

FOSIM NEWSLETTER APRIL 2020

I hope you are all well and keeping safe from this virus. Having to Self-Isolate it has forced me to find time to read, but not being able to go to bookshops; I have been forced to re-read those on my bookshelves. I have just finished FM Slim's "Defeat into Victory". It is without doubt the very best instruction of both Leadership and Command of The "Forgotten Army" in what was then Burma now Myanmar. Throughout the book he heaps praise on his boss during the difficult times – General George Giffard who was a Queen's man and whose banner hangs in the Regimental Chapel in Guildford Cathedral. I wonder if history has not fully recognised his contribution to the Far East Campaign. He was Colonel of The Queen's Royal Regiment 1945 -1954. I followed up reading FM Slim's book by re-reading Lt Col Mike Lowry's "Fighting through to Kohima" account of B Coy 1 Queen's in the North West Frontier and then Arakan and relief of Kohima. During this battle, the Battalion lost 69 killed and 124 wounded. Gosh, those in the Far East had a hard war with many not being able to get home for over 5 years, someone even longer.

I next went on to thinking about VE and VJ Day 75th Anniversaries which are coming up. I strongly recommend you go to The Queen's Surreys website Buried Battles and Veterans Voices <http://www.queensroyalsurreys.org.uk/video/index.shtml> in which our Regimental forbearers tell their stories. I was particularly moved hearing CSM Jolley and Sgt Martin of 2nd East Surreys taking about their time as Japanese POW's. The stories of those who were forced to surrender at Dunkirk and spent 4 ½ long years a German POW's are equally moving.

Perhaps it is worth reminding ourselves of the Surrey Regiment's deployments and action between 1939 and 1945.

The 1st Battalion Queen's Royal (West Surrey) Regiment continued to serve in India against tribesmen on the North-West Frontier at the start of the Second World War. The Battalion then transferred to Burma and saw a great deal of hard fighting against the Japanese in the Arakan, at Kohima and in the Irrawaddy operations. After the Japanese surrender, the 1st Battalion spent a short period in Malaya, before returning home.

The 2nd Battalion moved to Egypt from Palestine in 1940 and fought in the Battle of Sidi Barrani and at Tobruk. It then moved back to Egypt and then Syria. This was followed by a year in Ceylon, training prior to a move to Burma, where it served as Chindits Columns 21 & 22.

The Queen's TA battalions formed into two brigades; 131 (Queen's) Brigade consisted of 1/5th, 1/6th and 1/7th Queen's and 169 (Queen's) Brigade was made up of 2/5th, 2/6th and 2/7th Queen's. All six Territorial battalions fought in France in 1940. Two years later, both brigades were ordered overseas and fought in the Eighth Army in the Western Desert. 131 Brigade became the Lorried Infantry Brigade of 7 Armoured Division (the "Desert Rats") after the Battle of El Alamein. 169 Brigade joined 56 London Division (the "Black Cats") and took part in the capture of Tunis in May 1943. Both brigades fought in the allied landing at Salerno, Italy in September 1943; one relieving the other. 131 Brigade then returned to England for the invasion of north-west Europe and eventually helped to push the Germans back across the River Maas. 1/5th Queen's ended the War in Hamburg, later moving to Berlin, where it took part in the Victory Parade in front of Winston Churchill. 169 Brigade remained in Italy until the end of the war.

The 1st Battalion the East Surreys was in France soon after the outbreak of the War and were evacuated through Dunkirk in June 1940. In November 1942, they were part of the assaulting troops of "Operation Torch"; the first Anglo-American operation of the War. Then followed the capture of Tunis and Medjez-el-Bab and the Battle of Tebourba. The short successful campaign against Sicily followed. They crossed to Italy with the 78th Division and there followed a very arduous campaign up the toe of the Country, with heavy fighting around Monte Cassino and "The Bowl". The Battalion continued its time in Italy until the final German surrender.

The 2nd East Surreys was in Malaya in 1940, where the Battalion served with great distinction against the Japanese, but with heavy losses. The 1st Leicestershire Regiment suffered a similar fate and the two battalions were amalgamated to form what was called the "British Battalion". They fought on until the Army was forced to surrender in Singapore. Of the two battalions, only 265 men remained and of those 149 died during the three and a half years of Japanese imprisonment. The Battalion was reconstituted in 1942 and served as a Home Defence Battalion.

Location of Queen's Royal Regiment (West Surrey) ● and East Surrey Regiment ●

VE-DAY

UK - Yorkshire, Sussex, Norfolk, Stranraer

France - Calais, **Germany** - Hamburg, Kreis Alfeld

Italy - Venice, Pordenone **Greece** - Stilis

India - Jhansi

Burma - Migyaungye **Malaya** - Singapore*

VJ-DAY

UK - Yorkshire, Sussex, Norfolk

France - Calais, **Germany** - Berlin, Kreis Alfeld

Italy - Trieste **Austria** - Carinthia **Greece** - Athens

India - Poona

Burma - Sittang Bend **Malaya** - Singapore*



*Remnants of 2nd Bn, ESR captured in Feb 1942

Altogether the Queen's Royal Regiment and East Surreys lost 3,788 killed during the Second World War.

As you will have guessed our Battlefield Tour planned for May following the Surrey Battalions in Belgium and France in 1940 has had to be postponed until October or May next year depending in the COVID19 situation.

During this difficult time, I remind you that the Benevolent Fund is available to help all Veterans. Ring **ssafa** : 0800 731 4880 who will contact RHQ.

Stay safe and best wishes,

Tony Ward