
- 85 men eventually reached Japan where they were forced to work in factories, mines, shipyards and docks across the length and breadth of the country. Despite the harsh conditions only one 1st Leicesters man died in the Japan POW camps.
- The dropping of atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6th and 9th August 1945 finally brought WWII to an end and is commemorated as VJ Day each year on 15th August.
- A total of 157 men had died whilst in captivity, 46 having no known grave.
- 534 POWs of the 1st Btn Leicestershire Regiment were liberated from 9 countries around the Far East (Thailand (352), Japan (83), Singapore (71), French Indo China (12), Sumatra (7), Taiwan (4), Philippines (2), Borneo (2) and Manchuria (1). 3 had previously escaped.
- Of the 936 men at the start of the campaign, 197 were killed in action, 157 died in captivity, 45 returned home having escaped from Singapore, and 537 returned home after 3½ terrible years in captivity. Today, 75 years on, there is just one known surviving FEPOW of the 1st Btn Leicestershire Regiment.

NONE OF THEM MUST BE FORGOTTEN

1ST BATTALION LEICESTERSHIRE REGIMENT
ROLL OF HONOUR – MALAYA CAMPAIGN AND CAPTIVITY

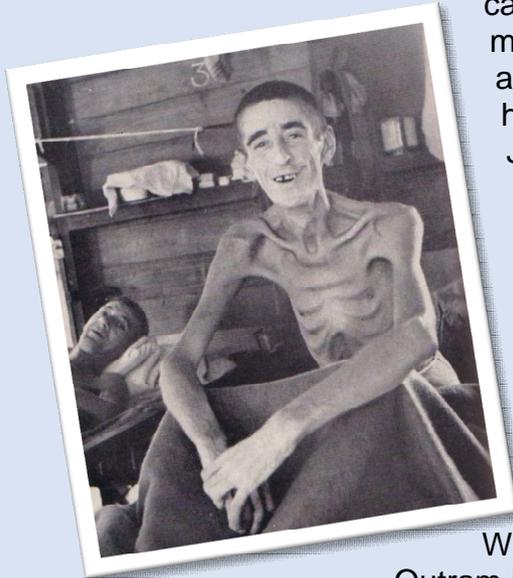
MALAYA CAMPAIGN

Pte C Allen Pte W Arnett Pte T Ashmore Pte F Askew Pte L Atkinson Sgt G Barkby L/Cpl W Barnacle Pte C Barnes Pte A Bell Pte A Bentley Pte I Billings Pte J Bird Pte W Blanchard L/Cpl D Blower Pte E Bollington Lt J Bonell Pte R Born Pte J Bowdler Sgt F Bown L/Cpl J Boyle Lt S Bradfield L/Cpl F Bramley Pte J Bray Pte J Bridge Pte F Briers L/Cpl E Buckett Pte G Bullimore Capt P Burder L/Cpl J Caddick Sgt W Carling Pte C Carrier Pte T Challoner Pte A Chiswell Pte F Clarke Lt T Clarricoates Capt W Collier Pte J Collins Pte H Comins Pte G Cooper Pte A Cope L/Cpl F Cordell Pte E Cork Pte M Corrigan Pte W Cox Pte G Craig L/Cpl S Cromeyn Lt P Crosshwaite Pte C Cunnington Cpl R Cuthbertson Cpl R Cutts Pte A Daniels Pte C Darby Pte F Davies Pte W Davis Pte H Deakes L/Cpl J Denton L/Cpl W Dobson Pte A Draycott Pte H Ecclestone L/Cpl F Elkington Pte R Ensor Sgt R Farrands Pte G Faulder Pte P Fern Pte R Finney Pte A Ford Cpl T Fox L/Cpl G Francis Cpl J French L/Cpl W Friel Pte M Garner L/Cpl E Garrett Pte W Geary Pte C Gibbons L/Cpl H Green Pte R Green Pte T Green Pte G Grundy Pte H Handley Pte I Harris Pte C Heggs Pte W Hind Cpl T Hinton Pte J Hitchcock Cpl L Hollis Pte T Hopkins Pte W Hopkins Pte R Hubbard Pte E Huckerby Pte P Jackson Pte A Jakeman Pte B Jeffery Pte R Jeffs Pte L Jenson Lt T Joaquim Pte F Jones Pte J King Pte R King Pte H Lambert Pte J Lambert Pte G Lamey Pte E Lane Sgt W Lees Pte J Lewis Pte C Lissenburgh Pte W Lockton L/Cpl J Lovegrove Cpl W Maddocks Pte F Maisey Pte W Mallender Cpl E Mallinder Pte G Marshall Pte G Martin Pte G Mather Pte G Mattlock Pte R Mayne Lt B MccGwire Pte W Mee Pte O Meenan L/Cpl A Middleton Pte J Mills Pte M Montgomery Pte A Moore Cpl A Moore Pte L Morgan Pte D Mowbray Pte W Muir RQMS S Murdy Pte W Naylor Cpl E Neal Pte H Needham L/Cpl C Newton Pte R Nobes L/Cpl H Norman Pte F Nunley Sgt B Oliver Pte T O'Mara Pte N Page Pte A Paine Pte A Palmer Pte P Pargiter Cpl E Parsons L/Cpl E Pearson Pte J Pearson Pte G Pegg Pte F Peters Pte W Phillips L/Sgt F Pidcock Pte R Porter Pte L Pratt Pte J Priestley Pte H Pritchard Cpl J Pritchard Pte L Redfern Pte F Rowbotham Pte J Sale Pte F Salt Pte L Salt Cpl A Savage Pte W Savage Pte C Saxby Pte A Seal Pte W Sharman Pte H Shelton Pte A Shenton Pte J Shepherd Pte L Smale Pte A Smart Sgt D Smith Sgt G Smith Pte R Smith Pte W Smith Pte W Smith Pte T Spencer L/Cpl P Spring Pte A Stafford L/Sgt L Taylor Pte W Taylor Pte W Toon Pte G Truswell Pte A Turner Driver L Turner Pte H Vann Pte W Viscount Pte V Wallace Cpl T Warin Sgt B Watkins L/Cpl R Watkins Pte G Webster L/Cpl F Wessel Pte J White Pte T Wingell L/Cpl W Wood Pte J Wright Pte W Wright

CAPTIVITY

Pte R Abbey Sgt B Annis Pte C Ashmore Pte F Astill Pte A Bailey L/Cpl C Ball Pte G Ball Pte G Bancroft Pte F Barnes Pte H Barnett Pte T Barnett Pte A Bell Pte J Bennett Pte S Bevins Pte A Billings Pte J Birch L/Cpl T Blackham L/Cpl S Bockcross Pte D Bowman Pte H Brookes Pte J Chamberlain L/Cpl W Chessman Pte T Chesson Pte G Clayton L/Cpl G Close L/Cpl A Coley L/Cpl W Coley L/Cpl L Corton Pte N Cotterill Pte F Coupland Pte G Craig Lt W Dagg Pte G Dalby Cpl H Dawes L/Cpl F Digby Pte F Edmands Pte S Edridge Pte F Element Pte A Ellis L/Cpl H Ellis Pte E Faulconbridge Pte H Faulks Pte R Firth Pte J Fisher Cpl W Flewitt Pte S Freer Pte E Gardner Pte S Gibbins Dmr G Gibbs Pte R Gooch Cpl J Goodhand Pte A Guilford Pte J Haines Pte A Hall Pte F Hall Pte J Hathaway Bdmn J Heathcote Pte A Hill Pte G Hill Cpl L Hilsdon Pte A Hodges Pte J Hollingsworth L/Cpl A Horton Pte H Hucknall Pte F Hull Pte J Inglesant Pte I Jackson Pte R James Pte W Jesson Sgt H Johnson Sgt R Jones L/Cpl R Kindon Pte S Lawrence Cpl J Layte Pte G Lee L/Cpl H Letts Pte A Lewis Pte P Lewis Dmr A Lord Pte C Luck Pte J Maddams Pte E Maynard Pte E Mayne L/Cpl G Middleton Capt I Mitchell Pte G Moore Pte L Nash Cpl J Newnham Pte W Nunn L/Cpl G Oliver Pte W Orchard Pte G Page Cpl F Parker Pte A Parnham Pte R Patterson Pte T Pearce Pte G Pick L/Cpl G Pickaver Bdmn J Pilkington Sgt G Platts Pte J Radford Pte A Redding L/Cpl G Richardson L/Cpl J Robinson Pte W Rodwell Pte H Rollett Pte D Roper Pte W Rose Pte P Ross Pte C Rudin Cpl J Rushby L/Cpl R Salmon Pte E Sandy Pte J Scasebrook L/Cpl J Scott Pte H Shardlow Pte L Sharpe Pte L Sheldon Pte J Shepherd Pte S Spencer Pte F Squires Pte G Squires Pte C Stapleford Pte R Stier Pte C Storer Pte W Sutton L/Cpl H Swindell Pte P Tate Pte L Tew Pte L Thomas Pte A Thompson Pte F Thompson Pte S Thompson Pte S Thompson L/Sgt F Thorpe Pte G Tidd Pte E Trapp L/Cpl G Truslove L/Cpl H Tudor Pte F Vince Pte H Walker Pte W Waller Pte C Walton Pte D Walton Pte E Warner Pte K Welch Pte W West L/Cpl J Weston Cpl A Wharmby Pte T Whetton Pte F White Sgt T Whitehouse L/Cpl T Whittle Pte T Wilkinson Pte L Wilks P Wright

Personal portraits from the Malaya Campaign



John Sharpe photographed as he was liberated from a World War II camp in the Far East after the Japanese surrender in 1945. He had been captured three years earlier along with other members of the Leicestershire Regiment, aged 27, and weighed just four stone when he was released. John, better known as Jack, was one of two Leicesters men that escaped from Nong Pladuck POW camp on the Thai Burma railway in Thailand, sent back to Singapore and sentenced to 4 years solitary confinement in Outram Road gaol, Singapore.

John was from Scraftoft and died in 2002 at the age of 88. This famous photograph now hangs in the Imperial War Museum in London and at New Walk Museum in Leicester. It was taken at Outram Road Jail in Singapore where he had been held.



Reginald Onions fought in the Malaya

Campaign and became a prisoner of war at the fall of Singapore on 15th Feb 1942. He was initially held in Changi POW camp but was later moved to a work camp in the River Valley Road area of Singapore.

In October 1942 he was transported by rail from Singapore to Thailand where he was held at Nong Pladuck working in a goods marshalling yard in support of the Thai Burma Railway. In early 1945 he was moved to Ubon POW camp in eastern Thailand to work on the construction of an air strip until he was liberated in August 1945.

His medals are on display at the [Loughborough Carillon Tower & War Memorial Museum](#).

The Burma Campaign (Phase Two of the Far East Campaign)

The Battles of Imphal and Kohima



Fought between 8th March and 18th July 1944, these were the turning point of one of the most gruelling campaigns of the Second World War (1939-45). The decisive Japanese defeat in north-east India became the springboard for the subsequent re-conquest of Burma.

For a full account of these battles [visit the National Army Museum website](#).

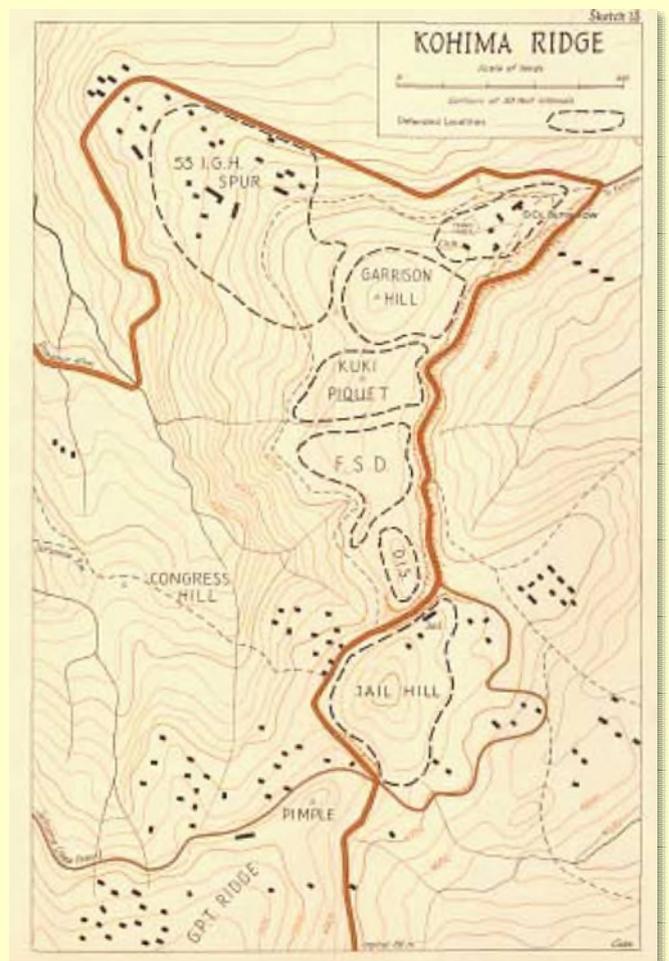
An account of the Battle for Kohima

Between 8th April and 13th May 1944, the fate of British troops in Burma was being decided over a small asphalt tennis court. This court lay on what was once a calm and scenic plateau, overlooking the District Commissioner of Naga Hills' bungalow. But in the spring of 1944 the entire region exploded into battle.

The British, Indian and American troops in Burma and Eastern India had been steadily pushed back by the advancing Imperial Japanese Army, who had their eyes set on advancing into India itself. On the 4th of April, they launched a massive attack against the British positions on the Kohima Ridge. This ridge was barely a mile long, and only a few hundred yards deep. Despite its high slopes, the Japanese attacked in force, pushing the British into defensive positions as they laid siege. By the 6th, the British had lost access to their water supplies in the south and were desperately trying to hold on to what positions they left.

The District Commissioner's Bungalow sat at the northern end of the British defensive line and was first attacked on the 8th of April. The Japanese suffered heavy losses but kept pressing forward. Finally, despite the best efforts of the British troops they broke through the line. Under covering fire from a [Bren gun](#), the British troops were able to retreat to the highest point in the compound, the tennis court. The Battle of the Tennis Court had begun.

Even on this first day, the fighting was incredibly gruesome. The Japanese refused to stop their onslaught, and likewise the British refused to stop their defence. Only yards away from one another the two sides kept up a constant barrage of fire. Between Easter



Sunday, 9th April and 10th April, the Japanese launched infantry attacks almost every 30 minutes.

The Japanese General Sato knew that his troops would soon have their supplies cut off by the monsoon rains. His men needed to achieve victory and secure a strong defence as soon as possible. The British, likewise, knew that they only had to hold out for a matter of weeks before they would be saved by the monsoons.

But this intense fighting took a toll on the British troops. A Company, of the 4th Battalion Royal West Kents, had been dug in behind the tennis court for three days. Their casualty count was high and their ammunition low. Stretcher bearers would sneak forward at night to pull wounded soldiers out of forward positions. But even after being saved, and taken to the field hospital, the men were not out of combat.

One of the greatest horrors of Kohima was that the British wounded had to be treated in clear view of Japanese positions. They had dug a deep trench for use as a hospital, from which the British troops could see the Japanese mortar teams firing on them and their comrades.

There was no good way to relieve the lack of ammunition for the British troops. But something had to be done, and one Sergeant from the Royal West Kents took up the job. On multiple occasions, he ran to the forward fighting positions carrying as much ammunition as he could. After it was distributed among the men, he would then sprint back to the supply depot. He repeated this during much of the fighting on the ridge and under constant artillery and rifle fire from the Japanese.

By the 13th, A company was relieved by B Company, with fresher troops and ammunition. But when they got into position by the court they realized how terrifying the battle had become. The Japanese troops had pushed to one side of the court, with British troops slightly up the hill on the other side.

As rifle ammunition became scarce, something strange happened. Men started throwing grenades from one line into the other. Troops later described it as almost a snowball fight, but with small deadly explosives. Men would toss a grenade, and duck. If a grenade came into their own trench they would either try to throw it back or run for cover; difficult in a small slit trench.

But the British artillery had picked up the fight against the Japanese, and on the 14th and 15th, no attacks came, much to the surprise of the British troops there. But this brief respite wouldn't last and on the 17th the Japanese launched their final assault of the battle. They took the British Field Supply Depot, and Kuki Piquet, both on hills just south of the tennis court and bungalow. The Allied forces were now trapped in the northeastern section of the Kohima ridge.

But the Japanese gains would not last. The British responded with Artillery and forced them back with the help of a relief column from the 2nd Division, which had been fighting through the jungle to reach Kohima. The tide had turned, and the British started pushing back. But at the tennis court, the Japanese were holding out.

An Indian unit, the 1st Battalion of the 1st Punjab Regiment, had taken up where the Royal West Kents left off. Arriving at the trenches on the 18th, they were almost immediately met with a grenade match, like the one on the 13th. Again the tennis court saw some of the toughest action of the entire battle. One man, Jemadar Mohammed Rafiq, earned a Military Cross while there. He had lost all three of his section commanders and organised a rifle section from the remnants. He then led a charge, killing 16 Japanese troops and taking their forward trenches.

But this small advance did not last. The British and Indian troops at the tennis court were pushed back between the 18th and the 24th. By the 24th they had been replaced by D Company, the Berkshire Regiment. Over the next three weeks, the intense fighting for this small strip of land continued.

The Japanese picked up their constant attacks, despite high casualties. The British could not advance forward or move during the day due to snipers. Finally, they were able to bring up [Lee Grant tanks](#), pulling, pushing, and driving them up the steep slopes until they were in position. The tanks started pushing forward, firing almost point-blank range into the Japanese defences. On 10th May, the tennis court was cleared, and by the 13th, the bungalow as well.

War is always absurd. But within it, there have always been even stranger moments. The Battle of the Tennis Court saw some of the hardest fighting of the entire Burma Campaign, with men only yards from one another. This infantry battle, fought in what was once a serene jungle resort, saw over 4,600 British casualties, and 5,700 Japanese.

Neither side was willing to give in, and the combined British and Indian defence came to symbolise their refusal to give in to Japanese aggression. They held their ground for over a month, against constant infantry attacks, grenades, shelling, and lack of supplies.



View of the Garrison Hill battlefield, the key to the British defences at Kohima



Men of the 10th Gurkha Rifles clearing enemy positions on 'Scraggy' hill, Burma, 1944. 'Scraggy' was the British nickname for one of the hills of the 5,000 foot-high Shenam Saddle which was the scene of intense fighting during the Japanese drive along the Patel road towards Imphal in April 1944.

The position was a labyrinth of bunkers; trees were reduced to shattered trunks and the hillsides turned into barren wastes by artillery fire. The result was a field of battle reminiscent of the worst fighting on the Somme during World War One.



The Chindits were the largest of all the allied special forces of the 2nd World War. Formed and led by Major-General Orde Wingate DSO, they fought behind enemy lines in Northern Burma during 1943 and 1944 in the War against Japan. They were unconventional due to their total reliance on airdrops for their supplies and complete dependence on wireless for communications. In March 1942 Lt.Col. (then) Wingate arrived in India after carrying out successful guerrilla operations in Palestine and Abyssinia. Using his understanding of guerrilla warfare he proposed a scheme of Long Range Penetration operations deep into the enemy-held territories of Burma

Wingate organised and specially trained the Chindits in commando methods, preparing them for jungle fighting, sabotage, and air supply dropping. The Chindits would infiltrate deep behind the Japanese lines in Northern Burma. For many months they lived in and fought the enemy in the jungles of occupied Burma, hundreds of miles behind the Japanese forward positions.



fresh-faced serviceman
Jim Posnett as a

Their mission was to raid the enemy's lines of communications, blowing bridges, railway tracks and blocking supply routes. They would harass the enemy to cause confusion, disrupt their plans and divert their resources.

The Chindits were organised into columns with a strength of about 340. Each column was strong enough to defend itself and capable of mounting surprise attacks on enemy targets, yet small enough for concealment and for mobility to evade and slip through enemy nets. Columns would combine to strike larger targets and then disappear back into the jungle.

The Leicestershire Regiment was the only Regiment to have two battalions, and the 7th Battalion was the only Territorial Army battalion, in the Chindit forces.

Here we pay tribute to our very own distinguished Leicestershire Regiment and Chindit veteran, **Gerald (Jim) Posnett**, of Frisby on the Wreake. In 1940 Jim joined the 7th Battalion of Leicestershire Regiment, and in 1942 he was sent to Singapore, but due to Japanese invasion diverted to Karachi transit camp. He was a Lance Corporal with 7th Leicestershire in the Chindit Column after 6 months, then transferred into the Military Police. He transferred to the 15th Indian Corp HQ then 5 Brigade West African Division Campaign in Arakan. Promoted to Sergeant, he then transferred from India to Java to Singapore.

Jim was stationed in Singapore when Mountbatten accepted the surrender from Japan in 1945. He returned to Leicestershire in 1946.



Jim Posnett today, aged 100 years

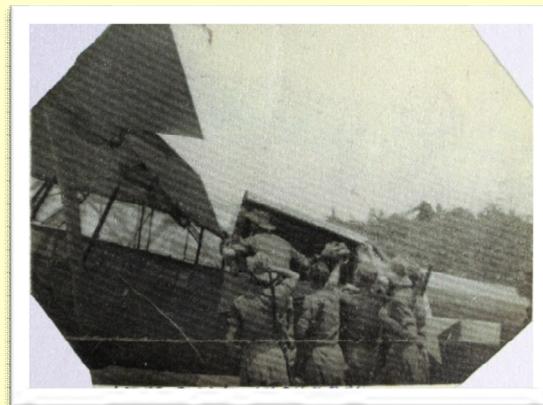


Jim's daughter-in-law, Pam Posnett, is the current Chairman of the County Council. Here Pam talks to Jim about his experiences of the Burma Campaign, and more. [Watch a video of this lovely interview.](#)

We are very grateful to Jim for sharing his personal story with us.

The Leicesters through the lens

Here is a collection of snapshots taken by Captain Ralph Leyland of 2nd Battalion of the Leicestershire Regiment's operations on the Chinwin River, Burma, featuring Leicestershire Regiment troops on active service.



Far East Prisoners of War – remembered through personal accounts

Here we hear from **Shirley Barnes** and **Sonia Bradford**, members of the [Children of Far East Prisoners of War](#) (COFEPOW) who recall the moving stories of their fathers' experiences.

Albert Barnes (Shirley's Dad)

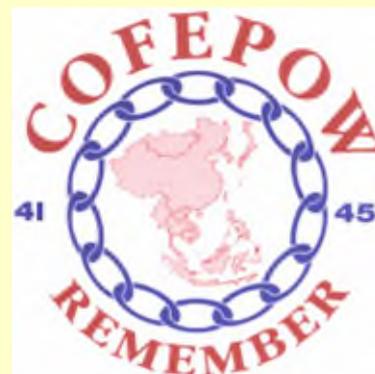


Albert as a young serviceman

Dad was born in the East End of London in 1920. He was one of six surviving children and there was never much money but there seemed to be a lot of fun from the way he spoke.

He volunteered shortly after the outbreak of war and joined the Royal Artillery. He was sent to do his basic training in Scotland thinking that they were going to fight the Germans in the deserts of North Africa.

Dad was en route for South Africa when the Japanese invaded Malaya and they were diverted to India for some jungle training. He said they then spent three weeks training in one of the driest parts of India and never saw anything remotely jungle like.



The Battle for Singapore was well underway by the time Dad's convoy arrived in January 1942. Dad always said that he arrived just in time to be taken prisoner. The convoy he had arrived on then took off civilians, mainly women and children. Some made it through to safety but many ships leaving the island were sunk with a huge loss of life. There were no lists kept of those on those ships, many of which were overcrowded, so there is no record of how many of the mostly women and children on board died.

Singapore was being bombed daily and hundreds were being killed. One of Dad's best friends was killed when the ammunition truck he was driving received a direct hit.

In the early stages of fighting, Dad heard that further down the road was a dead Japanese soldier, and being just a lad, he went to have a look. He thought it would be a 'bit of a laugh' but was shaken to see that he was just a boy like him, some mother's son.

On 14th February, Dad and his mate were ordered to take a wounded soldier and a Chinese man whose foot had been blown off to the Alexandra Hospital. What Dad did not know until weeks later was that while they were leaving, the Japanese were already in the hospital, killing the staff and patients, including those in the operating theatre. On the way out there were snipers and shells exploding everywhere. Dad was hit and had a slight head wound which left him with a permanent scar across his head. I asked him once if it was a bullet or a bit of shrapnel. He said 'no idea, gel, it was moving too bloody fast for me to see'.

The Allies surrendered the next day and in total about 130,000 Allied troops were taken prisoner of war. This was the worst military capitulation in British history.

Dad tried to escape by boat but was 'persuaded' to return to land by a Japanese gunboat. His family didn't hear that he was alive until July when he was allowed to send a pre-printed card.

Some weeks after capture the Japanese began dividing the men into work parties. Dad was a driver and was assigned to a couple of Japanese Sgt Majors. Dad was really small and looked very young. They wouldn't believe he was old enough to be in the Army and they called him 'Baby soldier'.

Along with thousands of other men, Dad was sent overland to work on the Death Railway. POWs and thousands of Romusha (enslaved local labourers) worked to build a railway up to Burma. The death rate for FEPOWs was about 28%, and higher still for the Romusha. Men were beaten, starved, and literally worked to death. Many others died from diseases like beri and cholera.

Dad had a halfway decent pair of shorts and was often on the cremation or burial parties. He said that quite often those who had died of cholera were cremated. No one told him that muscles in the body can contract when being burned and one time one of the dead appeared to sit up. Dad was terrified that they were burning someone who was still alive. He had nightmares about that, and other horrors, until the day he died.

One day a troop train came through, and stopped. Dad said he didn't take any notice until he heard voices shouting 'Baby soldier'. It was the Sgt Majors. They were horrified at the state he was in, and they started to beat the Japanese guard. They went back to the train and got food for Dad and before they left, they clearly threatened the guards. Dad said he didn't know what they said but he was spared any beatings for quite a while.

He said that you never knew when you woke up whether this would be the last day you were ever going to see. Once he was ordered to kneel and he heard the Japanese officer draw his sword. He thought this was it but for some reason the sword was stopped short and the officer just rested it on Dad's neck, laughed and walked away. Dad had no idea what he had done or why he was still alive.

In 1944, those that were deemed 'fit', were taken back to Singapore and placed on what became known as Hell Ships. By 1944, none of the POWs were remotely like anything that could be described as fit.

Hell Ships were basically old ships, often tankers, which the Japanese were using as POW transports. They were not identified as carrying POWs and they travelled in convoys with other ships. In consequence, many were sunk by American submarines.

Dad was forced into the hold of a ship called the Kachidoki Maru, along with about 950 British and Australian POWs, many of them sick and dying. There were also about 1,000 Japanese on board, including sick and wounded soldiers, and civilians.

Also in the same convoy was another Hell Ship The Rakuyo Maru, with 1,317 POWs on board.



Albert (on the left) pictured in New Zealand after the war, where he was sent to build up before coming home. He is pictured with pals Les and Bill. All had been taken POW in Singapore, been on the Railway together, and all three had survived the sinking of the Kachidoki Maru.

On the 12th September 1944 the convoy was attacked by American submarines and both the Kachidoki Maru and the Rakuyo Maru were sunk.

Dad was able to get out of the hold before the ship sank, but 431 POWs didn't make it. He said that while he was struggling to get off, he could hear the Japanese shooting their wounded as there was no way they could make it. Most of the other Japanese were rescued. All the POWs who survived jumped in the first ten minutes after being hit

Those on the Rakuyo Maru suffered a worse fate. Of the 1,317 POWs, 1,159 died. Some of the survivors were amazingly rescued by the self-same American submarines that sank them. This is when the Allies became aware of the terrible conditions the POWs were enduring. One of the men rescued by the Americans was a Hinckley man.

Dad was in the sea clinging to wreckage with several others, for days. He was severely malnourished and covered in oil. His sinuses were burnt out from the burning oil and his sense of smell never really returned.

He was eventually rescued and eventually taken to mainland Japan.

He described what a pitiful sight they must have been. Most just had loin cloths and some not even that. They were sick, starved and covered in oil. They were marched through the streets where Dad said they were jeered at and spat on.

The survivors from the Kachidoki Maru were sent to work on the docks and in the train yards at Sakata, northern Japan.

The POWs were told that in the event the Allies invaded mainland Japan, that they would be massacred. Dad said that, having seen all the brutality they were capable of, he totally believed this would be the case.

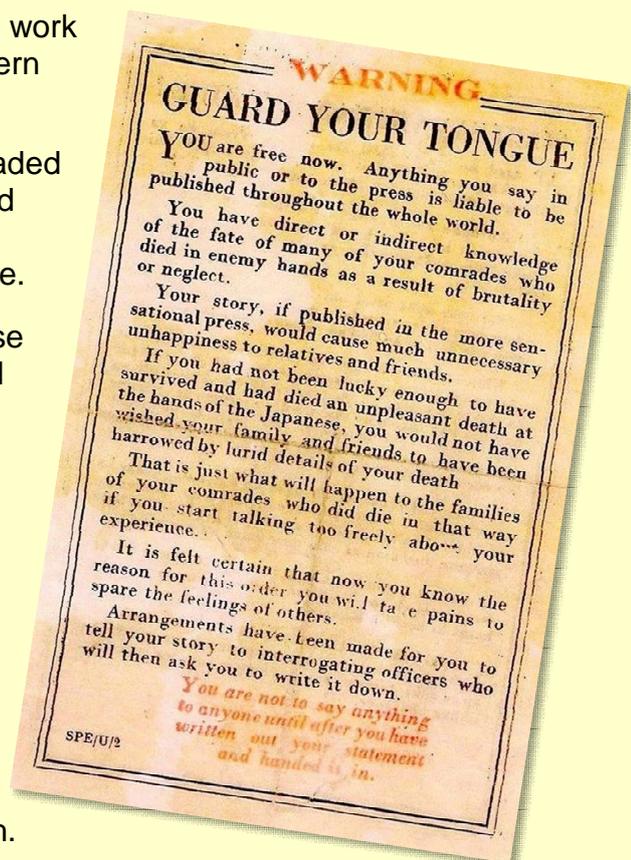
Dad said he knew something had happened because the local Japanese seemed really frightened. An old man who was a watchman on the docks told him about a 'Big Bomb' but Dad had no idea how big it had been.

He arrived back at camp from a work party to find that machine guns had been set up near the camp. He 'legged it' and refused to come out from his hiding place until a senior British officer came and told him the guns were there to protect the POWs from the locals.

The Americans did not get to Sakata until September and Dad finally left the camp on the 12th.

He was taken by hospital ship to New Zealand to recover. He did not arrive home in England until January 1946.

By the time he got home, the war with Germany had been over for many months and people were keen to just get on with life. He said absolutely no one wanted to know what they had been through and on top of that, they had been told NOT to talk about it.



Many never did and took what they suffered to their graves. It is estimated that between 25% and 28% of those taken POW by the Japanese died during captivity. Those who survived often died very young as a result of malnutrition and lingering illness. Many had recurring nightmares and what would now be called PTSD. Dad suffered for years with malaria and he lost all his teeth in his thirties and forties, because of the impact of malnutrition.

He lived every day like it was his last, because for over three and a half years, it could have been.

The thing that saddened him the most was that the war in the Far East, and those that were there, especially the FEPOWs and civilian internees, and their suffering, was largely ignored. At Remembrance weekend he would quite often say they had been forgotten again.

He was diagnosed with cancer and was told that he had four months to live. He lived for another four and a half years. He lived with us for all that time. He had survived so much that his grandsons called him the Comeback Kid. They reckoned if there was a nuclear holocaust, the only things to survive would be cockroaches and granddad.

He died aged 92. He spoke more about what he had been through in the years before his death. Some of it was absolutely horrific and I could not write it here. It was terrible to hear what he told me, but he needed to make sure that it did not die with him. Dad's story is no different to other FEPOWs. They all suffered the most terrible brutality and starvation. And for the most part that has been ignored for the last 75 years.

Philip Dixon (Sonia's Dad)

My father, Philip Dixon, was born on 27th February 1921 and spent his childhood in the small village of Holwell, near Melton Mowbray. As a 16 year old, he enlisted at Glen Parva Barracks on 22nd May 1937. I have set out below his service record...

- 1937-1938 After a short time in Aldershot (2nd Battalion, Leicestershire Regiment) he was sent on Boy service to Jubbalpure, India (1st Battalion)
- 1938-1939 Razmak, North West Frontier
- 1939-1940 Agra, India
- 1940-1941 Penang, Malaya
- 1941-1942 Phil served in the Malayan (including Jitra) campaign eventually joining forces with the East Surreys to form the British Battalion.
- Feb 1942 Taken prisoner of war at the fall of Singapore. Changi River Valley, Caldecote and Pasir Panjang.
- 1943-1944 Then transported to Thailand as part of D Force working on the railway in camps Matoona, Konkoita, Hindata, Kinsayok and others.
- Mar - May 1944 Onward to Non Pladuck after railway completion and then to Singapore.
- 3rd June 1944 Boarded Hioki Maru (hell ship) to Japan arriving Moji Japan on 21st June 1944.

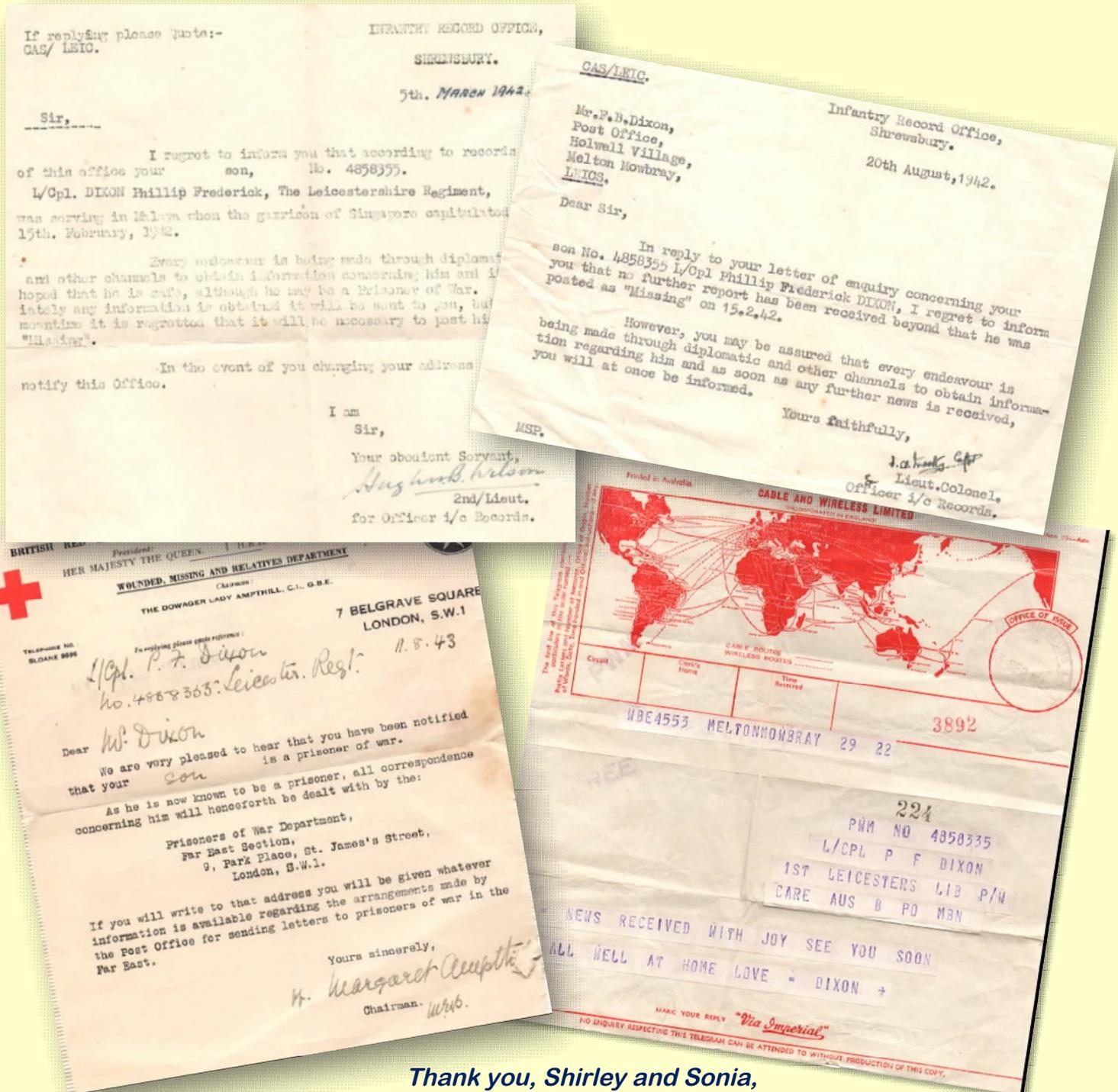


L/Cpl 4858355 Philip F Dixon, Leicestershire Regiment

June 1944-1945 Working in the Carbine factories in Osaka and Kanose, Japan.
 6th Sept 1945 Officially handed over to Allied forces.
 Sept 1945 Repatriated on the USS Joseph Dickman via, Okinawa, Manila, San Francisco, NovaScotia.
 5th Nov 1945 Arrived in Southampton UK aboard the Queen Elizabeth.
 1951 Retired from the Army.

Thereafter making his family home in Melton Mowbray. Phil sadly passed away on 17th March 2002.

The correspondence below powerfully illustrates the emotional rollercoaster that the Dixon family went through whilst awaiting news of their missing son, Philip.



Thank you, Shirley and Sonia,
 for sharing these very personal and powerful accounts.

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM

Hell Ships

(by Shirley Barnes)

Very few people are aware about the Hell Ships, which, starting in 1942, the Japanese used to transport POWs to other countries to work.

Already sick and sometimes dying POWs were crammed into dark holds with little food and often no sanitation. They were crammed in so tight that there was barely room to sit, let alone lie down. Many died on the journeys because of illness, or starvation, or lack of air. They were 'buried' at sea.

Hell Ships were not marked as carrying POWs so they were often attacked by Allied planes and submarines.

The loss of life was terrible, and it is estimated that at least 20,000 POWs died.

The Japanese enslaved local people as labourers. These were known as Romusha. No one knows how many of them died either as a result of being worked to death or in the Hell Ships, as no one kept any records of who they were. They were even more expendable than the POWs.

These are examples of the Hell Ships and the horrendous loss of life. All these ships have local connections as local men were on board. As it is not known definitively how many local men were involved in the war in the Far East, it is impossible to say exactly how many were killed in the fighting or as POWs.

The Rakuyo Maru and Kachidoki Maru

Torpedoed 12th Sept 1944 while in the same convoy. 1,159 POWs died on the Rakuyo Maru and 431 on the Kachidoki Maru. At least nine local men were on board the Rakuyo Maru of whom, two survived. On the Kachidoki Maru there were at least fourteen local men of who two survived.

The Lisbon Maru

Torpedoed 1st Oct 1942. 800 POWs of the 2,000 on board, died, many because they were shot by the Japanese. At least four local men died.

The Suez Maru

Torpedoed 29th Nov. 11th 1943. Carried all sick POWs, some stretcher cases. All 548 POWs died. Those who escaped from the ship were shot by the Japanese. At least seven local men died.

The Enoura Maru

Bombed by Allied aircraft 9th Jan 1945. 350 POWs killed. At least two local men died.

The Maros Maru

Had 500 POWs on board. The ship was in dock for forty days for repair. During that time 159 POWs died in the holds in terrible conditions. At least two local men died.

The Junyo Maru

Had 4,200 Romusha and 2,300 POWs aboard. Torpedoed 18th Sept 1944. About 4,000 Romusha and 1,626 POWs died. At least one local man died.

The Hofuku Maru

Sunk by Allied aircraft 20th Sept 1944. 1,047 of the 1,289 POWs died. Of those that died, at least 19 were local men.



We want to create a single Roll of Honour for Leicester and Leicestershire which includes all those who lost their lives....

...and we need your help!

This commemorative document has already featured the poignant Leicestershire Regiment Roll of Honour of those who didn't return home from the Far East. But there were many other men who didn't return from the Far East. These men served with other regiments or served in the Royal Navy or the Royal Air Force.

Shirley Barnes has been compiling a record of these men. Her Burma list has further work to go and so is not yet available to view. Her [Malaya list](#) (Word doc, 168kb) is well advanced, but as a work-in-progress Shirley would like to hear from you if you are able to add to the Malaya record, or spot an error. Or if you wish to provide a name for the emerging Burma list. If you can contribute please email lieutenancyoffice@leics.gov.uk and your contribution will be forwarded to Shirley.

Further records that have been collated from the First and Second World Wars to date can also be found here:

- [The County Council's War Memorial Project](#)
- The Leicester City, County & Rutland [At Risk War Memorials Project](#)

There is not one single roll of honour capturing all those from Leicester and Leicestershire who were killed in the Second World War.

With this 75th anniversary of VJ Day now is the right time to start to try and put that right. Our generation owes that to those who perished, and it can be our legacy for future generations. All those who paid the ultimate sacrifice deserve to be honoured and not forgotten.

We need your help to complete those records, and only then can a single Roll of Honour be created for all those from the city and county who lost their lives in the Second World War.

If you know of anyone not recorded can you get in touch and let us know. Please email: warmemorials@leics.gov.uk



WE WILL REMEMBER THEM ALL WITH YOUR HELP

Further online content...

Follow the stories of Leicester's involvement in the Far East campaign on the [Story of Leicester website](#).



Visit [the Government's national VJ Day 75 website](#) for details of the national commemoration. There are resources available and you can download an event toolkit.

You can also share your Second World War stories, family histories and messages of remembrance on social media. Use **#VJDay75** to join the conversation on social media now.



[Uncover the untold stories](#) as the RBL remembers and recognises all those who served and sacrificed in the Far East and ultimately brought an end to the Second World War.



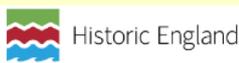
Visit the [Commonwealth War Graves Commission's website](#) to submit a photo and words of tribute to remember a loved one who fought during the world wars - or just to give thanks for everyone who fought for their country.



There is a lovely [collection of some 15 short films](#) available to view on the British Pathé film website, featuring the Royal Family, Winston Churchill, celebrations in London, and much more.



[The Imperial War Museum's dedicated webpages to VJ Day 75](#) contain some fascinating images and rare colour film footage from VJ Day.



'VE to VJ Day: 75 Places that Witnessed the War'. Historic England have [curated a collection of 75 listed places which help build a picture of life during the conflict](#).

Thank you for reading our VJ Day 75 tribute – please do share it!