

## Listening to Voiceless Stories of POWs (#8) -2021-

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Whenever you come here to the Commonwealth War Cemetery, Yokohama, you see the well cared site of greenery and repose. Have you ever noticed that these 1800 plus graves allocated in order have a different and very special story each? We have “listened” to these stories of the men interred here, so far away from their homelands. Let us introduce three of these stories today.

### ■ William Charles Tyner, British Section PA15, 10<sup>th</sup> August 1945, Age 39



William Charles Tyner, Staff Sergeant of the Royal Army Medical Corps, was posted to work at the Bowen Road Hospital, Hong Kong, in 1937. He was with his wife, Olive, and his one-year-old daughter, Marion. In fear of the invasion by the Imperial Japanese Army, Olive and Marion were evacuated to Australia in 1940. They never knew it would be the last time they would see each other.

After a long, heavy warfare on Christmas Eve 1941, the Allied surrendered to Japan on Christmas Day. Tyner was one of the 11,000 men captured and interned at the Sham Shui Po Camp, Hong Kong, for a while. Then, along with 616 other POWs, he was transported to Japan on 4<sup>th</sup> September 1942, arriving at Yokohama Stadium 3B POW Camp on 12<sup>th</sup> September 1942. Forced work was at a dockyard. Transferred to Yokohama 13D Camp on 20<sup>th</sup> March 1944 as one of the 102 POWs, their work place was at NKK Corp., Asano Dock. They had to walk 4 to 5 km every day for work.

On 13<sup>th</sup> May 1945, 200 POWs were moved to Sendai 5B to work for Nippon Steel Corporation, Kamaishi Steel Works. There they met POWs of other nationalities like Dutch and Americans. Tyner was too sick from beriberi to work, so he remained in the Camp to work as a medical orderly. Following a heavy Allied bombardment on 14<sup>th</sup> July, a further Joint British and US Naval Bombardment was targeted at factories on 9<sup>th</sup> August 1945. The POWs' request in July to move to a safer place was never acceded. Numerous citizens were again killed and their houses were burned down. So was the Camp. 32 POWs died (25 Dutch, 4 American, 2 British and 1 New Zealander). Tyner died from his severe burns later that day. His fellow since the hospital in Hong Kong, James W. Downs, private of Royal Army Medical Corps, was the other British victim by his burns. Both men worked hard as medical orderlies to look after patients regardless of their own danger. Downs' grave is in British

Section LA3. He was age 31. On 15<sup>th</sup> September 1945, surviving POWs were finally released by the US Army. Ashes of the 50 deceased of this Camp including the 32 by the Naval Bombardment were also collected on the same day.

At home in the UK, Olive was waiting for her husband's safe return, since she had received the POW postcard written by him on 6<sup>th</sup> January 1945. But the letter written by Tyner's senior officer on his way home at Manilla gave Olive the terrible news, the shock of which, made her weep non-stop for a week.

■ **George Henry Beal, Australian Section EA 3, 28<sup>th</sup> May 1943, Age 38**



As you enter this cemetery, you may notice two explanatory boards in English and in Japanese on you left. They reveal details about George Henry Beal who lost his life in Niigata.

He was an Aboriginal soldier. In those days, Aboriginal Australians were considered lower class citizens with few human rights. They were not even counted to be included in Australia's population records. No proper job was possible for him and, if it was available, he could have been paid only one third of a white man. But in the army, they were paid the same as

white soldiers, with the same clothes and training. A lot of Aboriginal men volunteered for military service. During world war II, about 15,000 Australian soldiers were captured as prisoners of war. Among them, 81 were Aboriginals. Some of them were taken to the construction of the Burma-Thai Railway.

In December 1942, 300 Australian POWs were shipped to Japan to the newly opened Naoetsu Camp. George and his brother, Frederick, and two others were Aboriginals. According to the camp report, "Some black men were among the POWs". After half a year, Beal was involved in an accident at a factory. He was carried into hospital for surgery but lost his life. The other three survived and were repatriated.

In December 2019, on the occasion of a visit to Japan, the POW Research Network Japan had a session with Mr. Garth O'Connell, the Curator of the Australian War Memorial. Beale was his great uncle. Mr. O'Connell is very proud of his race of Aboriginal Australians and works for Aboriginal history and its cultural inheritance.

■ **James Robert Butterworth, British Section EA 3, 21<sup>st</sup> May 1943, Age 34**

Butterworth, gunner of the Royal Artillery, a POW at Hakodate Camp, perished because of acute enteritis. Butterworth was a good husband of Ellen and with a daughter, Joyce. In 1987, Ellen visited Japan as a member of war widows' group invited by the British Government. In 2007, Joyce came to Japan with her husband, daughter and grandchildren to pay respect to her father's grave and to visit his last POW camp in Hakodate.

In 1942 when the Allied surrendered to the Imperial Japanese Army in Southeast Asia, 350,000 men were caught as POWs. Some of them were taken to construct the Burma-Thai Railway and some others were shipped successively to Japan to replenish the labor shortage. In Hakodate, in the early stage, they accepted 300 British and Dutch men, having renovated the former quarantine to a POW camp. All these men



**The rose Joyce planted**

took a train from Moji to Aomori, then by boat they arrive at Hakodate Port, Hokkaido. It was a snowy day in early December, and they were all in summer uniform. Some of them were in shorts. Very exhausted and getting terribly cold, they went up the hill to the Camp. When they finally arrived, it was almost in the evening, then they had to stand to attention during the long roll-call in the snow. Warm clothes, heaters were scarce and unskillful work at a dockyard down the hill made them sick and injured one after another. Butterworth perished. He always kept the photo of two-year-old Joyce in his chest pocket. It was brought back to Ellen by his comrade after the war.

On her visit to a barrack of the former camp, now a tea room, Mr Masatoshi Asari, Historian, offered Joyce to plant a young rose in a yard to wish for peace. Joyce said showing the photo, "No one should have the same family history, ever again". Now the little rose has grown up to 150 m tall and has many largely bloomed. Mr Asari believes the souls of the 114 dead British, American and Dutch POWs have protected and fostered the blooming of the rose planted by Butterworth's daughter and family in his honor. The rose, a commemoration of the POWs' suffering and a remembrance for generations as they pay their respects.

For more information, contact us, <http://www.powresearch.jp/jp/index.html>