

Torpoint Archives & Heritage Centre,

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President Tremayne Carew Pole

Torpoint Organisation of the Year 2013-2014

Registered Charity No. 1043650

Founder members Pat & Freda Manning

TAHC REPORT July 2025

Dear Members and Volunteers,

The AGM held on July 3rd was well attended and it was good to meet the new TTC representative, Steve Pike.

Ann Sawyer represented the Archives at the Civic Service on June 13th. We are grateful that Sarah Knott took a video of the Civic Parade and shared it with TAHC as usual

We are pleased to welcome Angela Larratt and Katherine Burrell to the team of volunteers.

Julie and Paula have recorded the memories of two more Torpointers.

The 80th Anniversary of VJ Day falls on Friday August 15th.

Memories and photographs are being collected from the families of the 10 Torpointers who lost their lives in the Far East and also information about those who survived. TAHC do not wish for them to be the "Forgotten Army."

It was a geography lesson to find the memorials where our 10 casualties are commemorated.

All RN casualties are on memorials in their home ports.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) certificate states that Chief ERA Leslie George Perkins, aged 32, died in HMS TAMAR, HongKong on October 2nd 1942. He is commemorated on the Plymouth Hoe Memorial.

This is only part of the story. We are very grateful to Leslie's nieces, Jill Geary and Paddy Knott, for sharing family photographs and documents.



This photograph of the Perkins family was taken in 1936/37.

Alfred Claude Wilson Perkins is sitting with his wife, Edith Amelia nee Squance. Standing is their only daughter, Evelyn Mary (Jill Geary's mother), their 3 sons, Victor Bruce, Leslie George and Alfred Richard Roy. Roy has his arm around his wife, Florence nee Carter. Their child Patricia (Paddy) is sitting on her Grandmother's knee.

Leslie George Perkins

was probably on leave when this the photo above was taken.

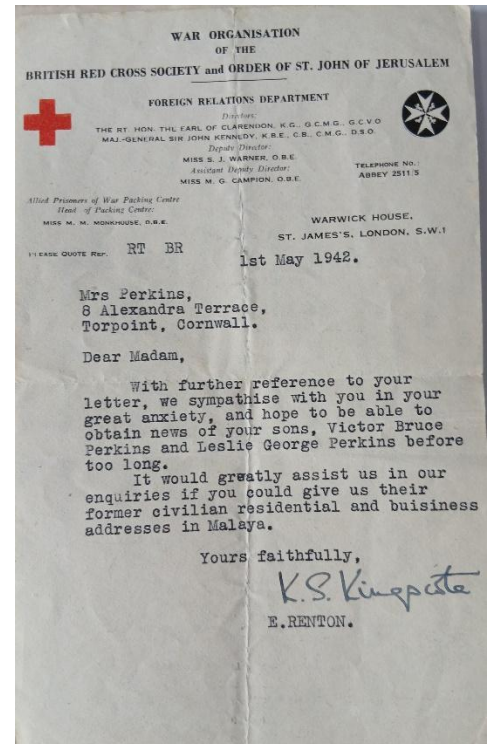


The photo on the left shows him in his artificer's uniform in about 1928.

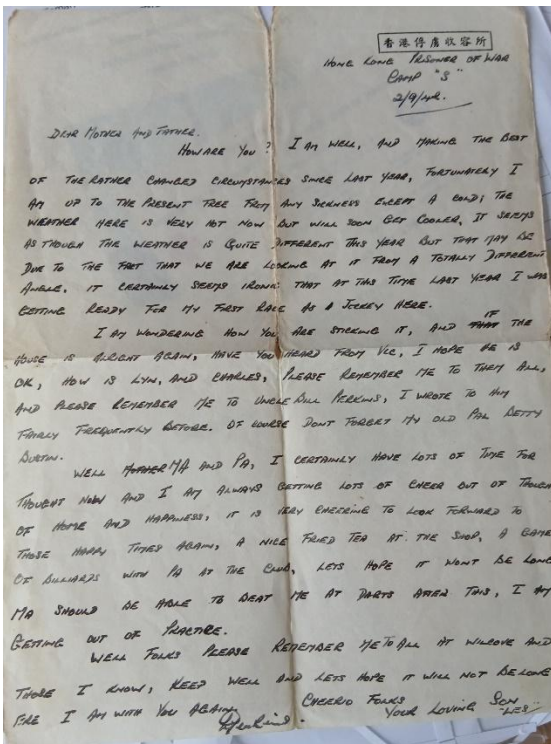
He advanced to be a Chief Engineer Room Artificer (ERA) serving in HMS TAMAR, Hong Kong . The Japanese overran Hong Kong and Leslie became a Prisoner Of War (POW) on Christmas Day 1941.

The letter on the right reflects the worries of many families of serving personnel. Five months after his capture, Edith Perkins is still desperate to know of the whereabouts of not just Leslie, but also of Victor Bruce. During WW2 the Red Cross responded to or sent

2,676,220 letters and telegrams from Great Britain alone.



We know that life was very grim in POW camps but the inmates tried to keep positive and sent optimistic letters to their families. This letter written by Leslie to his parents on 2nd Sept 1942 is not in



his usual copperplate script - maybe they were ordered to write in capital letters so that the Japanese censors could read them. This letter would have reached Torpoint several weeks after Leslie died. In the last week of September nearly 2,000 Allied and Chinese prisoners were herded onto a freighter, the Lisbon Maru. The prisoners were to be taken to Japan as slave labourers. Coded messages from informants were not received by the Allies. There was no indication that this freighter had human cargo, so it was torpedoed by the USS Grouper. The Lisbon Maru began to sink slowly. Japanese soldiers on board were taken off immediately, just leaving a basic crew, but the holds containing the prisoners were battened down. Desperate battering efforts eventually allowed POWs who were well enough to reach the top deck, but they were under continual attack from guns and bayonets. At first the Japanese rescue boats would not pick up POWs from the water, but this order was eventually reversed. Flotsam was used to keep some swimmers afloat, some were picked up by Chinese fishermen, and a few swam to nearby islands.

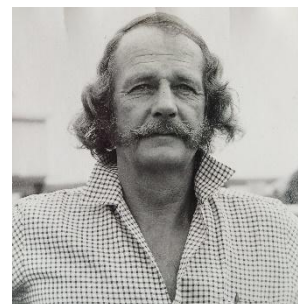
Most of the escapees were recaptured. Only 3 POWs made a complete escape back to Europe. Within 24 hours of the torpedo hitting the Lisbon Maru, 828 Allied POWs, including Leslie Perkins, had died, and over 200 more died of disease or exposure in the next few months.

Meanwhile in the hot and humid jungle of Burma, Leslie's younger brother, Lieutenant Victor Bruce Perkins was slaving away, helping to build the Death Railway.

4/11/44 泰 泰 II 1231

收容所 Camp	馬六甲 泰 月 日	番 號 No.	馬六甲 泰 II 1231
姓 名 Name	Perkins, Victor, Bruce	生 年 月 日 Date of Birth	4.3.14.
國 籍 Nationality	BRITISH	所 屬 部 隊 Unit	No. 2nd Bn The Malay Regt. Infantry.
階 級 身 分 Rank	Lieutenant.	捕 獲 年 月 日 Date of Capture	1942年2月15日
捕 獲 場 所 Place of Capture	SINGAPORE	母 名 Mother's Name	Edith, Amelia.
父 名 Father's Name	Alfred, Claude, Wilson	職 業 Occupation	CLERK
本 籍 地 Place of Origin	Wilcove, Torpoint, Cornwall, England.	特 記 事 項 Remarks	
通 報 先 Destination of Report	Mrs E.A. Perkins, 8 Alexandra Terrace, Torpoint, Cornwall, England.		

Left is Victor's prison card. He was serving in a Malay Infantry Regiment when he was taken prisoner in Singapore on Feb 15th 1942. He survived the ordeal and emigrated to Darwin, Australia.



Major Walter Gray and his wife Lillian had been stationed at George Town, Penang, with Valerie, their 5 year old daughter. Lillian gave birth to baby Rosemary in George Town Hospital in mid December. Pearl Harbour had been bombed, Hong Kong had been taken by the Japanese on Dec 8th, and it was known that the Japanese were advancing through Malaya. Against medical advice, Lillian discharged herself and the baby from hospital, and a rail ticket was acquired to take them all, with minimum luggage, to Singapore. It was a very crowded and uncomfortable journey. When they arrived in Singapore, Lillian and the baby were re- admitted to hospital. The City was packed with refugees and casualties because of the constant air bombardment. The baby contracted dengue fever. The Grays heard that the liner the Duchess of Bedford would be evacuating women and children. For the second time, Lillian went against medical advice and discharged herself and the baby from hospital. She joined the other mothers, queuing to be registered for a passage on the Duchess of Bedford.



Over 200 families bade tearful farewells to husbands and fathers.

Lillian and her 2 children shared a small cabin with another mother and her little boy. The liner left Singapore on January 30th 1942. It was not possible to spare a naval escort, so she zigzagged her way across the Indian Ocean to Colombo. After a few days, the liner left Colombo, progressed to Cape Town, and then into the South Atlantic. The threat now was from German U Boats. However, the voyage continued with a few worrying, but not too serious enemy interferences. Sadly 3 adult passengers, including the purser and 3 babies died en route. The Duchess of Bedford arrived in Liverpool on April 2nd. It took another 2 days to get to Plymouth by train, where Lillian was met by her relieved parents. Her parents could reassure Lillian that Walter had reached Colombo safely.



On Feb 15th 1942, Major Walter Gray (photo on the left) and 23 other Royal Engineers were ordered to prepare a motor tugboat the “Phyllis R” for their escape. It took several hours to get the necessary fuel, food and tools on board. Singapore was under bombardment and the Japanese had already crossed the Straits at Johor. Just as they were about to leave , 2 VIPs arrived to join the group. The 25 key people on board a tug, similar to the 1 below set off up the Malacca Straits , hugging the shore lines to avoid detection. The full transcript of Walter’s diary can be read at the Archives. In brief they reached and crossed Sumatra to Padang. They received a lot of kindness



and help from local people, who were also bracing themselves for the arrival of the advancing Japanese. From Padang, the party was given passage on an Indian freighter. They arrived in Colombo on March 6th. The group continued their army duties in the Far East for the next 3 years. We are very grateful to Jaclyn Ralph nee Gray, for sharing transcripts of her Aunt’s and Uncle’s diaries.



The Chinthe was the mythical creature that protected Burmese Temples. When Major General Orde Wingate set up his Special Forces Units, an English version of the word was chosen. Chindits were trained to work in small units as guerrilla fighters. Their aim was to take Japanese units by surprise and sabotage communications lines, roads, bridges and railways. These were dangerous missions. Anyone caught faced certain death, either by torture or beheading. The terrain was thick jungle which had to be hacked through. Backpacks and weapons were extremely heavy. Steady footed mules were used for some carrying and if the parties were fortunate they might be taken short distances by glider. The

heat, humidity, insects and snakes were serious hazards to add to the fear of being detected by the Japanese. Food was in short supply and foraging was necessary. The Archives appeal for memories to honour these people, was answered by a son and a daughter whose fathers were Chindits.



Visitors may read a booklet about Arthur Truscott’s experiences in the jungle and Rosie Wilesmith has shared maps and drawings used by her father, Clifford William Elson. Their Burma stars and other medals are on display.

On Friday August 15th at 9 am. The 80th Anniversary of VJ flag will be raised in Sparrow Park.
In the evening at 7.45pm until 8.35pm, there will be a time for remembrance in Rendel Park

Mike Pearn, MBE Chairman

Copy to The Hub Manager (for info).
Torpoint Town Council