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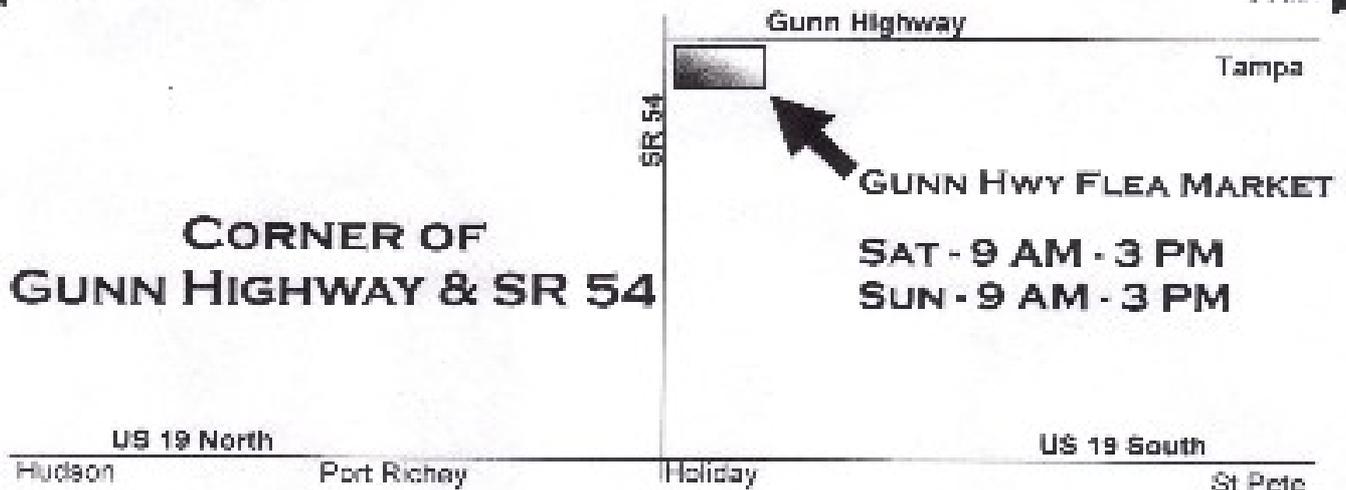
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# WELCOME



ART WORK  
by  
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ALMA KENT.

Paying tribute to our veterans is often emotional and moving as one hears of the horrendous experiences they went through on our behalf, fighting for freedom. Sometimes it can be an uplifting true life story. This is one story that covers almost unimaginable suffering that was endured as a Japanese prisoner of war, but also of valour and self sacrifice and also of remarkable talent as a supreme athlete, inspiring a wonderful example of caring for others towards a better quality of life.

This lady was born in Balleymena, in the Republic of Ireland and as a young girl moved to Edgware in Nth London, where she still lives. She is the 7<sup>th</sup> child of the 7<sup>th</sup> child of the 7<sup>th</sup> child, in other words, her grandfather was a 7<sup>th</sup> child, her father was a 7<sup>th</sup> child and she was his 7<sup>th</sup> child of 18 children!

She herself is a mother of 9, a grandmother of 38 and a great grandmother of 15! Also, 4 of her sons are police officers.

During WWII in 1939 she was a sergeant serving in The Queen Alexandra Royal Army Nursing Corps and later served in the 14<sup>th</sup> Army Nursing Corps in Burma. She was a Lieutenant when Singapore was over run by the Japanese in the invasion of 1942. She was just 25 yrs old. In her charge were 12 young trainee nurses, all of whom were imprisoned in the infamous Changi Prison, a prison that became an international by-word for death, torture and brutality, in fact it is still used as a prison to this day.

Fearful that her nurses may be ill treated or used as comfort ladies for the Japanese troops she boldly told the Japanese commandant that as well as the prison inmates, her nurses would treat him and his troops with medical attention anytime they needed it if they were unmolested.

Apparently all the doctors, nurses and patients at the islands hospital had already been massacred by the Japanese troops when they invaded, so medical aid was in very short supply, so the Japanese commandant agreed.

Nevertheless, it did not prevent her from being badly beaten and tortured, nor from being forced with fellow captives to witness beatings, torture, hangings and bayonet practice on live prisoners.

She managed to save many lives, but not the 6ft 3inch tall soldier who obviously had to look down on his Japanese captors and had his legs severed by sword from the knees down because he was too tall for them, and having to witness a group of Australian soldiers, patients and nurses who's boat had been sunk, wade ashore to safety, but then be forced to swim back out to sea and all were then machine gunned for target practice, none survived (this is officially documented as the Singapore massacre)

However, the ghost that haunts her most is the fate of one of her young nurses. The Japanese Commandant noticed that the girl was disobeying orders by not bowing her head to him in respect during the morning roll call, so he warned that the girl would be severely punished if it continued.

But when she advised the girl (who like her came from Ireland) to do as the Japanese Commandant had demanded, but she refused, and quietly replied that she would only bow her head to the Lord. When she remained erect the next morning the Commandant had her hands and legs bound and bent up behind her. There she stayed, in pain, bleeding from the tight cords throughout the boiling hot day and then through the stifling hot night without food or water. Next day at roll call, she was unbound and propped up. Again she refused to bow her head, so the commandant forced her to kneel and decapitated her with his sword!! The girls head rolled across the ground towards our heroin, who was standing by helplessly and came to rest at her feet. That sight will remain with her

to the end of her days, because you can never get something like that completely out of your mind, any more than all the other casualties. She watched so many die, but she felt was fortunate to survive, she has never and never will forget all the suffering.

Amazingly however, she has turned all those appalling negatives into inspirational positives. When she left the army, she also took with her the enduring gratitude of all the prisoners to whom she had nursed, among them a Ghurkha Major who's arm she saved by sewing it together with raffia twine- The needle was actually from a leaf she discovered in the jungle, which has a sharp point at one end and by stripping off all the greenery it leaves a strong thread left similar to cat gut.

Several years later and unbeknown to her, military interns from several countries who had been prisoners in the camp started to relate their memories and tell their stories and her name kept popping up on what she had done and how she had cared for so many. You may be interested to know that all this is recorded in a book called World War II Revisited written by Lt Commander Peter Wren retired from the United States Naval Reserve and published by Cork Hill Press in the USA.

For her service and gallantry she was awarded the War Defence Medal, The 1939-1945 Star, The Burma Star and the highest award for bravery, The George Medal. She was also awarded the title of OBE (Order of the British Empire) by Her Majesty the Queen.

Down the decades since the war, the same spirit and compassion for others has remained unwavering within her. She took up running as she cannot sleep very long, around 2 hours a night because she still has nightmares of the suffering and what she witnessed during those appalling wartime years, which at times she feels engraved in the forefront of her mind. 2 hours was the average amount of time she was ever able to sleep in the hell hole of Changi Prison.

Her training runs can consist of running 10 miles often in the early hours from Edgware to Pall Mall in London, she carries with her sandwiches and sometimes money for the street destitutes who sleep rough, that she knows enroute. She also carries a small bottle of rum to put in their tea or coffee, as she say's, they too deserve something to look forward to – it gives them hope towards the quality and preciousness of life in general. She has even been seen on Christmas Day around London at centres, washing, shaving and feeding those less fortunate than others. She also knits jumpers, scarves and gloves for them.

She has now done running marathons all over the world, including, Chicago, New York, France and more, raising thousands of pounds for charities including the Burma Star Association.

To think, when she was released from Changi Prison she weighed just 56 pounds and was close to death from starvation and injuries from beatings. Bamboo caning and rifle butts do cause monstrous injuries! Thanks to the American surgeons, her life was saved. Her jaw and head had been smashed, but they rebuilt her jaw, partially in plastic, but she has no lower teeth. She also has a metal plate in her head and in one leg, a steel rod in her spine, metal plates in her ankles, her broken feet were repaired and she also has two new knee caps.

Since then she has run well over 208 marathons and all in well under 6 hrs, that's well over 6,000 sponsored miles. She began all this in 1982 when she was 65 yrs old. Then in 1992 at age 75 yrs she did the marathon in 3.50 hours and was awarded the gold medal. She is listed in the Guinness Book of Records as the oldest female in the 2005 London Marathon.

Alma in April 2008 Alma ran the London marathon of 26.3 miles in 4 ½ hours, not bad for a 91 year old!

She describes how she drinks rum from her personal silver flask, and that's a whole swig too! and there's a London pub en-route in the London Marathon where the Landlord has a glass of rum ready for her to swig – one gulp – and gone! So Ladies & Gentlemen, forget your knowledge of diets and health food supplements to help you train and keep fit and healthy, have a swig of rum instead!

For the past few years she has run the marathon for the King George V Fund for Sailors, which is the seafarer's charity that she supports in memory of her late husband who served in the Royal Navy.

He had a rodent ulcer, ie cancer in his eye and in 1970 she was told by the consultants that he only had a short time to live. So she took him out of the hospital and took him home, dumped all his medication in the trash and fed him diets which included garlic, honey, carrots, rice, etc and he lived another 11 years!

For the past quarter of a century she has worked as a volunteer from 2pm to 7pm as a cleaner, cook and much more for the nuns at the St Mary's of the Cross Convent near her home, she is also a member of the Order of St Benedictine at the convent. She also assists in the children's ward at her local hospital, helps in her local charity shops, and has been a major fund raiser for the Royal Naval Association in which she is also an associate member; she finds time to deliver free newspapers and to see her extended family.

In 2000 she was invited to Buckingham Palace on the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the King George Fund for the sailor's charity and she got to cut the cake in the Royal Family's presence using the late Kings sword.

In 2002 to mark her selfless care to others she was granted a rare honour – Freeman of the City of London- In 2005 she was a special guest of the Royal Family for the VE celebrations of 60 years at Buckingham Palace. A chauffer driven car took her there courtesy of the BBC.

In 2005 she was awarded the Silver Cross for gallantry.

Before the war she made soft toys for the famous toy shop Hamleys in Regent Street. In her spare time she now makes them for raffle prizes, raising funds for her chosen charities. In particular, she makes them for terminally ill children whenever she hears about them and delivers them herself, as she says, it's all so worthwhile, just to see the smile on their faces.

Apparently her toys are so realistic, a complaint was made once after one animal was pictured being held up by one leg and the complaint came in not to treat animals in such a cruel way. Another time she had a visit from an RSPCA officer who travelling to work by bus had noticed a dog in her car window over three days and wanted to know what exercise it got and how often it was fed and watered.

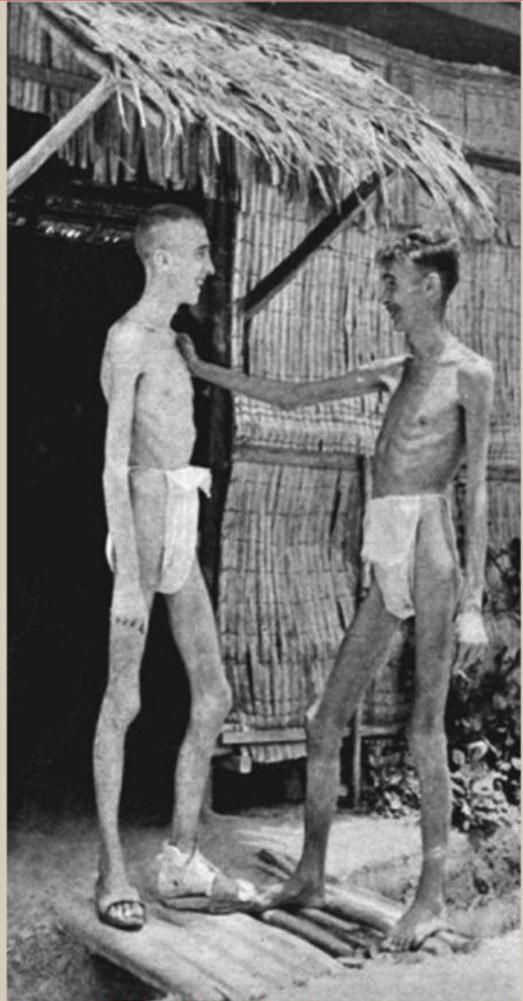
In 2006 in her 90<sup>th</sup> year and on a very cold day, she ran the marathon in New York for another charity she supports, The New York Yankees baseball team; they flew her both ways across the pond. Ironic that after all these years several of the players are connected with the American soldiers that she saved all those years ago and belong to the same charity.

**(Lady Alma's story is a story that deserves to be told)**



**ALMA WITH GHURKA'S**

**Submitted by Terry Burton and forwarded to the British Forces News**



Emaciated British soldiers, for three years prisoners of war, are Private J. Want, of Crownfield Road, Stratford, and Driver Charles Freeman, of Kings Road, Linthorpe.



Allied Prisoners in notorious Changi Gaol, into which the Japs herded thousands of our troops, they are seen just after the hour of liberation.