

VJ DAY 75TH ANNIVERSARY



A VJ Day street party in Upper Halliford Road, Upper Halliford, on 15th August 1945.

After the frenzied celebration of the end of the Second World War in Europe (VE Day) three months beforehand, the end of the war against Japan in the Far East on 15th August 1945, promptly dubbed VJ Day, was marked in a more muted way. It is with some justification that the men of the 14th Army, still fighting on against a determined foe in Burma, considered themselves 'The Forgotten Army', as the majority of the population at home in the UK began to rebuild their lives after a long and terrible war.

The *Middlesex Chronicle* reported that victory celebrations in Staines and Sunbury were much quieter than when Germany fell. On the night of VJ Day, bonfires were lit in some areas, fireworks were let off, and dancing took place in Staines Market Square until late in the evening. The town hall was draped with the flags of the main allied nations, Britain, America and Russia, but there was none of the bunting along the High Street or parades that characterised VE Day. Thanksgiving services were arranged for the following Sunday.

In Shepperton, it was reported that by VE Day evening, children had built huge bonfires on pieces of waste land, houses and shops were decorated and lit up, and the focus of the celebrations was the floodlit Church Square. Here more than a thousand people had gathered by 9.30pm, dancing and singing around a huge bonfire blazing outside the Anchor Hotel, which was decorated with flags and bunting. By 11pm all was quiet in the square, and the centre of festivities transferred to the High Street, where music from loudspeakers outside F.V. Clarke's radio shop provided the accompaniment for dancing which went on until the early hours.

In Ashford, a Victory Party was given by Mr and Mrs Herd on the Saturday afternoon, in their garden at 'Southfield' Feltham Hill Road, for the residents of the Ashford Almshouses. Afternoon tea was served with the help of the 2nd Ashford Brownies, who also entertained the residents with songs and dances. Mr Herd and Mr Petty played popular tunes on the accordion accompanied by Mrs Benham on the piano. The party ended with thanks to all concerned, and the singing of 'Auld Lang Syne'.

THE WAR AGAINST JAPAN

The war in the Far East started in December 1941, simultaneously with the bombing of Japanese bombing of the American naval base of Pearl Harbor. The Japanese captured the British Crown Colony of Hong Kong on Christmas Day and moved into the Malaysian Peninsula, the Philippines and the Dutch East Indies. Malaya was overrun and the supposedly impregnable fortress of Singapore, Britain's major military base in the area, fell on 15 February 1942. Tens of thousands of British Commonwealth troops fell into Japanese hands and endured years of brutal captivity during which they were forced to labour on construction projects such as the notorious Burma Railway. The Japanese army advanced into Burma, involving the defending British and Indian troops in a long and demoralising fighting retreat through thick jungle terrain over vast distances. Rangoon fell on 8 March 1942 and by mid-June the Japanese advance had reached the hills on the North East frontier of India.

In December 1942, British and Indian troops mounted their first offensive in the malaria ridden coastal Arakan region. It was unsuccessful, although much was learned about jungle warfare. During 1943, 'Chindit' columns under Brigadier Orde Wingate, supported by the Royal Air Force, penetrated deep behind the Japanese lines in central Burma. In March 1943, a further determined enemy attempt to invade India was repulsed after fierce fighting. In August 1943 the South East Asia Command was formed under Lord Louis Mountbatten and in October that year General William Slim was appointed as Commander of the Fourteenth Army.



Lt General William 'Bill' Slim, commander of 14th Army. Later became Field Marshal Viscount Slim.

In March 1944, the Japanese launched an offensive across the Chindwin River, cutting the Imphal-Kohima Road. There followed the ferocious battles of the 'Admin Box', Kohima and Imphal, at the end of which the defeated Japanese withdrew. Further Chindit columns operated deep behind enemy lines during 1944 and at the beginning of 1945 the Fourteenth Army launched a successful offensive down the Arakan Coast, followed by a major advance deep into central Burma. Mandalay was retaken on 20 March after a twelve day battle, and the Fourteenth Army continued on to Rangoon which was reoccupied in an amphibious operation on 3 May.

The Fourteenth Army, known to many as 'The Forgotten Army', numbered over one million men under arms, the largest Commonwealth army ever assembled. Air lines of communication were crucial. The Royal Air Force and the Indian Air Force, supported by carrier-borne Fleet Air Arm aircraft, provided constant supply as well as offensive bombing sorties, together with fighter cover and photo-reconnaissance in support of the Army. At sea, the Royal Navy and the Royal Indian Navy provided the landing craft, the minesweeping operations and the combined operations necessary for the coastal offensive in the

Arakan, as well as providing gunfire support from seaward. The Royal Marine Commando, as well as Royal Marines from the units of the Fleet, took part in the Arakan operations.

Meanwhile the American forces had been recapturing territory in an 'island hopping' campaign across the Pacific, and effectively destroyed the Japanese fleet at the Battle of Midway between 4 -7 June 1942, before starting a bombing campaign from island airbases against the Japanese mainland. The Japanese surrendered on 15 August 1945, after the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, with terrible loss of civilian life. This day became known as VJ (Victory over Japan) Day.

THE BURMA STAR ASSOCIATION

The Burma Star Association was officially founded on the 26 February 1951 with 2,000 founder members. At its peak it had some 24,000 members in the late 80's to the mid 90's. The broad aims of the Association were, and still are, to promote the comradeship experienced during the bitter fighting in the jungles and hostile terrain of Burma, and to relieve the subsequent need, hardship and distress that veterans of the Burma Campaign of the 1939-45 War and/or their widows/widowers may be suffering.



The badge of the Association is based on the Burma Star, the medal awarded for service in the country during WW2.

The Burma Star Association is Tri-Service and also for members of the Merchant Navy who hold the Burma Star. To become a full member of the Association, an ex-Serviceman, ex-Servicewoman or Nurse must have been awarded the Burma Campaign Star for service in Burma during World War II for the necessary qualifying period, or the Pacific Star with Burma Clasp.

The first Remembrance Parade took place on Horse Guards Parade, followed by a service of Remembrance at the Cenotaph in London, on 12 October 1958 and continued with great support, up until the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Association in 2001. Now, wreath laying ceremonies are held at the Memorials to Lord Louis Mountbatten and Field Marshal Slim early in September in London.

The first President of the Association was Field Marshal Viscount (Bill) Slim who held this position until his death on 14 December 1970. His son, Viscount (John) Slim took over from his father and is still the National President. Earl Mountbatten of Burma was the Association's first Patron, and held this position until his tragic death on 27 August 1979. His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh succeeded him, and Countess Mountbatten of Burma, Earl Mountbatten's elder daughter, became Vice Patron.

Since undertaking benevolent work the charity has distributed over £3 million to people throughout the United Kingdom and war time allied countries. Assistance takes many forms including: Residential, Care and Nursing home fees; respite care; building repairs and maintenance; paying removal expenses; provision of powered wheelchairs, riser/recliner chairs and stair lifts; payment of debts and the provision of specialist medical and domestic equipment. These are just some of the ways in which the Association's benevolence operates.

Today the Association still has some 1,700 members World Wide, with 28 Branches functioning in the UK and 4 overseas.

DEKHO! the journal of the Association, continues to be produced three times a year to help all those, who are unable to get out and meet their former comrades, to keep in touch with what events are going on in the Burma Star Association.

THE BURMA STAR ASSOCIATION NORTH SURREY BRANCH

The North Surrey Branch was founded as the Chertsey and District Branch in 1952 but after changing the venue for meetings to the Phoenix Hall in Church Street, Staines, in 1968 it was decided to rename the Branch to 'North Surrey'. Plans were made to dedicate a new Branch standard (flag) at St. Peter's church, Staines, in July 1969.

On Sunday 20 July 1969 a parade assembled outside Kingston Road school, led by the pipes and drums of 257 General Hospital Royal Army Medical Corps (Territorial Army), and marched west along the High Street, past a saluting base at the Market Square, and then down Thames Street to St. Peter's church in Laleham Road. 50 branches from all over the country attended the parade with their standard bearers, some 450 ex-servicemen in total.



The parade of Burma Star veterans reaches the Market Square in Staines. In the background is the Kennards department store which was taken over by Debenhams in 1973.

The **Kohima Epitaph**, familiar from Remembrance ceremonies up and down the length of the country, was inscribed on the 2nd Division memorial at Kohima in India, where the invading Japanese were thrown back at great cost. The words were in fact written by Joh Maxwell Edmonds at the time of the First World War:

WHEN YOU GO HOME, TELL THEM OF US AND SAY,
'FOR YOUR TOMORROW, WE GAVE OUR TODAY'.



The parade passes the saluting base at the Market Square. In the centre is the historic Blue Anchor pub, sadly no more, although the building of c1700 remains, and on the left is the former Johnson & Clarks department store, demolished in 1986.



Taking the salute on the dais was Major-General Sir William Abraham, National President of the Burma Star Association.



The parade marches down Thames Street, headed by the pipe band and standard bearers.



Lady Abraham, Major-General Sir William Abraham and Brigadier R.A. Nicholson of the North Surrey Branch approach St. Peter's church, flanked by the branch standard bearers.



North Surrey Branch members at St Peter's church on VJ Day in 1999, to dedicate a new memorial there. The then branch Chairman, Ken Dix, seated centre.



Ken Dix when serving with the RAF in Burma, 1944. Ken was one of the first to join a unit of the Air Cadets at Staines in 1941. It was formed at the Majestic Cinema, as the manager there was the leader of the unit. In 1943 he joined the Royal Air Force and was posted to 110 Squadron in India and later Burma, where he served as an armourer, loading bombs and ammunition onto the squadron's Vultee Vengeance and de Havilland Mosquito aircraft.

Ken later became Chairman of the North Surrey Branch of the Burma Star Association.



The memorial stone at St. Peter's Church, Staines