

# THE BURMA CAMPAIGN SOCIETY

## NEWSLETTER

Number 2

March 2003

---

### **THE CHAIRMAN'S NEW YEAR ADDRESS.**

Since we started the Burma Campaign Society on 14th March, 2002, we have steadily pursued our aims within the context of a very critical world situation. We are holding the first AGM, which is also an unique occasion for a Veterans' Reunion, on Thursday, 22nd May, 2003.

Next year is the 60th anniversary of the Imphal campaign and the All Burma Veterans' Association's plan to extend their annual pilgrimage to India, as well as to Kohima and Imphal, and to include joint memorials with British veterans, is being seriously discussed.

With best wishes to all our members,

Masao Hirakubo.

---

### **INTERNATIONAL FRIENDSHIP AND RECONCILIATION SUNDAY.**

The Burma Campaign Fellowship Group worked closely with the all Burma Veterans' Association of Japan from the 1970's onwards to bring about reconciliation between those who fought against each other in Burma between 1941 and 1945. Reciprocal visits were made by both groups to the United Kingdom, Japan and Burma. Joint memorial services, involving the laying of wreaths and paper cranes, were held in Westminster Abbey and in several cathedrals - notably Canterbury, Coventry and Rochester — and in Burma.

Feeling that its work of reconciliation had been completed, the BCFG "stood down" in March 2002. That did not however, mean that what it had started in promoting Friendship and Reconciliation should be forgotten.

Under the auspices of the International Friendship and Reconciliation Trust, the Very Reverend Robert Willis, Dean of Canterbury, has agreed that round the Service of Evensong in Canterbury Cathedral, at 3.00 p.m. on Sunday, 17th August this year, there will be a commemoration of the sacrifices made by those who fought in the Second World War, together with thanksgiving for the varied initiatives for reconciliation. It will carry with it the hope that the Service will inspire and enable others in the future in the UK, and in Japan and elsewhere, to commemorate each year the 15th August, or the Sunday immediately following, as International Friendship and Reconciliation Sunday.

His Excellency The Japanese Ambassador has been invited to the Service, and at least two Patrons of the Trust have expressed the hope to be there. It is also expected that Japanese veterans, former members of the BCFG, together with current members of the Burma Campaign Society, and a number of national and local dignitaries will join members of the Cathedral and the Trust in this service of thanksgiving, celebration and dedication to the future.

John Bynoe

*For further information and in order to advise on seating requirements, those wishing to attend on 17th August should notify John Bynoe, 5 Shirley Way, Bearstead, nr. Maidstone, Kent, ME15 8PP, by the end of July.*

---

---

## MASAO HIRAKUBO AT THE RIKKYO SCHOOL.

On Saturday 28th September, Masao Hirakubo and I visited the Rikkyo School (*Guildford Road, Ruddwick, West Sussex, RH12 3BE*) for Mr. Hirakubo to talk to the pupils about his experiences as a member of the Japanese armed forces in Burma during the Second World War and his subsequent activities to honour and remember his comrades and bring about reconciliation between Great Britain and Japan.

Mr. Hirakubo and I met at Victoria railway station to take the train to Horsham, where we were met by Mr. Kurashina, the Headmaster, who then showed us around the school. The pupils of the school are Japanese, as are their teachers, and in many ways it is like a little piece of Japan transported to England. As a teacher, I was impressed by the books in the school library, which covered many subjects and obviously provided a very useful resource for the pupils and teaching staff. As we walked round the school, we noticed certificates for winning Haiku competitions and a room containing several Koto. All of this gave the impression that this school cherished traditional Japanese culture and was proud to show it off.

In the evening, at the end of our tour, Mr. Hirakubo spoke to the pupils for an hour about his time in Burma. He told them how it felt to be there and what he and his friends had experienced. The pupils listened quietly and attentively. He then explained what he had done since the end of the war to honour the memory of his wartime friends and comrades, particularly those who did not live to return home to Japan, and how he is now involved with British veterans who share his aims.

Afterwards, in the teachers' common room, one boy came up to ask him a question about the emotions he had felt as a soldier. It is not common for Japanese school children to hear first hand experiences of wartime, so I am sure that Mr. Hirakubo's talk will have made a strong impression on them. Hopefully, they will now be better able to understand the interconnected histories of Japan and Great Britain, and why we should not take the peace that we enjoy for granted.

Akemi Solloway

---

## THE BATTLE OF KOHIMA.

### Discussion Meeting on 15th October, 2002.

The Battle of Kohima lasted for two months from April 1943. With the Battle of Imphal, it was the decisive encounter of the war in Burma and ended the Japanese attempt to invade India.

The village of Kohima at 5,000 feet, surrounded by tea plantations and peaks up to 9,000 feet, is 40 miles by winding road from the railhead at Dimapur, the main base for British and Allied troops, and 86 miles north of Imphal, the capital of the Indian border state of Manipur. The Dimapur-Imphal road, dominated by the Kohima Ridge, was the vital supply route into Burma.

In 1942 the defending forces, comprising the 1st Burma Division and 17th Indian Division, and thousands of civilians, had retreated north, pursued by the Japanese, who were halted by the onset of the monsoon in May.

Following a year of stalemate, Lieutenant General Renya Mutaguchi with his 15th Army was ordered, on 7th January, 1944, "to destroy the enemy at Imphal and establish strong defensive positions covering Kohima and Imphal before the coming of the rainy season." His plan was for Imphal to be attacked by 33 Division from the south and 15 Division from the north, with 31 Division seizing Kohima and cutting the Dimapur-Imphal road.

Kohima's small garrison, from the Assam Regiment, reinforced by 500 men of the Royal West Kents flown in from the coast, held out for 15 days against some 15,000 troops of 31 Division, until relieved by 2 British Division.

**Lieutenant Masao Hirakubo OBE**, 3 Battalion, 58 Regiment, 31 Division, described how he was responsible for feeding a thousand troops of his battalion, living on purchased and captured supplies with no rations from the rear. He gave each man twenty days supply of rice to carry. Of the 15,000 Burmese cattle driven up with the Division, only 10% got to Kohima. This was reached on the due date of 4th April. At one point, as they marched at night,

often under fire, using steep jungle tracks and crossing the Chindwin River, he fell 100 metres into a stream, but luckily survived. After a week's delay by the fighting at Sangshak, 20 British warehouses in Kohima, with enough supplies to feed the entire Division for three years, were captured, and he moved out two months' rations for his troops before the warehouses were destroyed by the RAF. Troops in the front line were supplied with rice balls, salt and a bottle of water in bamboo baskets. This was done at night because of the lack of air cover or air supply and the overwhelming superiority in arms, ammunition and equipment of 2 British Division

It was a very primitive battle. The officers were supplied with swords, pistols and grenades, and in their nightly attacks, the Japanese expected the British and Allied troops to fight to the last man, and did not expect to take prisoners, having no facilities for them. When they were defeated, after two months of bitter fighting, and ordered to make a sudden retreat during the monsoon, nearly all the men were sick with beriberi, dysentery and malaria.

**Corporal Roy Wellings**, 4 Battalion, the Queens own Royal West Kent Regiment, 5 Indian Division, described on tape how his Company had held DID hill for five days from 5th April in slit trenches, fighting off attacks night and day with rifles, bren guns and grenades. After they withdrew to FSD hill and then Kuki Picquet, water, food, ammunition and medical supplies were air-dropped to them. Kuki Picquet fell on 17th April, but the arrival of 2 Division's artillery prevented the enemy from following up. When they were relieved, he was one of only 10 survivors out of the 120 in his Company.

**Corporal Gwilym Davies MBE**, 1. Battalion, Royal Welch Fusiliers, 2 Division, told on tape of making first contact with Japanese forces on Garrison hill, capturing the summit covered with British and Japanese dead on 29th April and re-taking Kuki Picquet on 2nd May. He believed that the capture of Garrison hill, with its wonderful arc of fire over the Dimapur-Imphal road was the turning point in the Battle of Kohima and said that "the Japanese soldier always fought bravely. I have always admired him for that."

**Masao Hirakubo, Roy Wellings and Gwilym Davies** all spoke of the decisive effect of the overwhelming power of 2 Division artillery, to which the Japanese had no effective answer.

**Captain Maurice Franses**, Royal Norfolk Regiment was recorded, in action south of Kohima, by a BBC: radio commentator, witnessing a Japanese taking his own life with a grenade rather than allowing himself to be taken prisoner.

**Major Gordon Graham MC and Bar**, 1st Queens Own Cameron Highlanders, 2 Division, took part in the Battle and initiated the Burma Campaign Memorial Library in the University of London, with an identical library in Japan. He referred to books on the Battle to which reference could be made and suggested the formation of a Kohima Educational Trust to educate the Naga tribesmen in gratitude for their help at the battle of Kohima..

After the Battle, the Japanese retreated across the Chindwin River, heavily bombed by the RAF. Having inflicted in Singapore the greatest defeat in British military history, the Japanese at Kohima and Imphal suffered the greatest defeat in Japanese military history with the virtual destruction of five divisions as fighting formations.

Towards the end of the Battle, Major General Sato complained bitterly that his troops were without food or ammunition. When Mataguchi, his Army Commander, ordered him to fight on, he refused to do so and ordered a retreat. This is thought to be the only known occasion in the Japanese Army on which a senior officer refused to obey an order by his superior, and Sato was later invalided out. After the Battle, Major general John Grover, commanding 2 Division, was replaced on the grounds that he had been too slow in moving up the road from Dimapur to relieve Kohima.

Some 50,000 Japanese troops were lost in the two Battles and 185,149 of the 303,501 Japanese sent to Burma, died. Some 37,000 British and Commonwealth troops are buried or commemorated in Burma. The Japanese lost three-fifths of their men, compared with roughly one in thirteen of the approximately one million ground troops engaged against them.

*The above is an abbreviated version of the Report by Philip Malins which is reproduced in full on the BCS website : [www.burmacampaignsociety.org](http://www.burmacampaignsociety.org)*

---

## THE KOHIMA EPITAPH

Everybody quotes the famous Kohima Epitaph, but very few know the exact origin. It has been very often wrongly attributed to Leonidas, King of Sparta who fought to the death to defend the pass against Xerxes and the Persian army at the battle of Thermopylae (480 B.C.). In fact, it was the poet Simonides of Ceos (Kios) (586 – 468 B.C.), who immortalised it as:

*“O stranger, go home and tell the Spartans that we lie here in obedience to their orders”.*

During the Spanish civil war, curiously enough, it was the same thought “to hold the pass to death”, which influenced the Spanish Republicans in their famous “no pasarán” (they will not pass) fierce defence of Teruel.

The sentiment in the epitaphs is certainly Spartan in tone and the writers were influenced by their classical education. The first of them was written by J. M. Edmonds for a graveyard in France, circa 1916 during the First World War:

*When you go home tell them of us, and say  
‘For your to-morrows these gave their to-day’*

The original version of the Kohima Epitaph which is inscribed on the monument was unveiled at Kohima in November 1944. The author was Major John Etry-Leal, the G.S.O. II of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. He was a classical scholar and had imperfectly remembered what J.M. Edmonds had written. His version reads:

*When you go home  
Tell them of us and say  
For your tomorrow  
We gave our to-day.*



Lucien Chocron

---

## FRIENDS OF THE BURMA CAMPAIGN MEMORIAL LIBRARY.

This new Society is being formed to support the Burma Campaign Memorial Library in the School of Oriental and African Studies in the University of London. It is hoped that the new Society will primarily be composed of members of the new generation and Akemi Solloway has agreed to be BCS's representative.

The purpose of the Friends would firstly be to give general support to the Library, and the Librarian would annually give an informal progress report.

Secondly, they would act as scouts in bringing any published or unpublished works to the attention of the Librarian and, in particular, keep a lookout for titles in the bibliography which are not yet in the collection.

While SOAS would cover additions to the collection falling within the normal price range, outside funding might be needed for very expensive items, and there is also the question of the completion of the Japanese collection and the possibility of a translation programme. In all these areas, the Friends would assist SOAS in attracting necessary grants. Finally, it goes without saying that the Friends would encourage donations and the presentation or bequest of titles for the expansion of the collection.

John White





---

## RECONCILIATION SERVICES 2002.

### Three Wheels Buddhist Centre - 17th August.

As in the previous five years, the August Eza incorporated a ceremony to pray for world peace, for reconciliation between the Japanese and British War Veterans who fought one another in Burma during the Second World War, and a memorial service for all the soldiers who died there.

Once again, Satoru Yanagi, this time accompanied by his wife, made a special journey from Japan to represent his comrades alongside Masao Hirakubo, Chairman of BCS, together with the Vice-Chairman, Philip Malins and other members of BCS, among them Maurice Franses and Philip Daniel, who quoted Isaiah to great effect in that short but intensely moving sermon which is printed in the next page..



The Service was conducted by the Reverend Professor Kemmyo Taira Sato, the Director of Three Wheels, and the Reverend David Brazier, the Head Priest of the Amida Trust, gave a talk on “Buddhism and Peace”.

### Coventry Cathedral - 18th August.

Masao Hirakubo and Philip Malins travelled to Coventry the following day to lay wreaths on behalf of BCC., together with Satoru Yanagi and his wife, the Reverend Professor Sato, Akemi Solloway and other members of the Society.

The ceremonies were conducted in the presence of the Right Reverend Anthony Priddis, Bishop of Warwick, the Reverend Stuart Beake, Sub Dean of Coventry Cathedral, the Mayor of Coventry and His Excellency Masaki Orita, the Japanese Ambassador.

John White

---

## REMEMBRANCE DAY CEREMONY, HODOGAYA, YOKOHAMA.

On Commonwealth Remembrance Day, Sunday, 10th November, 2002, Mr. Renichi Misawa and I attended the Memorial Ceremony at the Commonwealth War Cemetery, Hodogaya, Yokohama, where I met Mrs. Tomoyo Nakao and Mr. Takashi Nagase.

On this occasion, the Indian Embassy was responsible for the event and Ex-naval Warrant Officer PO Kartar Singh acted as Master of Ceremonies. I laid a wreath on behalf of BCS and Mr. Misawa laid one for the All Burma Veterans' Association on what was a fine and beautiful autumn day.

Shuichiro Yoshino

*Editor's note: Shuichiro Yoshino is a Japanese Burma veteran, a member of BCC and a Vice-President of the All Burma Veterans' Association of Japan .*

---

## An address written by Philip. L. Daniel at the occasion of the Ceremony of Reconciliation at Three Wheels( 15<sup>th</sup> August 2002) .

Dear Reverend Professor and Friends, *“Open up your petals, like roses planted near running streams”*

Once more you have done me the honour of asking me to contribute to this very special gathering. As August 15<sup>th</sup> draws nearer I wonder what I can say in this company which would speak from heart to heart across our differences of culture, upbringing and the expression of our religious sense. I reach not for the anodyne but for true comfort, hope and elevation of spirit, and, given our sad contemporary world this is no easier than it would have been long, long ago when those of my generation were young soldiers in a foreign land involved in the global conflict of those days.

This year few of us can escape the horror of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2002. I don't know your experience but I did what I rarely do in the working week. For some reason I had decided to take my lunch break at home, and I switched on my television for the news at noon, and did not leave it for six hours. During that time I move from sitting in my armchair to kneeling, with my beads, as fellow human beings in front of me plunged to their deaths from those shattered towers until they themselves collapsed into smoking pyres.

There seemed little enough of hope or comfort in that, nor in much that has happened since, in Afghanistan, or elsewhere, or by some events now threatened to come.

And yet, and yet, we must not feel in this only despair at the human propensity to destroy. Last year you may recall, I found in the prophet Isaiah's words a convergence which all could share. He called on us all to be clean vessels bringing our oblations to the Blessed One. A printer's devil ensured that in the last edition of our BCFG journal the word became "obligations", and after a moment of exasperation, I realised that was not such a bad meaning after all.

This year, at the same season, Isaiah, in a passage I should be reading tonight at 6 but is now postponed to Sunday, speaks as he so often does, to us all, Jew and Christian, and others beside. *“He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” (Mk IV 9)*. For Isaiah says: *“Have a care for justice, act with integrity, for my salvation will come, and my integrity be manifest.”* And as usual he omits no human person; *“Strangers who have attached themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, and to love His Name, these will I bring to my holy mountain, I will make them Joyful in my house of prayer. Their oblations and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar, for my House will be a House of prayer for all people.” (Isaiah 56)*.

Reverend Professor and dear Friends, There is probably nothing I can say to you or members of this company that you have not heard before, though each in the language he best understands. I can only seek to underline what the old Jewish prophet said, and which applies to this house of prayer, as much as to any where sincere, trusting and loving hearts seek to speak to one another. *“My House Shall Be Called a House of Prayer for All Peoples.”*

Shalom and Peace be with you.

*Listen, My faithful children:  
Open up your petals,  
Like roses planted  
Near running waters*



---

## OBITUARY

### Lieutenant Colonel Charles Macfetridge

Charles died on 29th December, 2002, aged 89. He was a sportsman of distinction, who played rugby for the army and was outstanding at hockey and tennis, and was a tireless worker for Save the Children Fund and in many other fields. Like several members of his family before him, he was a regular soldier and was commissioned into the Indian Army as a mountain gunner, serving on the North West Frontier and in India, Burma, and Greece.



He believed passionately in reconciliation with former enemies and was an early member of the Burma Campaign Fellowship Group and subsequently joined the Burma Campaign Society on its formation. Among the tributes at his memorial service was one from Major General Renichi Misawa, President of the All Burma Veterans' Association of Japan. Charles and Renichi were both mountain battery commanders, firing at each other across the River Chindwin at Shwegin in Burma in 1942. In 1998, as part of a Service of Reconciliation in Westminster Abbey, they laid a wreath together on the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior.

Charles had a boundless admiration for the military mule and was the initiator of, and contributor to, the anthology on "*The Military Mule in the British Army and Indian Army*". He helped to initiate the Appeal for the Animals in War Memorial which is to be erected in Park Lane, London. A former Chairman of the British Mule Society and contributor to military journals on Mules, he was Honorary Secretary of the Mountain Artillery Club from 1967 until his death. Such was his expertise that he was often referred to as "Mr. Gunner" or "Mr. Mule".

In Charles Macfetridge, BCS has lost a fine member who will be remembered with admiration and affection by all who knew him. We extend our deepest sympathy to Elaine, whom he married in 1986 on the death of his first wife, Evelyn, thus acquiring a new family which gave him great delight.

Philip Malins

*Copies of "The military, Mule in the British Army and Indian Army" by Brian Nicholls, Philip Malins and Charles Macfetridge", 332 pp, 26pp, photos are available from Philip Malins, 11 Dorchester Court Dorchester Road, Solihull, West Midlands, B91 1LL. Tel/Fax 01210686 4691, price £22, including packing and UK postage.*

---

### BCS COMMITTEE MEETING, 28TH JANUARY, 2003.

It was reported among other things, that the Society was solvent but by no means rich, being entirely dependent on subscriptions and donations.

Sadao Oba, who had found an interesting new website in Japan; full of information on the Pacific War, ([www.rose.sannet.ne.jp/mishiha/senso/english.htm](http://www.rose.sannet.ne.jp/mishiha/senso/english.htm)) would make contact to propose a link to the BCS Website.

Masao Maeda, ex-Company Commander, 56 Army, had presented a copy of his book, covering China, Malaya and Burma, to the Burma Campaign Memorial Library in SOAS.

John White, who had been asked to join the Committee, was appointed Editor to work alongside Lucien Chocron on the Newsletter, which would henceforth be sent out twice a year in March and September.

John White

---

## COMING EVENTS 2003

- Wednesday, 12<sup>th</sup> March, 6 – 8.00 pm:** Discussion Meeting on “Britain’s Grand Strategy For War Against Japan” by Dr. Saki Dockrill of the Department of War Studies, King’s College, London University at East India Club, 16 St. James Square, London SW1.
- Monday, 12<sup>th</sup> May, 6 – 8.00 pm:** Discussion Meeting on “Experiences as one of the Japanese Surrendered Personnel in Java” by Sadao Oba, Nippon Club, 2<sup>nd</sup> Fl. Samuel House, 6 St Albans St., London SW1.
- Thursday, 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 11.30 am:** BCS Annual General Meeting and Lunch, (The Japanese Ambassador will be invited), Mitsukoshi Restaurant (Private Room), Dorland House, 14 Lower Regent Street, London SW1.
- Saturday, 17<sup>th</sup> August, 2.00 pm:** Friendship and Reconciliation Service and Meeting, Three Wheels Buddhist Centre, 55 Carbery Avenue, London W3 9AB
- Sunday, 18<sup>th</sup> August, 3.00 pm:** BCFG, BCS at International Friendship and Reconciliation Service, Canterbury Cathedral.
- Sunday, 9<sup>th</sup> November** Commonwealth Remembrance Day Ceremony, Commonwealth War Cemetery, Hodogaya, Yokohama, Japan.

*Individual notices will be sent out for all Coming Events. For further details, please contact the Hon. Sec. Phillida Purvis at: email.phillida@linksjapan.org or Tel: 0207 221 6985, Fax: 0207 792 1757*

---

## BCS WEBSITE: [www.burmacampaignsociety.org](http://www.burmacampaignsociety.org)

Alex Fanshawe, great nephew of BCS member, Rex Wait, has done a wonderful job as a volunteer in setting up our Website. Please visit it if you have not already done so or, if you do not have access, perhaps look at it on a friend’s pc.

As well as information on upcoming events and reports on past ones, we are introducing books from the Burma Campaign Memorial Library and interesting research, articles and, links to other sites which all provide information about different aspects of Britain and Japan’s wartime encounter. Your comments and suggestions for items which might be added to the site would be most welcome either by email at: [info@burmacampaignsociety.org](mailto:info@burmacampaignsociety.org) or by Fax: 0207 792 1757

Phillida Purvis

---

### **EDITOR’S NOTE.**

*A great deal of further information and a wide variety of Reviews, Articles and other material are to be found on the BCS Website.*

*For comments, criticisms and questions concerning the Newsletter, please contact John White, 25 Cadogan Place, London, SW1X 9SA, Tel/Fax 0207 235 4034. Material for inclusion in the September 2003 Issue should reach me at the above address by 31 August at the latest.*

**THE BURMA CAMPAIGN SOCIETY**  
**19 NORLAND SQUARE**  
**LONDON W11 4PU**  
**TEL: 020 7221 6985**  
**FAX: 020 7792 1757**

Edited and Produced by  
John White  
Lucien Chocron

**EMAIL: [INFO@BURMACAMPAIGNSOCIETY.ORG](mailto:info@burmacampaignsociety.org)**  
**WEBSITE: [WWW.BURMACAMPAIGNSOCIETY.ORG](http://WWW.BURMACAMPAIGNSOCIETY.ORG)**

---