

Copy of a letter in The Tablet of 31 August 2002 by BCS Member, Philip Daniel

Comrades in Arms

There have been countless stories down the years about the bitterness felt by British war veterans against the Japanese. They have usually focused on the ex-soldiers and their families' anger that they had never received adequate apology or compensation for their suffering in Burma during the Second World War.

But there have also been old soldiers who have very quietly spent the intervening years trying to restore a climate of friendship between the two nations. Among them has been a Catholic, Philip Daniel, who expresses frustration with those who continue to complain that the Japanese never apologised for atrocities they committed in Burma.

"There are always those who say it is too little too late or say it is not the form of apology they want. It has tended to come from the families of ex-servicemen. Those of us who actually suffered have never been like this", the Burma veteran told The Tablet.

Last month, as close to VJ Day (15 August) as possible, there were services of remembrance at Coventry and Canterbury Cathedrals and at a London Buddhist temple.

Daniel, 84, maintains that the Japanese have given the most sincere and heartfelt apologies that their constitution allows. He points to the frequent encounters between British and Japanese ex-servicemen that have led to true comradeship and he cites the work of two organisations, the Burma Campaign Fellowship Group and the All Burma Veterans Association of Japan. With most surviving veterans now in their eighties, both groups were wound up this year. But Daniel himself shows no sign of letting up and is a member of a new organisation, the Burma Campaign Society.

"What remains now is what our generation has sought to leave", he says. In Britain this includes a fine library in English and Japanese at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London and a grove of English and Japanese maples at the National Arboretum in Staffordshire. A memorial is also planned at the restored St Ethelburga's Church in the City of London.