

June 2021

Background and work

H4FA provides WW2 veterans and widows living in Burma/Myanmar 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.

We now have 16 Chin veterans and 77 Chin widows receiving annual welfare grants in Western Burma/Myanmar. 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 Burma/Myanmar. Distributing their grant money is a challenge, but H4FA, with the help of our new trustee, Van Cung Lian, is succeeding. It is a joy to see these very old people receive thanks and acknowledgement, even at this late hour. Our website link to YouTube shows videos of the distribution there.

Since WW2, 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, asked us again to extend our work to include Chin state. In November 2017, H4FA was accepted as a constituent member of RCEL. We now work officially alongside RCEL and the relationship has developed and strengthened, bringing greater recognition and comfort to our beneficiaries. RCEL has no connection, however, with our educational and humanitarian projects.

In June 2020, our patron, Dame Vera Lynn, aged 103, sadly passed away after a wonderful life that brought joy to so many; she is greatly mourned by the whole nation. In 2018, we were honoured to welcome General Sir Alex Harley as our President. We were also very pleased and honoured to welcome a new patron - Joanna Lumley.

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 she too 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.

News update on Burma/Myanmar May 2021

Aung San Suu Kyi's resounding victory in nationwide elections in November '20 were met with criticisms of fraud by the military and on 1st February '21 a coup was staged to the outrage of the entire population. Mass demonstrations and nationwide strikes, initially peaceful and good humored, though determined, were met with extreme violence on the part of the army or Tatmadaw. Soldiers rob, kill with impunity, torture and meet civilian protest with heavy weapons. By late April, 745 demonstrators had been shot dead, 53 of them children, and 70 women. Military opposition by the ethnic armed organisations, in areas further from the centre has been reinforced by newly trained young demonstrators who have fled the cities. This has little chance of success, since the Burma Army is so large and well-armed. International condemnation has been strong but support from Russia and a refusal to condemn on China and India's part, has brought anger from the 'Civil Disobedience Movement' and the 'National Union Government' within country. The military leader, Senior General Min Hlaing Aung who was due to retire, and would then have been open to charges of genocide against the Rohingya people, has said that new elections will be held in two years. 'The Lady' remains under house arrest pending her trial under trumped up charges. The country risks becoming a failed state. Since hospitals are closed, statistics on Covid are not available.

In the Refugee Camps, Thailand

In the current situation all talk of closing the camps and of refugees returning to Myanmar is on hold. Due to Covid, there are very strict rules in place to prevent any new camp

dwellers or visitors. Of the 20,000 Karen people who have recently fled bombing of their villages by the Burma Army, The Royal Thai Government has allowed some to cross the border and set up temporary camps but separate from the established ones. There is an urgent need to send humanitarian aid to these people. H4FA hopes, with your help, to do this.

H4FA 2020

H4FA has no ambition to compete with other, larger charities. Our engagement is simple and practical. How donations are spent is meticulously documented with accounts overseen by our treasurer, checked by a registered independent examiner and available to the public through the Charity Commission website. As our charity has grown, we now make small deductions for administrative costs. Funds for H4FA and PSRB projects are kept separately. We now have eight trustees.

The *Forgotten Allies* film, made in collaboration between H4FA and Grammar Productions, has been helping to spread the story of the brave veterans far and wide. During 2020, as we marked VJ75, *Forgotten Allies* was back on tour in the UK and beyond.

Trustees of H4FA were hoping to have been in Yangon for VJ Day in August 2020, but as with so many events this had to be cancelled due to Covid. A small ceremony was held in Yangon with the British Ambassador and three veterans attending. Meanwhile, in the UK, Alex Bescoby, trustee, represented H4FA at the National Memorial Arboretum, taking with him our generous donor and Burma veteran, Charles Medhurst aged 95.

Finances

Our income for 2020 was £116,588.61. Of our expenditure: 73% was spent on WWII veterans and widows and the cost of getting their grants to them, within Burma/Myanmar and in the camps; 20% on education and humanitarian relief; 4% 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.

Special thanks goes to H4FA's donors in 2020/21, among them: Royal Commonwealth Ex-Services League, Special Forces Benevolent Fund, Van Mesdag Trust, Joanna Lumley, Cuthbert Horn Trust, Norwich School, Holy Trinity Brussels, Tadworth and Walton Overseas Trust, Gavin Wigginton in memory of his father Sydney Wigginton SOE, Mrs FB Lawrence Charitable Trust, and many generous individuals in the UK, Germany, Belgium, Austria and Tokyo.

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DONATIONS

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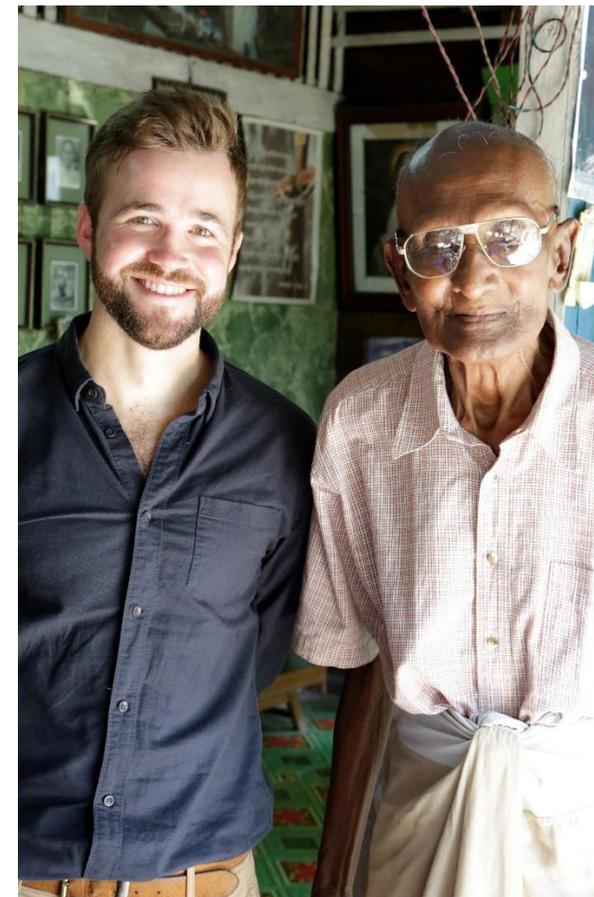
H4FA | Sort code 08-92-99 | Account no. 65428889

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Help 4 Forgotten Allies

[H4FA + Projects to Support Refugees from Burma](#)
[Supporting WW2 veterans in Myanmar/Burma](#)
[UK registered charity no.1139273](#)

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



(Photo courtesy of Grammar Productions)