

May 2023

Background and work

H4FA provides WWII veterans and widows living in Myanmar/Burma and in refugee camps on the Thai/Burma border with small annual welfare grants. PSRB focuses on helping refugees in the camps with education projects and on humanitarian relief.

Burma/Myanmar's ex-servicemen

The dwindling band of veterans and widows, Britain's most loyal allies in the war against Japan 1942-45, now endure extreme old age on a pittance. Viewed, since independence, through the weary years of the junta, and now again during this extreme period of violence under the junta once more, as enemies of the state, they have paid dearly for their loyalty to, and affection for, Britain. Their subsequent fight for freedom has cost them dear: they are still struggling for the rights of their people in this new crisis.

Over two thousand 'levies', called up hurriedly prior to the Japanese invasion, were Karen or Karenni, and served in the legendary Force 136, one of whose prominent leaders was Major Hugh Seagrim GC. It is now over 75 years since Major Seagrim was executed as a prisoner of war with his Karen comrades. He gave himself up to stop the torture of Karen civilians by the Japanese who were searching for him. After the British retreat, Seagrim alone remained in the Karen hills, sending out information to the Allies in India. Later in the war, during the recapture of Burma, another great hero, Lieutenant Colonel Peacock, led forces parachuted into the same area. The Karen and Karenni were recognised as playing a pivotal role in this operation and praised widely for their courage by General Slim.

Currently, there are a handful of Chin surviving veterans or their widows receiving annual welfare grants in Western Myanmar/Burma. The Chin levies and the Chin Hills Battalion served in the British Armed Forces of Burma fighting alongside the Allies in the remote Chin hills. Chin State is the poorest part of Myanmar/Burma. Distributing their grant money is a challenge, particularly at

this time of the Burma Army's warfare in Chin State, but H4FA, with the help of our trustee, Van Cung Lian, has again succeeded. It is a joy to see these very old people receive thanks and acknowledgement, even at this late hour.

Since WWII, many have had to hide their medals or any proof of their wartime service and change their names in order to get employment. Their affiliation to the British was viewed by the Burmese as sympathy for the 'imperialist oppressors'; it has done them no favours. Now in great old age, most have no pension, and many find it hard simply to eat, let alone enjoy the small comforts that make extreme old age bearable. With little support from Britain until a few years ago, we aim to make sure they are not forgotten again.

Following friendly discussions with the late Viscount Slim, President of the Burma Star Association, and the Royal Commonwealth Ex-Services League in 2007, H4FA began giving grants in the border area. In 2014, RCEL asked us to take on the old soldiers and widows in the Yangon/Rangoon area and beyond, and in 2018 to extend our work to include Chin state. In November 2017, H4FA was accepted as a constituent member of RCEL. We work officially alongside RCEL. RCEL has no connection, however, with our educational and humanitarian projects.

We remain honored to have General Sir Alex Harley as our President and Dame Joanna Lumley and Karen Archer as our Patrons.



Dame Joanna was born in India and her father was a Major in the 6th Gurkha Rifles and fought as a Chindit in Burma. She has famously fought for the rights of Gurkhas and could rightfully be called a 'national treasure' for her stage, television and film roles which have delighted so many. It is so good of her to have found the time to support H4FA in this way. She has proved a very generous patron and we are extremely grateful.

News update on Burma/Myanmar April 2023

The Burmese Military have unleashed appalling acts of terror and violence on any of Myanmar/Burma people who they see opposing them. They sow terror so as to cower the population. There has been greatly increased use of air power with arbitrary attacks including on schools, hospitals, and community centres. There is little awareness of the dire situation in Myanmar/Burma in the wider western world which is very focused on the war in Ukraine and other strategic international developments. The economy of Myanmar/Burma is imploding and this important country, with a pivotal position in Southeast Asia, is inexorably becoming a failed state. This means that H4FA/PSRB's task to support our remaining World War II veterans and their widows and increasingly our efforts to give help towards the huge numbers of refugees and IDPs is so critical.

With the UK's long historic responsibilities in Myanmar/Burma, particularly the massive efforts Great Britain and our allies made to defeat the Japanese invasion of Burma in WWII, it is appalling this devastating position is now facing the people of Burma/Myanmar.

We have our colleagues and volunteers on the ground who deliver help direct to our old veterans and their widows and increasingly to IDPs and refugees. They carry out this vital work often under dangerous and risky conditions. There are significant and unavoidable risks to their safety. Without their courage and sustained fortitude none of this would be possible.

In the Refugee Camps, Thailand

In the current situation all talk of closing the camps and of refugees returning to Myanmar/Burma is on hold. Of the many thousands of Karen and Karenni people who have recently fled bombing of their villages by the Burma Army, The Royal Thai Government has allowed very few to cross the border and set up temporary camps separate from the established ones. There is an urgent need to send humanitarian aid to these people. H4FA/PSRB has been doing this over 2022/23 and with your help would like to continue please.

H4FA 2023

H4FA has no ambition to compete with other, larger charities. Our engagement is simple and practical. Our charitable objects are to help relieve suffering, including refugees from Burma/Myanmar, who have fled hardship and human rights abuses. The Trustees have agreed that the future strategic direction of the charity will be to increasingly focus on educational and humanitarian projects, seeking to provide a longer-term legacy for these people who have suffered so much.

During 2022 Denis Gray joined our team of Trustees, with his very extensive journalistic experience and knowledge of Myanmar/Burma. We now have a team of 10 Trustees, with a wide range of skills and expertise, to continue to support this key work. For personal reasons our founder, Sally McLean, has stepped down as Chair after 27 committed years in the role. Her vision, passion and sheer dedication to the charity have been outstanding. She continues as a trustee with a particular focus on PSRB projects. Sally – we are hugely indebted to you!

We remain immensely grateful to all our supporters and donors, individuals, and grant-making bodies, without whom none of this would be possible. As we look forward, we believe there is a strong and much-needed future for the charity.

Finances

Our income for 2022 was £124,226 and expenditure totalled £151,450. This level of expenditure was facilitated by the exceptional level of donations seen in 2021. Of our expenditure, 60% was spent on WWII veterans and widows and the cost of getting their grants to them, within Burma/Myanmar and in the camps; 31.5% on education and humanitarian relief; 6.5% on adult Christian education; and 2% on essential administration, publicity and fundraising. At our trustees' meeting, it was decided that, unless a preference is indicated, all undesignated donations would be split, with 75% going to H4FA and 25% to PSRB projects. Our lists of veterans and widows become shorter as inevitably these now very old people pass away. They themselves have asked that any extra funds be dedicated to the education of their people. This year we have begun a new educational project among the Chin refugees in Mizoram State in India. Special thanks must go to H4FA's donors in 2022, among them: The Royal Commonwealth Ex-Services League, Special Forces Benevolent Fund, Van Mesdag Trust, Cuthbert

Horn Trust, Holy Trinity Brussels, Roi Baudoin Foundation, Tadworth and Walton Overseas Trust, Gavin Wigginton in memory of his father Sydney Wigginton SOE, and many generous individuals in the UK, Germany, Belgium, and Tokyo.

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DONATIONS

Website | Justgiving | Paypal | CAF/ Roi Baudoin Foundation.
H4FA | Sort code 08-92-99 | Account no. 65428889
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Help 4 Forgotten Allies

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Patron: Dame Joanna Lumley OBE FRGS
and Karen Archer
President: General Sir Alex Harley KBE CB

