



Trip Report 2019

H4FA's 2018

The last year has been an exceptionally full and rewarding one for us, albeit with increased challenges, both with our added responsibilities, and the very uncertain future due to the political and aggressive Myanmar military situation in the country.

Whilst inevitably, with the fast passing years since WWII, the number of veterans is declining, we are finding more old veterans and their widows, usually in very straightened circumstances and often in remoter locations, difficult to reach. It is most regrettable that it is the case they have been missed and forgotten in earlier years, when the aggressive attitude and actions of the Myanmar military made communication and travel extremely difficult.

This has unavoidably resulted in greater administrative and resource pressures on us, especially in Myanmar itself and also the knock on pressures at the UK end.

To help meet these challenges effectively we are, with the generous help of our partner, Royal Commonwealth Ex-Services League, appointing a local person based in Yangon to directly assist with administration and distribution in country. This person will work closely with our recently appointed trustee, Zoe Rigden. Zoe is doing excellent and much needed work on the ground in Yangon and is based in SE Asia [Bangkok/Yangon]. She is very generously helped by her husband Ian Rigden who works extensively in the SE Asia region.

We have also appointed Alex Bescoby who operates extensively in Myanmar, through the British film company www.grammar-productions.com of which he is a founder director. He has wide UK and Myanmar connections. The company have made the film *Forgotten Allies*, which is explained further in the report. Joining as well is Andrew Curtis, Housemaster, Seagrim House, of Norwich School where Major Hugh Seagrim GC was a pupil in the 1920s. He was also a fellow pupil at Norwich School with the father of our trustee Peter Mitchell. Andrew's educational experience will be of special benefit to the trust's work in the camps on the Thai/Burma Border, in particular with the next young generations whose grandparents and great grandparents fought for Britain. Andrew served in the British Army in his previous career. His Army background will be much appreciated by the old soldiers.

Our President, General Sir Alex Harley, who joined us earlier last year, has been hugely helpful in his advice and strong support and in particular introducing us to key players in the military and related fields. This has greatly strengthened the Trust in its wider relationships. Throughout General Alex has been a sustained source of encouragement in our work.

Our activities to promote the work of the Trust have been intensively sustained towards getting better known the courage of the old soldiers Burma in support of Britain and the then Empire and Commonwealth, when we were in greatest need. This will help generate much need financial support and help in kind. In June 2018, with Grammar Productions, we very successfully held a strongly attended gala Dinner at the Army and Navy Club in London: *Remembering World War Two in Burma*. At the event, Grammar Productions showed a trailer of the their film *Forgotten*

Allies and we were joined by two excellent key note speakers, James Holland and Levison Wood. As well as attracting major financial support for the development of the film, we received generous financial backing for H4FA, which was much helped by significant media interest.

The film's director and H4FA trustee, Alex Bescoby writes: "After many months of hard work following our "*Remembering WW2 in Burma*" fundraiser in June 2018, The *Forgotten Allies* documentary is almost ready for release.

The Grammar Productions team are delighted to announce the film will be premièred at the National Army Museum on the evening of Wednesday 12th June. Tickets are not yet on sale, but details on how to reserve tickets will soon be released on the Grammar website www.grammar-productions.co.uk

In November the Trust played a key role in the Remembrance Service in Yangon and we arranged for nine old veterans to attend the ceremony. (See Report for details.) The British Embassy have fully supported H4FA's efforts to show the veterans they are not forgotten and to work with us; we are grateful for this.

Royal Commonwealth Ex Services League [RCEL]. We are very pleased that due to the success of the Trusts work in Myanmar, we have been appointed a full Constituent Member of RCEL. They have been especially supportive with generous financial contributions towards the annual grants we give to the old veterans. This has enabled us to do so much more.

Our Volunteers and those who help us on the ground in Myanmar. We are especially thankful for their sustained and selfless commitment that is so willingly

given by those wonderful people who support our work in country, and work directly with the old soldiers and their widows. The Trust would not be able to operate effectively without this. In many cases this critical assistance goes back many years. We have included a couple of photos of Kevin our distributor of grants in the Toungoo area to show the difficulties he faces. We have offered to buy him boots; flip flops on a motorbike in the heavy mud looked very dangerous.



This year we lost one of our most generous and highly respected donors Rob van Mesdag, journalist, rower, and philanthropist. Rob had supported H4FA for over 15 years; his annual donation formed some 30% of PSRB's funds. The trust he set up, the Awareness Trust offers to continue to support us. We will never forget his kindness and interest in the work.

Trip by Sally McLean - November 2018 - H4FA

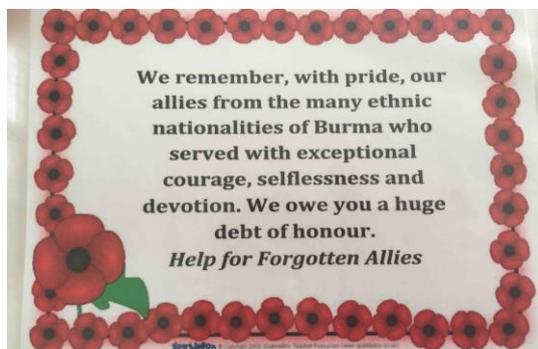
8th - 12th 2018 YANGON formerly Rangoon



In Yangon to meet with the distributors of grants for two of our biggest lists covering the Ayerwaddy Delta and the Yangon area and to attend with veterans and fellow trustee Zoe Rigden, the Remembrance Day Service.

On Sunday 11th November at 08.45 am at Taukkyan War Cemetery, Yangon. 9 ex servicemen brought to Yangon by H4FA especially for the event were present. One, Tlangsilova, had flown from Kalaymyo, Chin State, a Karen veteran had come from Toungoo, other Karen from the Yangon area. A film made by the grandson of Tlangsilova, is on our Help 4 Forgotten Allies Facebook page.

The Chin veteran, a Karen veteran together with Bawm Awn of the Kachin Veterans Committee carried up a wreath for H4FA together with the message below.



We were then all invited to lunch at the Ambassador's residence. It was remarkable how these very old men stood up to the event, especially since the coach from Taukkyan to the residence took over an hour. But the veterans seemed to enjoy it all very much.

CHIN STATE 12th - 18th

The first leg of the trip to Chin State was in **Kalaymyo**, a couple of hours flight from Yangon. Time was spent with the distributor of grants, Terah, and my young interpreter, Sui Sui, over accounts and on discussions on how to access some of the veterans and widows on the list in remote areas of Chin State. We then went shopping and bought boxes of food for those we were visiting in Kalaymyo and to take up into the Chin Hills to Hakha, to give as gifts with their annual grant money.

Next day the three of us with driver set off to visit two widows who are new to our list. Not all I met are included in this report. Widow of **Ngul Thanga** whose name was Nu Hliri. She had dementia and didn't understand anything of our visit. The family showed us her husband's medals.



Widow **Pi Robuangi** of veteran Lt. Khawdina on our list. Previously she had received a grant in Mizoram, India, but not since she had moved to Kalay. The family had heard recently about H4FA's visits and applied.



We returned to the hotel to talk with the relative of **Tung Hang** a veteran in a remote village. We managed to get direct contact with him via a mobile. He had seen the announcement that the Chin Human Rights Organisation, (our partner organisation in Chin State) had put in the local newspaper and contacted Terah with his service number. He had been a Chin Levy, trained in Maymyo in 1943, and transferred to Mingladon. His wife died many years ago, he depends on his daughter in law, who is now unwell. His officer “had three stripes” he told me, and was called Gordon. He could be over 100.

14th

We checked out of our hotel early and drove to Hakha. It is 1,867m up with a population of around 25,000. The road up there from Kalaymyo takes around ten hours and the views are spectacular while the roads a little breathtaking! It is the capital of Chin State and there are no tourists there.



HAKHA 15th

We began the day at the Chin Human Rights Organisation office in the centre of Hakha where we talked through the details of the lists they hold for us and the finances. Photos, signatures, and details of ID have been collected. There are huge challenges in such a remote area with terrible roads and extreme weather. Tedim, Tonzang and Matupi had still to be visited.

Visits

We visited four veterans who we had met on the last visit and paid their 2018 grants.

Sa Mang and wife Zynz Duh

Was keen to talk to us about buried gold. His story was that when the Japanese were overrunning Hakha the British buried a lot of gold nearby. It was the money used for paying the soldiers and running the garrison, and was too heavy to carry with them to India, since they had to travel fast, and they planned to come back for it. Some was carried away on horseback but some buried. They are not sure exactly where. They are still trying to find it. Sa Mang wanted to know if there is any record of this in the UK. He wanted a metal detector and suggested H4FA should help them hunt for the treasure with him! He knows the area, he told me, from hunting and it is near where the British camp was. He offered me a cut of the booty! His health was poor, but his mind clear. This was his account.

Kio Bil and his sister Hmet Kil

Kio Bil is extraordinary in that he performed some clerical work in the Army in WW2 and now has taken it on himself to make sure there is a list in Hakha of veterans and widows. He goes around from house to house on his motorbike with great

energy despite his age and works with CHRO. A quiet man, it was good to see him. Kio Bil's much older sister Hmet Kil is the widow of Sgt. Khua Kio, she is now 99.



I found **Van Hamme** in some distress with toothache though not complaining. He did not have enough money to visit the dentist, nor pay for the transport to the dentist. He lives in New Hakha high above Hakha where the town had been partially rebuilt after the extensive flooding of 2015. To hire a motorbike costs the equivalent of £5 there and back. The cost of the dentist would be more than £10. He was born in 1925, so he is 93. I left his 2018 grant money plus medical expenses.

Ni Luai Our next veteran was in much more comfortable circumstances with his extended family around him. I asked him if he thinks about the Japanese war much. (People in Chin State tend to call the Burma Campaign the "Japan War". He replies that he knows he was involved but he doesn't remember much. He fought in Falam and Hakha he says. All of those in his Battalion have died. I ask if he dreams about the war. He says he sees his friends in his dreams. He hates war. He is told

about the Grammar film. He's happy to hear about it. He has high blood pressure. All of his three daughters are present, there is a beautiful Christmas rose tree outside in their garden. The old man is well-loved. Apparently, he has adopted very English table manners and discipline, and is very cheerful. A charcoal fire is burning near to him.

16th Hakha



We went in the truck to meet two veterans who were not on our list.

A first meeting with **Hram Lo, who gave his year of birth as 1916.** He lives over his great nephew's motorbike hire shop with his wife and extended family. He had heard about the grant through the Chin Veterans Committee recently but had never received a grant before. He spoke Indian a little and called me "Memsahib"!

Major Moore (I had certainly heard this name before) had been one of his officers and he had enlisted and served in Falam before the war broke out. He served between 1942 and 1947. He went with the British Army to India for training for six months and was brought back by

plane. There had been constant fighting; the Japanese had been based in



Kalaymyo. Hram Lo had been a bugler. See photo. Chin men wore their hair on top of their head at that time. He still knew his Service Number by heart 66548 and that he had been in the Chin Hills Battalion.

Our last visit in Hakha was to **Chia Meng**, 98, who lives in New Hakha high above the original town in a small wooden hut with his grandson. He was 22 when war broke out and the British camp was 8 miles from his village. He seems to not have seen many British officers, but mainly to have been fighting with Indians and Ghurkas. He said he was called "Home Guard" but was given a uniform when he went into battle. He saw a lot of Japanese go through his village and had to carry things for them. When the Japanese came all the men in the village hid the guns the British had given them. At the end of the war he gave his gun back. He had received training in Hakha with the British. He had never received a welfare grant before and the CHRO came two months ago.

We gave Chia Meng 540,000 Kyat (£270 for 2017 7 2018) and I asked Sui Sui if it was in fact safe to leave such an old man

sitting outside his hut with so much cash alone. She was surprised by the question and said nobody would steal from him in Hakha. She herself was born and raised in Hakha so would know.

17th/18th

Journey from Hakha to Kalay 10 hours by truck. Flight to Yangon.

THAILAND 19TH - 27TH

19th/20th Flight to Bangkok, and on to Mae Sot on the Thai Burma border. Preparations for a trip to Mae La Refugee camp included shopping for food presents and discussions on the changes in the list of veterans and widows with the grant distributor responsible for that list. He holds a list of around a dozen.

21st Saw Micah secretary at the Karen Refugee Committee came to fetch me and take me and the presents we had brought to Mae La Camp (pop. 35,401 Aug.18). This camp has been there since the 1980's and many of the young people were born here. It is a direct result of the civil war between the Karen National Liberation Army and the Burma Army. A ceasefire was signed in 2011, but fighting sporadically breaks out. Some, but very few, have gone home, over 75,000 have been resettled in third countries, mostly the US and Australia. There are nine camps the length of the border with an official population of 97,202.

Without a representative of the KRC and a permit, I would not have been able to get in. Security is tight and the Royal Thai Government does not like visitors to the camps. We passed through the security barriers and entered where Saw Ler Lay Kler Htoo was waiting.

We went to visit Pastor Lin Aye, now 100. Although confined to the camp, and to the tiny bamboo shack and his bed, with a colostomy, he is unfailingly cheerful and his mind is clear. He tells me how his older brother retreated to India with the British, how he fought against the Japanese near Maymyo and trained in Rangoon. He said, "as for me, I am getting older and cannot walk; I want to, but I can't. Sometimes I can't sleep or eat. Sometimes just one day at a time is enough." He wanted to go back to Toungoo for his birthday celebrations; he had been a Pastor there after the war, but he realises this is not possible. I left him presents and a solar powered light, as I left he saluted. His grant money was paid in February 2019.

We visited Naw Wah Ler who lives with her daughters in a more substantial bamboo house in the camp. Her daughters had gone to fetch the monthly rations or rice, sell some of the rice and to buy some softer rice for her from a camp shop. Each person who is entitled to receive rations, that is if they have been in the camp since 2005, receives nine kilos of rice a month. As well as that they get a little beans, some dried fish mixed with chilli and garlic and salt and oil as well as fuel to boil their water and cook their rice.



I ask if any of her relatives who were resettled to the USA or Australia are sending back money to her family, but she

says they did for the first few years and then it stopped. She says she would like to offer me something as I am visiting, but



has nothing. Rations next year are set to be cut again as international donors reduce the amount of money that they give for the refugees. Those in the camps with no ration cards who often share rations with others will be faced with hard choices and there have been 23 suicides in the nine camps over the last two years.

After these two elderly people I visited H4FA's other projects in Mae La camp, Emmanuel School, and Care Villa.

PSRB Projects in this report: Care Villa, Emmanuel School and the Bible College

Care Villa

There are 8 handicapped residents here, who have been injured by landmines. Funding from H4FA/PSRB pays for their carers, activities, food to supplement the rations and personal hygiene needs.

One of them, Paul, 41, plays the violin. He has been in the camp for 12 years and because he was not on the 2005 UN register of camp inmates does not have an

option of resettlement. He lost his sight in 2006, not through a landmine injury. He has received no treatment since 2007, when he was told nothing could be done. He requested money for violin lessons. His violin was given to him by a visitor to the camp some years before.

Emmanuel Primary School

Is an Anglican school with 157 children, seven teachers and a headmistress - Gloria. H4FA/PSRB has supported the school since 2002 and sends four quarterly payments to cover teachers wages, administration, school materials, transport, electricity, water charges and repairs to the buildings.

This year Tadworth and Walton Overseas Aid Trust has provided enough money to give the children two lunches a week. This has been very popular! People in the camps are living on very little food, and Gloria has a problem with some children who have difficulties concentrating.



The school was proud of having renovated their hall, working together, teachers and parents painted the ceiling blue and covered the mould with an insulating paint. During the rainy season, life in the camps is particularly hard.

In this hall the children put on a show for me of singing and dancing which was most impressive and touching. Their standard of work is high and pupils from Emmanuel have come top in exams held throughout camp schools. This year four generous donors have paid for promising students to progress on to Noh Boh High School an Anglican school financed by Christchurch Bangkok. However there are several years between primary and high school which for these students was spent in other camps schools.

The school committee have requested that H4FA/PSRB funds an extension of the school from Primary to Middle school. In order to open the school for three new grades they would need 4 new teachers. The initial cost would be around £7,000 to include the initial building work at roughly 50% of this figure.

22nd/23rd I flew from Mae Sot to Chaing Mae and on the next day to Mae Hong Son further north on the Thai Burma border.

There I met Myew Htoo who is in charge of our list of veterans and widows in the two Karenni refugee camps in this area. There are now only three widows left on his list. After lunch and discussions with him we spent some hours in the market at Mae Hong Son and supermarkets buying gifts for the camp residents for our trip there the next day.

24th We set off with a driver who works directly with the Ban Mae Surin camp commander and knew the Thai security there well. Ban Mae Surin has 2,222 camp residents. It takes five hours to reach. The first two are on very good roads but then the last three are slow work on very rough jungle tracks and through rivers etc. We spent the night at the camp. I have visited

many times and know people there, although many have been resettled in the USA or Australia. As well as visiting the one widow on our list in the camp, I was staying at our H4FA/PSRB project, the Bible College and was carefully taken care of by young women students.

Daisy 88, widow of Saw Maw Reh, is well educated and a well known personality in her community. When we brought her her jacket she put it on and said, "If I wear it I will never die", with a wry smile.

But she says more seriously that this is a difficult time for her, she is tired, she can't walk far, she goes to visit her daughter once a week, gets pain in her neck and feels dizzy.

At the time of WW2 she was a "big child". Her husband was a soldier, and they were married after the war. She thanks God he lived through it, but it was a terrible time.

She planned initially to go to a third country, but decided not to and to stay with her community.

Her husband was the Karenni Chairperson a VIP, a well known man and in the National Democratic Front. I ask her what she thinks of the current politics in Myanmar. She says that she personally never believed the Government of Myanmar would help the ethnic people. She doesn't want to go back.

What did her husband say about his time as a soldier? It's a very long time ago and she can't remember it all. She remembers that a Japanese soldier caught him but he escaped and re-found the British. Did he have any medals? I ask. Yes, but he lost them when the Burma Army burnt their village. All their valuables were burnt. How long was she on the run from the Burma Army, I ask.

Twice. In 1986, the village was burnt, then the family returned, but in 1989 it was burnt again and they moved to Thailand and the refugee camp.

Did you travel on foot? How long did it take? I ask.

One or two days. The Burma Army has her land now.

In 1994 her husband died. He was buried in the border area after he was cremated. His ashes were buried. But the Burma Army dug up the grave looking for treasure and he had to be reburied nearer to the refugee camp.



Camp 2 Bible College PSRB Project

The Bible College is in this remote camp, close to the border with Myanmar/Burma it is one of the smallest camps. There is no internet connection without climbing up a nearby mountain. Teachers at the College complain that students are often missing from classes because they have "gone up the mountain". Students defend this action by saying they need to download materials for their studies. It takes them two hours to walk up.

There are now 36 students and ten teachers, a high ratio as I pointed out. I was told that there are four or five students to a class. We have supported the College for over 16 years, and seen it through total destruction and rebuilding following a huge fire throughout the camp in 2013. It is for bright young people within the camp and for some on the other side of the border the only affordable further education available

to them. They offer a qualification “Certificate of Theology”.

Those who come from outside the camp, have no ration card and are dependent on the Bible College for food. Some of the teenagers who were previously under their care on my last visit, to receive an education in the camp schools, have had to return home, due to ration cuts. The College receives many requests but cannot take more students because they cannot feed them. There is a thriving vegetable garden, and chickens and pigs but students and staff can go hungry. The college currently only has one computer. Alumni who have been resettled in third countries, have sent back donations.



I carried out several interviews to get a picture of the individual lives of male and female teachers and students.

One young man who struck me as very bright had made the journey to study here from the Delta area a journey of close to a 1,000 Km. Gay Hser Doh is 23

and one of 8 siblings. I asked him his ambition for the future. “I want to be a missionary. A leader. I have a dream, to unify the Karen people, politically and spiritually. He tells me that when the students in the camp, graduate and go home, they face problems. The qualifications gained in camp are not always recognised back home. The Government of Myanmar view people in the camp as political rebels. I asked him on average how often he went “up the

mountain” to get the internet connection. He said between 3 and 9 times a month. He hopes to get a masters in Nagaland. He needs 3000\$ a year for 3 years and he would then plan to come back to serve his people.

I talked through accounts and requests with the Bible College committee. There was a concern that next year the rice ration could go right down, forcing people to return home to very difficult circumstances. If the camp were to close the Bible College would amalgamate with another Bible College within Karenni state.

The committee requested money for computers, for clothes and English grammar books. Without the support of the generous regular donors, the educational establishment in such a remote camp would probably have to close.

25th There was an early Church service, followed by breakfast and our departure from camp and drive back to Mae Hong Son.

26th I flew from Mae Hong Son to Chaing Mae, then had lunch with Bellay Htoo in charge of our lists for Sangklaburi, Kanchanaburi, and Naunglebin. Bellay lives in Chaing Mae with her British husband Ashley South and two teenaged sons. She is Karen, a teacher and her family fled the Burma Army in the nineties.

My trip included 13 flights and 7 Hotels/Guest Houses, but I was rewarded by meeting again with many of those who so appreciate the extraordinary generosity of our donors. Their resilience in the face of oppression, and hardship is inspiring as is kindness of those who are willing to support them.