

Lanarkshire Yeomanry Group Newsletter

Summer 2012



A Day to Remember

This year 15th August will fall on a Wednesday - to most people just another day - but for many families it is a date that will resonate forever.

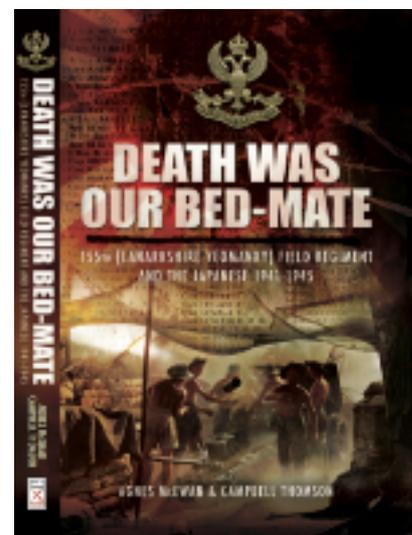
For them Wednesday 15th August 1945 was the day that the war in the Far East came to an end when the Japanese surrendered. The war in Europe had been over for months and the conflict which continued unabated in Burma and the Far East was of little consequence to many - that is except for the families of the men fighting and dying in those steaming, far off jungles or for those struggling to survive in the cruel and brutal conditions of the POW camps. The Japanese surrender on 15th August finally ended the anguish of many families. Sadly, for others there was only the devastating realisation that their loved one would never return.

Since then the date has become known nationally as VJ Day - Victory over Japan - or more recently the Far East Prisoner of War Day - when services of remembrance are held throughout the United Kingdom. This year, the relief that the surrender brought will be marked in Lanarkshire by a Service of Remembrance being organised by CoFEPOW - the Children of Far East POWs Association, the Royal British Legion and the Lanarkshire Yeomanry Group, with support from North Lanarkshire Council. The Service will take place at 2pm on the afternoon of Wednesday 15th August 2012 at the Memorial to those who served in the Far East during the Second World War which is situated outside the Civic Centre in Windmillhill Street in Motherwell.

The Story of the 155th

As we have mentioned in the past, while there is a very good account of the experience of the 156th [Lanarkshire Yeomanry] Field Regiment during WW2, the story of the 155th in Malaya and as POWs is more partial. While both John McEwan in his book, *'Out of the Depths of Hell'* and Jack Edwards [Signaller attached to 155th] in *'Banzai, you Bastards'* tell a little of the conflict in Malaya and later as POWs on Taiwan, there was no detailed account of the 155th's involvement in the Malayan Campaign and virtually nothing about the experiences of the men of the 155th who suffered on the Death Railway, in Borneo or in the other death camps spread over the Far East.

As a result we made it our objective to rectify this and to try and tell the story of all the men of the Regiment, no matter where they were held. This has taken us from the nightmare that was the death railway and the extermination camps on Borneo, to the Kinkaseki copper mine and the coal mines and foundries of Japan where many of the 155th slaved and died.



Drawing on previously unknown material about the Regiment and the personal accounts of survivors, we have produced *'Death was Our Bed-Mate - the story of the 155th [Lanarkshire Yeomanry] Field Regiment and the Japanese'* which will be published by Pen and Sword later this year.

The title came from a comment made by Tom Hannah when being interviewed recently by a local newspaper about his time as a POW on the Death Railway. Tom remarked, 'You never knew when you woke up in the morning if your mate beside you would still be alive. On that bloody railway, *death was our bed-mate*'.

We have included a comprehensive Nominal Roll and a list of the all the camps where the men were held. Using this the reader can trace the trail of their loved one along the jungle tracks or down into the depths of the mines.

We are also delighted to tell that our old friend Andy Coogan has brought out his own book, *'Tomorrow You Die'* which is to be published in August and tells of his time with the Regiment and as a POW on Taiwan and in Japan. Andy will launch the book at the Edinburgh Book Festival on 16th August. We are sure that it will prove popular as Andy certainly has a story to tell!

Captain Fraser Stewart

In our hunt for information about the 155th in the Far East, we came across numerous references to Captain Fraser Stewart who was the Regimental Adjutant and who was held POW on Taiwan where he died in June 1945 as a result of the cruel and inhumane treatment meted out to him. It appears that Captain Stewart, a tall, spare man, came in for 'particular' attention from his brutal captors.

We were aware that Captain Stewart hailed from Lanark where he and his father, who had served with the Regiment in WW1, were well known and respected architects. The Lanark Gazette were good enough to carry a story about Captain Stewart and as a result we were contacted by his two daughters, Elizabeth and Lesley. Elizabeth now lives in the New Forest in the South of England and Lesley is in Orkney. A month or so back we had the pleasure of meeting Lesley when she was on her travels with her trusty camper van! We are very fortunate in the time and interest that she and Elizabeth have given us in our search for information on their father.



Captain Fraser Stewart with Elizabeth and Lesley



The Kelso family

Thank You

Once again we are grateful for the help and generosity shown by families and friends of the Lanarkshire Yeomanry. We have received kind donations from a number of friends including Anne Carnochan in memory of her uncle, Andrew Carmichael of the 155th and others who wish to remain anonymous.

Included among them were the Kelso family from Wishaw. Frank Kelso was with the 155th in Malaya and later in Kinkaseki. It was not until his two daughters attended the commemorative service at Newmains to mark the fall of Singapore when they heard Tom McKie, Tom Hannah and Pat Campbell that they realised what their father had experienced as a POW. They were, to say the least, shocked and horrified. Like nearly all the POWs, he had never told of what had been done to him. The most he would do was to tell funny stories. How familiar is this to other POW families? To make matters worse, they learned at the Service that the Heritage Lottery funding application towards a Memorial had been turned down.

As a result, the family set about doing something about it. With their mother, Frank Kelso's widow, as the driving force, they sought out donations in local pubs and with small businesses in the area. To cap it all, Mrs Kelso made a personal donation and the family have gifted over £1300 towards a Memorial to the Men of the Regiment. They did not want the donation to be identified and while we agreed not to circulate the local newspapers, we feel strongly that, among friends, their kindness should be recognised.

Other Donations

Donations of other kinds have also been made.

Sir Chris Hoy, the great uncle of Andy Coogan of the 155th, donated a cycling racing vest and Andy's daughter, Christine, subsequently auctioned it and raised £300 which was donated to the Memorial Fund. An anonymous donation of a similar amount was made to mirror the gift

John Higgins, the World Snooker Champion, has donated a signed snooker cue that he used while playing in competition but as yet we haven't quite decided the best way to use it!

A particularly special gift was that made by the family of Captain Stewart - a splendid dress sporran by Rowan of Glasgow complete with an elaborate solid silver mount. Again, we are taking advice on the best way to maximise its value.



the sporran donated by Captain Stewart's family

Last Post

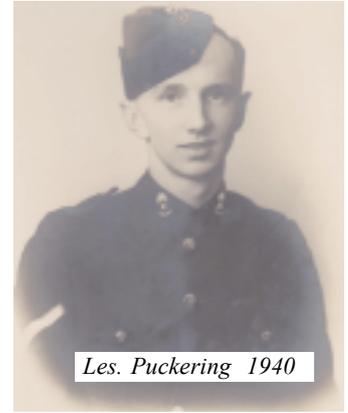


Bill Clark 2011

Sadly we have to record the passing of another two veterans of the Lanarkshire Yeomanry.

Bill Clark from Kilmarnock has died at the age of 97. Formerly of E Troop, C Battery of the 155th, he was a real character. When we went to his home last year to visit him he regaled us with a host of amusing anecdotes about his early days as a boy in Ayrshire. Less keen to dwell on the POWs days – few of those who suffered during those terrible years ever are - he nevertheless was invaluable in identifying many of the men in the photograph of E Troop which was still one of his prized possessions. The world is a sadder place for his passing.

Another of the 155th, Les Puckering, has also passed away. Les was 93 years of age and had lived in Haddington since the end of the war. Attached to Regimental HQ when the 155th were based in West Lothian during 1941, Les had met his future wife, Jean Cumming, at a dance in the town prior to him being sent to the Far East and the subsequent horrors of the Kinkaseki POW camp on Taiwan. His Obituary was carried in the Scotsman and the Telegraph and can be accessed on the internet by 'Googling' Les Puckering.



Les. Puckering 1940

Pat Campbell from Dumfries also suffered a grievous loss when his wife Margaret died earlier this year. Margaret, a former school teacher, had been ill for some time but Pat still feels the loss terribly.

Our thoughts are with him and the Clark and Puckering families.

Memorial to the Lanarkshire Yeomanry

Progress on having a permanent memorial to the Lanarkshire Yeomanry continues to develop. Following the disappointment of failing to obtain funding from the Heritage lottery, we turned our attention elsewhere. And, as has been said before, when one door shuts, another opens.

We were approached by Carluke Development Trust who were keen to site a memorial in the garden in the Market Place in the Town alongside the existing War Memorial and another to the Carluke VC Winners, who include Thomas Caldwell of the Lanarkshire Yeomanry who won his Medal during WW1. There is considerable local support for the idea and we hope to take this suggestion further.

However, a more definite proposal has been made by the Restorative Justice Team from North Lanarkshire Council. This unit is responsible for supervising offenders who have been sentenced to what was previously known as Community Service and they have offered their services to us.

The Team have obtained permission for a site in Belhaven Park in Wishaw to build an 'Armed Forces Garden' which will include a memorial to the Lanarkshire Yeomanry. Also included will be information boards which will tell the story of the Regiment. Although we have received an assurance that the project will definitely go ahead, the extent of the work involved will inevitably depend upon the funding available. A bid was made to the Armed Services and has reached the latter stages of consideration. We will keep our fingers crossed!

Armed Services Day

This has become a regular event in the area and we were invited by North Lanarkshire Council to attend the Flag Raising Service at the Civic Centre in Motherwell. Following this, the family of Frank Kelso laid a wreath at the Memorial to those who served in the Far East during WW2 in memory of the Lanarkshire Yeomanry. Later when speaking to the Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Lanarkshire who was at the Service, we made the mistake of suggesting that he had probably never heard of the Lanarkshire Yeomanry. Indignantly - but with good humour - he pointed out the dress sword which he was wearing. It was adorned with the insignia of the Lanarkshire Yeomanry! He was Colonel David Cranstoun of Corehouse whose family raised the first Troop of the Regiment in the 19th century and whose members have served continuously since that time. He was himself the CO of the Regiment which succeeded the Lanarkshire Yeomanry when it was disbanded in 1956. The moral of this story is never to make assumptions!



Family of Gunner Frank Kelso



The Lanarkshire Yeomanry Award.

Once again we were invited by the Cathedral Primary School in Motherwell to attend their Prize Winning Day held at the end of the summer term. Each year a pupil, or pupils, is selected from Primary 7 as the recipient of this award. It is awarded to the child [or children] considered to have been most caring and considerate towards others and mirrors the behaviour of the POWs of the Lanarkshire Yeomanry towards their mates. We are aware from the school that it is a highly regarded award.

The photograph shows this year's winners Holly Ballantyne and Sophie Bradley with Agnes Dougan.

Family Contact

Richard Smith from Dumfries contacted us after a story was carried in the Dumfries Standard about Pat Campbell attending the Commemorative Service at Newmains in February to mark the fall of Singapore. Richard's late father, George 'Butcher' Smith, was one of D Squadron from Dumfries who served with the 155th in Malaya and later slaved on the Death Railway. George suffered terribly during that time and never recovered his health. He gained his nickname, by which he was well known by the Men of the Regiment, from his trade as a butcher.

Neil Gill contacted us seeking information about his great uncle, Gunner Andrew Vere, who died at Shirakawa on Taiwan. Neil is currently writing his great uncle's story and would dearly love to have a photograph of him. If anyone can help, please get in touch.

Similarly, Stephen Lawson is seeking information on his late grandfather, Gunner Fred Williams who was a POW on the Death Railway. Stephen was surprised to hear that Fred had slaved on the railway as, after the war, one of his hobbies was his train set, which took up almost all of the spare room in his house.

During April, Martin Moody contacted us about his late father in law, Bdr John Mather. On hearing that we were shortly to send our completed manuscript to Pen and Sword, he very kindly scanned some pages from the secret diary kept by John Mather while he was in Kinkaseki and gave us permission to use them in 'Death was our Bed-Mate'. Martin was also able to tell us that John had been Captain Brown's Batman.

Agreement to give a talk to members of Wishaw Old Parish Church about the Lanarkshire Yeomanry led to contact with the son and daughter-in-law of the late Sergeant Archie McPhail. While helping Mrs McPhail tidy up before moving house, a 'Welcome Home Archie' banner was found. The banner had been displayed for Archie when he came back from the war.

More information about men of the Lanarkshire Yeomanry

During the Great War of 1914-18 the Regiment saw action at Gallipoli and then in the Middle East. The war in the Middle East is little referred to as the terrible carnage of the Western Front is what captures the horrified imagination of anyone reading about the various conflicts of WW1. But the fighting against the Turks in the sandy, fly blown trenches of Palestine, and what is now Saudi Arabia, was no less unpleasant and this is where many men of the Lanarkshire Yeomanry fought and died. Later in 1918, as part of the composite 12th Battalion [Ayr and Lanark Yeomanry] Royal Scots Fusiliers, the Regiment was sent to the Western Front where Sgt Thomas Caldwell from Carluke won his Victoria Cross.

Therefore we were delighted when we were contacted by John Byers whose father, William Byers was with the Lanarkshire Yeomanry and then the 12th Battalion during WW1. We have been asked by the Lanarkshire Family History Society to produce a history of the Lanarkshire Yeomanry during the First World War to coincide with the 100th Anniversary in 2014 and any information on this period is very useful.

Badges



We have frequently been asked about the possibility of producing Remembrance Badges in respect of the Lanarkshire Yeomanry and are grateful for the help and guidance given by our friend Michael Hurst in Taiwan, whose factory is renowned for the manufacture of high quality commemorative badges. As a result we have had impressive badges (shown left) made by Michael and they are available at a cost of £2 + £1 P&P with the proceeds going to the Memorial Fund.

If you have any ideas or suggestions about how we can further promote the memory of these amazing men and their Regiment, please let us know.

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