

# THE BURMA CAMPAIGN SOCIETY

# NEWSLETTER

September 2006

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## FOURTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF BCS. 8TH JUNE, 2006.

The Chairman opened proceedings by recording the brilliant success of the Symposium celebrating the 60th Anniversary of the end of World War Two, which was made possible by the extraordinary effort and organizing skill of Phillida Purvis, the Honorary Secretary of BCS. He gave a brief summary of the many contacts he had made during his visit to Japan in April and, although an audience of one hundred was present on one occasion, again stressed the sad decline in the number of veterans attending such events and the urgent need to attract more young people.

He concluded by making four proposals, the first of which concerned person to person recommendations. He referred to Ryugo Matsui's suggestion, early on, that the bereaved families of ex-veterans should be approached and said that he felt that he himself could develop the process of recruitment in the UK, but that more help from Committee Members was needed to carry out the day-to-day work.

He then proposed the inauguration of an Annual Memorial and Reunion together with an afternoon tea party at St. Ethelburga's Church, which he felt would appeal to young members. The Hon. Secretary had ascertained that St. Ethelburga's appeared to be willing in principle to welcome such an event on Saturday, 14th October, 2006, and the Chairman asked Akemi Solloway if she would be prepared to organize it, and with the help of Akiko Macdonald arrangements were subsequently finalized.

Thirdly, after some discussion, it was felt that there was no need to change the title of the Discussion Meetings in order to pass on the message to succeeding generations, since this was already being done.

Finally, he raised the question of instituting a Branch in Japan. In this context, the Hon. Secretary reported that Professor Kurusawa had offered, with the help of Professor Kosuge, to arrange a couple of Discussion Meetings a year and had indicated his willingness to be involved in translating the Website into Japanese. These were unanimously welcomed as excellent ideas, and it was agreed that they should both be co-opted as email Committee Members in Japan.

The first such Discussion Meeting, to be held at Tokyo Women's University, has subsequently been arranged for 14th November. The Accounts were then presented, showing a healthy excess of income over expenditure, and the existing Committee was returned unopposed.

Finally Mr. David Charles, son of Stanley Charles a veteran member of BCS, was introduced and described the project for the restoration of the Lowestoft esplanade, which included a 1920's Japanese garden, and the Hon. Secretary made a number of useful suggestions as to possible sources of funding.

John White.

## HONORARY MBEs.

Mrs. Yoshiko Tamura and Mrs. Taeko Sasamoto, both of them members of BCS, were given their Honorary MBEs by the British Ambassador, Sir Graham Fry, at a Ceremony at the British Embassy in Tokyo on 30th May, 2006. The awards were for their work on behalf of POWs and their research on the deaths of all those buried in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemetery in Yokohama. Len Harrop, who ran the cemetery for fifty-five years, added to the account of their work, much of which he had encouraged and undertaken with them.

Phillida Purvis.



Yoshiko Tamura and Taeko Sasamoto at their investiture

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## RECONCILIATION CEREMONY AT THREE WHEELS.

**Saturday, 19th August**

The Tenth Annual Ceremony to pray for world peace and reconciliation again included a memorial service for soldiers who died in Burma during the Second World War.

Representatives from the Japanese Embassy, the Burma Campaign Society and Three Wheels joined war veterans and members of the public in witnessing a Buddhist service of sutra chanting and incense offering and in listening to a number of speakers.

The meeting was notably characterized by an astounding degree of honesty and sincerity on the part of those who spoke. The veterans of both Japan and Great Britain, the political and BCS representatives, and Reverend Kemmyo Sato of Three Wheels, all talked very candidly, but without rancour, of their feelings about the events of the war, and Satoru Yanagi again sent a most moving letter in which he recounted how his visit to Shogyoji at the age of fifty, and his subsequent encounters at Three Wheels, had transformed his outlook.

Sadly, many veterans who have contributed to the peace dialogue have now passed away or were too unwell to attend. However, it is to be hoped that the extraordinary spirit of reconciliation that the Burma Campaign Society has helped to foster will be transmitted to future generations. Certainly, as a young person attending the ceremony, I feel that I learnt of a special form of courage even greater than the courage that the veterans displayed in the war; the courage to overcome hatred, bitterness and grief in order to affirm the values of friendship and human dignity across cultural and racial boundaries. The memory of the

veterans I have encountered at Three Wheels will remain as an inspiration to me always.

Andy Barritt.



Philip Malins offering incense at the Reconciliation Ceremony

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

**Sunday, 20th August**

Last year, 2005, being the sixtieth anniversary of the end of World War II, what has become the Trust's annual service at Evensong in Canterbury Cathedral included the laying of wreaths at the High Altar and the shaking of hands by veterans and members of the Japanese and German Embassies. It culminated in addresses by, or



A Group with Jean and Maurice Frances, H. E. Yoshiji Nogami,  
Masao Hirakubo, Keisuke Otsuka and Akemi Solloway

on behalf of, the Japanese and German Ambassadors. However, this year the Dean and Trust felt that the scale of the Trust's association with Evensong should be reduced.

As the Dean was out of the country, the Service was conducted by the Vice-Dean who, before the service began, welcomed Madame J. Loudon, representing the Lord Lieutenant, the Japanese Ambassador and Madame Nogami, Captain Peter Monte of the German Embassy, the Lord and Lady Mayoress of Canterbury, the Mayor and Mayoress of Maidstone, and Mr. K. Prichard, representing the HQ of the Royal British Legion.

At the beginning of the Service, the Vice-Dean received the two Royal British Legion standards, which were on parade, and reminded the congregation that the theme of the Service, as well as being Commemoration and Thanksgiving, was Reconciliation. This was followed by Lawrence Binyon's lines from *For the Fallen*, read by a former POW of the Japanese, and lines by Laurens van der Post, read by a veteran member of BCS.

A single wreath was laid before the High Altar by the International Friendship and Reconciliation Trust, commemorating all those who had suffered and died as a result of war between nations. The Service of Evensong, without an address, followed after the final hymn, and before the Blessing the Kohima Epitaph was recited. It is hoped that this form of the Trust's association with Evensong will continue as an annual event in Canterbury Cathedral's pattern of Services.



John Bynoe with the Vice-Chancellor of Chaucer College, Keith Wren, and Director of Studies, Valerie Ainscough.

The Service was attended by a large congregation, some of whom had travelled far, including many adults, and children from the Japanese Embassy, an increased number from Chaucer College Canterbury, the Pre-University College of Shumei University, and many members of the Burma Campaign Society, including Masao Hirakubo, the Chairman.

John Bynoe.

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## **OBITUARY.**

### **LESLIE DENNISON.**

Les Dennison, a BCS member, has died at the age of ninety-one. He was a truly remarkable man who, from a violent past, attained a serenity of mind that few can ever have achieved.

The illegitimate son of a wealthy father, who abandoned him and his mother, Les was sent down the mines, aged thirteen, terrified of the dark and living in grinding poverty. At nineteen, he sought work in Coventry, marrying in 1938, working in the Keresley mine and joining the Communist Party.

At the outbreak of the Second World War, he joined the Royal Army Service Corps as a fitter, was captured by the Japanese at Singapore, and survived working on the construction of the Burma-Siam Railway. He returned home, where he was violent to his wife, and donated part of his war gratuity to the Communist Party.

He trained as a plumber and became an agitator at the Standard Triumph car plant before joining the building industry and becoming the convenor of shop stewards on a site with nearly four hundred men. In 1959, a plasterer



and fellow shop steward, Stan Peachey, told Les that he was a dictator in his own house and that the men on site feared him. Peachey talked to him of a revolution beyond Marxism and of building a ‘hate free, fear free, greed free world’. Les, profoundly moved and now disillusioned with Communism following the suppression of the Hungarian uprising in 1956, began a search to ‘find God’. He approached a local Vicar and the two prayed together in an empty church. Les later became a Roman Catholic.

He began insisting from his fellow workers on ‘a moral day’s work’ rather than a ‘legal day’s work’ in meeting Coventry’s housing needs, and the productivity of the bricklayers more than doubled.

In 1962, he attended a Conference in Switzerland with eight hundred international delegates. One of the Japanese speakers, General Ichii Sugita, who was present at the surrender of Singapore in 1941, bowed low and said “ ... You know what happened during the campaign ..... I am sorry. Please forgive me and my nation.” Thus, the healing of Les’s bitterness and hatred began.

He became a member of the Burma Campaign Fellowship Group, visiting Japan on several occasions and joining members of the All Burma Veterans Association of Japan in ceremonies and acts of reconciliation. From 1997 onwards, he attended the services of reconciliation with the Japanese at Coventry Cathedral, which took place, in the presence of the Japanese Ambassador, on the Sunday on, or immediately following, the 15th August anniversary of the end of the Second World War. There, as a prisoner of the Japanese, he laid a wreath on the Reconciliation Statue.

His last appearance, on 21st August last year, at the age of ninety, as serene and cheerful as ever in his electric buggy, was to lay a wreath on the Reconciliation Statue in the presence of the German Ambassador, the Japanese Ambassador, the Japanese Minister Plenipotentiary and the Japanese Consul General. He will be remembered with great affection and remain an inspiration to all who knew him, especially to those of us who have worked for reconciliation with our former enemies.

Philip Malins.



Leslie Dennison shaking hands with Ambassador Masaki Orita, Coventry Cathedral, 15th August 2004

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## **HOW JAPANESE AND BRITISH VETERANS, AND SOLDIERS OF FORMER COLONIES REMEMBER THE WAR DEAD IN REUNIONS WHICH COMMEMORATE THE WAR: AN ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH CASE STUDY.**

**A Discussion Meeting** was held at the Nippon Club on 13th March at which **Tomoyo Nakao**, a BCS Committee Member, gave a talk, supported by audio and video tapes, on the work which grew out of the contacts with British veterans and former POWs, especially those who had served in the Far East, which she made when she was a Doctoral Candidate at Essex University, beginning in 1996. This was the start of lifetime mission of recording, through audio and video, first-hand accounts of the experiences of war veterans, a work which she

continued on her return to Japan.

Through the important opportunities which she has provided for veterans to tell their stories, she has not only made an unique contribution to the historical record of the Second World War, but has achieved an enormous amount in terms of reconciliation between Britain and Japan.

Most of the British veterans with whom she has worked, and many with whom she has formed firm friendships, had never met a Japanese person other than a wartime enemy. Tomoyo's efforts, and the friendships she has forged, have literally changed lives, and the accounts which she recorded in her talk were universally moving and often painful.

She was also able to refer to the 'colonial' veterans; Korean, Taiwanese, Kenyan, Burmese and Philippine, with whom she is now in contact. She had, indeed, just returned from a visit to Kenya to meet with veterans of the Burma war, and this research brings to light a new dimension in the hostilities between Britain and Japan in Burma, and members were given a fascinating, if emotional, evening.

Phillida Purvis

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### YAMAZAKI AKIKO.

Civilian Staff Employee Yamazaki joined the 32nd Division Army Medical Unit in August 1944 from her job in the Health Unit of an elementary school in Okinawa. In February 1945, she was chosen to join the General Staff of the Division, attending to Commander Ushijima Mitsuru, and Chief of Staff Osa Isamu.

On 18th June, the 32nd Division faced imminent demise after two and a half months of deadly combat against the Americans, who landed in Okinawa on 1st April. Assessing the situation, Civilian Staff Employee Yamazaki handed to the two Generals underclothing that she herself had sewn.

Commander Ushijima said "Thank you, I shall wear your fresh underclothing when the time comes ...". After a short pause, he gave her his jade cuff links and continued: "You must not die. During the day, if you go out with a white cloth at the end of a pole, the American soldiers will not shoot." Chief of Staff Osa also presented her with his favourite teacup and repeated the Commander's caution against suicide.

However, the next day, on 19th June, a flame-thrower hit the medical division trench, causing many deaths. Yamazaki Akiko and two others survived, but they took their own lives with a hand grenade.

Hearing this, the two generals joined their palms in silent prayer, and on 23rd June, the day of fate, they put on their brand-new undergarments, given to them by Civilian Staff Employee Yamazaki and committed suicide. On Chief of Staff Osa's undergarment was written in calligraphy: "Loyalty is to give one's life."

Translated by Keiko Ito

*Editor's Note.*

*Although the events recorded here took place, not in Burma, but in Okinawa, I make no apology for including this most moving account, since it certainly casts a strong, reflected light on the deepest feelings and motivations of many of those who did indeed fight and die in the Burma Campaign. However, I should, perhaps, apologize for the editorial indulgence of printing the Waka which follows, and which attempts to encapsulate a set of values very different from my own, and is entitled 'Okinawa Postscript'.*

Cherishing honour,  
in their defeat,  
they triumphed,  
died  
with their comrades.  
Loyalty  
beyond belief  
was all  
that was left to them.

*Finally, for many of the veterans and other members of the Burma Campaign Society, there is a linkage of a happier kind with the War in the Pacific in the person of Satoru Yanagi, who fought and survived in the front lines both in Guadalcanal and in the final desperate days in Burma, to become a leading member of BCS, travelling from Japan with his wife, Yuko, for eight consecutive years to take part in the annual Reconciliation Ceremonies here in England.*

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## THE SILCHAR TRACK.

At a **Discussion Meeting** on 17th May at the Nippon Club, **Major Terence Molloy MC**, 1st Battalion, Northamptonshire Regiment, a BCS member and author of the newly published *Silchar Track*, described his experiences in the Burma Campaign.

He was commissioned as a regular officer in 1937 and was in South East Asia until 1945. He recalled how British battalions of well trained troops spent five years abroad in India. That ceased at the beginning of the Second World War and India became something of a backwater. Troops were trained for desert warfare, animal transport being replaced by motor transport, and for a time, due to shortages, the men even had to train with wooden replica arms.

In 1941, the convoy shipping system resulted in reinforcements starting to reach India and wartime officers and men began to replace regulars. The Japanese attack on South East Asia in that year resulted in a change to jungle training with animal transport. His battalion was mobilised in February 1942, becoming part of 20 Indian Infantry Division and undergoing a year's jungle training in what is now Sri Lanka.

Recruits had little or no war experience and were posted to holding battalions, given two weeks' leave, and issued with tropical clothing. It was a dramatic event for them to embark for an unknown destination for an unknown period of time, but all through their training they had new friends to share their new experiences.

On arrival in India, they found a strange country with new peoples, overwhelming heat, new food, bugs and flies and so forth. They trained in jungle warfare, but as the war went on there was less time for it and training suffered. Dysentery, malaria and other diseases quickly disabled many men, though the introduction of daily Mepacrine tablets, which the Japanese did not have, provided effective protection against malaria.

Major Molloy emphasised that jungle warfare took time for urban people to learn. The country was unknown and mysterious, resulting in great tension and a feeling that the enemy was behind every bush. He recalled a stretcher party talking loudly, as if on a Sunday stroll, and stressed the importance of silence and the use of ears and eyes.

On the Silchar track which led to India, he was wounded and evacuated. Its defence was part of the great battles of Kohima and Imphal in 1944, which led to the defeat of the Japanese in Burma. It was total war, with a spirit of no surrender. Great comradeship among the British and Indian, and also the Japanese troops, enabled them to endure the hellish conditions.

Back in Britain there was agitation for the opening of a Second Front in Europe and a feeling that the country was not doing enough to help the Russians, who were suffering huge casualties fighting on the Eastern Front. This resulted in British units being reluctant to send good troops to the Far East.

Major Molloy joined in the universal praise of Slim as a commander and observed that, as 'Uncle Bill', he was probably the only commander in the Second World War to be held in such great affection by his men. Major Molloy also praised the Japanese troops for the bravery and fighting spirit which made them such formidable opponents. After the war, as a member of the Burma Campaign Fellowship Group, he had the personal satisfaction of coming to know some of them as valued friends.

Philip Malins.

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### SHINJITSUNO IMPHAL. REAL STORY OF THE IMPHAL CAMPAIGN.

In my book in Japanese, published in June this year (*Shinjitsuno Imphal, Ushio-Shobo, Kojinsha, 2006*), I wrote down my memorandum of two hundred pages of A4 in 1946, after being repatriated from Burma. It contained nine hundred and sixty two days, or two and a half years, of my daily experiences. In my discussions with Japanese and British veterans after the war, my memory was always accurate as to the name of the soldier and the place, and the exact date of the event.

After sixty years, Kojinsha decided to publish it. Regrettably, however, many useful attachments were omitted. In the last few years, there have been over twenty occasions on which I have spoken in English and Japanese to members of the younger generations about my own war experiences. The episodes in the talks were, of course, quoted from the memorandum.

Masao Hirakubo

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### COMING EVENTS.

**Saturday, 14th October:** 2.00 - 5.00 pm: Reunion and Tea, with Entertainment, at St. Ethelburga's Church, 78 Bishopsgate, EC2N 4AG ( Tubes: Liverpool Street and Bank)

**Tuesday, 14th November:** Discussion Meeting, Tokyo Women's University.

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*Editor's Note: For comments, criticisms, and questions concerning the Newsletter, please contact John White, 25 Cadogan Place, London, SW1X 9SA, Tel/Fax 020 7235 4034. Material for inclusion in the March 2007 Issue should reach me at the above address by 28th February at the latest.*

Edited and Produced by John White and Lucien Chocron.

**THE BURMA CAMPAIGN SOCIETY  
19 NORLAND SQUARE  
LONDON W11 4PU  
TEL: 0207 221 6985  
FAX: 0207 792 1757**

**Email: [info@burmacampaignsociety.org](mailto:info@burmacampaignsociety.org)**

**Website: [www.burmacampaignsociety.org](http://www.burmacampaignsociety.org)**