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Masao Hirakubo

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Birth: Sep. 25, 1919
Yokohama, Japan

Death: Mar. 4, 2008
Hendon
Greater London, England

Social Activist and Philanthropist. A Japanese veteran of the Second World War Burma campaign, Masao Hirakubo devoted the latter part of his life to reconciliation with his former British adversaries, for which he was honored by his Emperor and appointed an honorary OBE. His war-time experiences in Burma led him to change his religion from Shinto to Roman Catholic. He returned to Japan to find his family home in Yokohama had been destroyed by bombing. His former commercial company, Marubeni, re-employed him and he worked in the Tokyo branch before eventually coming to Britain as its representative. It was then that he began a mission of reconciliation with his former enemies in Burma that lasted until his death. Corporal Gwilym Davies, Royal Welsh Fusiliers, and Hywel James, Worcestershire Regiment, who had served in Burma, were among the first former British soldiers to seek reconciliation with the Japanese. They were put into contact with Hirakubo and visited Japan with him to find they were shown great kindness everywhere. Their cause was joined by Louis Allen of the University of Durham, who had been an interpreter in Burma. Their initiative resulted in the formation in 1991 of the Burma Campaign Fellowship Group with Major-General Ian Lyall Grant as chairman and Masao Hirakubo as councillor, comprising frontline soldiers and airmen of the Burma campaign and former prisoners of the Japanese. They visited Japan in several parties and were escorted by members of the All Burma Veterans Association of Japan, who in turn sent parties to Britain that were escorted by members of the Burma Campaign Fellowship Group. Men who would have killed each other in battle formed friendships they had never anticipated. They believed hatred should not pass from generation to generation and that reconciliation should follow final victory. Acts of reconciliation took place at Westminster Abbey, Canterbury, Coventry and other cathedrals, and in Japan, India - at Kohima and Imphal - and in Burma. On August 15, 1999, the anniversary of the end of the Second World War, Ambassador Sadayuki Hayashi said in his address from the pulpit of Coventry Cathedral, in the presence of British and Japanese Burma campaign veterans and prisoners of the Japanese, "The experience of those people who suffered during the war against Japan will remain forever etched in their minds. We Japanese feel deeply remorseful about what happened and sincerely apologise for it." In May 2004, to mark the 60th anniversary of the Battle of Kohima, wreaths were laid on the Indian Divisions' Memorial in the Royal



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Military Academy, Sandhurst, jointly by the Japanese Ambassador, the Commandant, Hirakubo - representing Japanese veterans - and Lieutenant-Colonel Patric Emerson, of the Indian Army Association, representing British and Indian veterans. Hirakubo was a guest at the annual dinner of Burma Company at Sandhurst and was welcomed to the British 2nd Division annual reunion in York and laid a wreath on the Kohima Memorial. Ever mindful of the suffering of British prisoners of the Japanese in captivity, Hirakubo helped them whenever he could, particularly in their contacts with Japan. He went back to Kohima many times and gave much help with the building of the new cathedral. He believed that the Japanese and the Allies who had caused such devastation in Burma had a continuing responsibility to help to rebuild the country. He was also the founder and chairman of the Japanese UK Residents Association. Masao Hirakubo was born in Yokohama, the only son among four sisters, but moved to Kobe after the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923. His father was an international trader who believed Japan could gain what it needed through international trade, not war. He is survived by his wife Hiroko, whom he married in 1951, and by a son and two daughters.

Burial:

[Hendon Cemetery and Crematorium](#)

Hendon

Greater London, England

Plot: Mr. Hirakubo's ashes were scattered over a section of Japanese graves in the cemetery.

Created by: [Warrick L. Barrett](#)

Record added: Jan 09, 2010

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