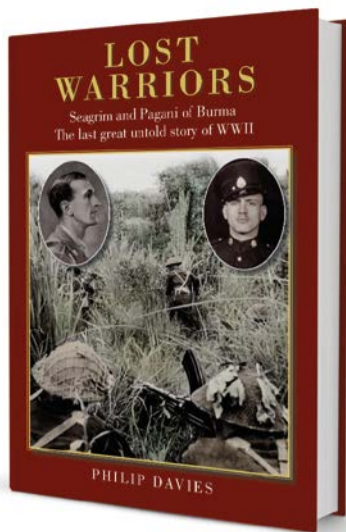


Lost Warriors by Philip Davies



Seagrim and a small group of British officers. These volunteered to stay (or be parachuted) way behind enemy lines to arm and organise 'levies' of guerrilla fighters from the Karen hill tribes to harass and fight the Japanese. Unlike the majority of Burmese, who saw the Japanese as liberators from the British yoke, the Karens remained intensely loyal and revered the ascetic and spiritual Seagrim, whom they speak of to this day.

After successfully evading the efforts of the Japanese military police, the Kempeitai, and their Burmese allies to capture him for over two years, Seagrim felt forced to give himself up in March 1944 to save the Karens from reprisals and torture, and was himself executed after imprisonment in Rangoon. The subsequent uprising of the Karens was a major factor in the success of General Slim's 'Operation Character', enabling the British to win the race for Toungoo and opening up the road to Rangoon, which in the end the Japanese fled in headlong retreat.

In telling the linked stories of Hugh Seagrim and Ras Pagani, Lost Warriors by Suburb resident Philip Davies paints a vivid picture of life and death in Burma under the Japanese occupation, and the precarious and dangerous lives led by the special forces working behind the lines organising resistance among the Karens and transmitting vital information back to the allies in India. Ras Pagani is described as WWII's 'serial escapist' who escaped on his own first from Dunkirk

and then Singapore; who then fought briefly alongside Seagrim as a guerilla commander, and then attempted the long and dangerous trek back to the front line in Assam, but was captured, tortured and imprisoned in Rangoon. But he managed to keep his vow to return alive to his young wife after the re-taking of Rangoon in 1944 – a vow that kept him alive in the darkest moments.

Hugh Seagrim, tall, charismatic and intensely spiritual, was an unusual and unconventional British Army Officer, with strong views on the strategy and tactics needed to fight and win a jungle war. This put him at odds with the military orthodoxy of the day – which failed so badly in the rolling up of the British Empire in the Far East in 1941. His views were similar to those of the legendary Chindit leader, Orde Wingate, whereby the jungle was seen as a friend and ally, and not as an impenetrable hell on earth full of unimaginable terrors, predators and diseases. Successful guerrilla warfare depended on fast thinking, initiative and self-reliance, and the respect and loyalty of the people, which Seagrim had in spades. Seagrim's attitudes to jungle warfare were indeed similar to those of the Japanese soldier, who saw it as 'a friendly place where it was dark and you could cover yourself and camouflage yourself.' The story of these two men could well become better-known if the present interest in the film and TV rights bears fruit.

But what should be made of Hugh Seagrim, the man? He had this intensely religious and spiritual side deepened no doubt by his long and at times undoubtedly lonely, isolated and frankly boring enforced stay for over two years behind the lines among his beloved Karen hill people. We are left with little clear impression of his real character and personality, or his hopes and fears beyond the 'goal': this being the defeat of the militaristic and sometimes sadistic Japanese, and the welfare of the Karen people. However, he showed no apparent personal hatred of them; indeed he had a tendency to make rather risqué and teasing jokes at their expense in prison. At his court martial at the hands of the

Kempeitai, Seagrim willingly accepted his own execution, but eloquently pleaded for the Karens captured with him to be spared. The Japanese hugely respected this, and some were released albeit somewhat randomly in terms of the evidence before the court martial.

Did Seagrim believe in the long-term future of the British Empire and its 'right' to survive? What were his views on race more generally? Or is this posing questions with the wisdom of hindsight that few at the time even thought really to consider seriously, but are inevitably much more pertinent to our generation?

The author's description of prison life for the assorted POWs in Rangoon, and the strange symbiotic relationship that often developed between them and the Japanese guards – one moment quite friendly and benevolent, the next sadistic and brutal – is well described. Indeed they struck a chord with your reviewer, as the Japanese in Changii, Singapore incarcerated my own father, John, for the duration. He would not often speak about it, but had some good stories, including the fact that he read the whole Bible over the four years, reading each page before using it to smoke a roll-up with the tobacco he grew. He eventually saw his treasured tobacco crop become worthless in 1945 when the Yankee GIs arrived distributing cartons of Marlborough. He continued his duties in the Malayan Civil Service after the war and saw the transition to Malaya's independence in 1957.

PETER JENKINS
(A long-standing Suburb resident who read modern history at Oxford)

Lost Warriors – Seagrim and Pagani of Burma. The last great untold story of WWII, by Philip Davies. Atlantic Publishing – £20

Following the Japanese conquest of Malaya at the end of 1941 and the surrender of Singapore in February 1942, Japan seized the opportunity also to seize British Burma. The objectives were to secure Burma's oil and natural resources, to close the 'Burma Road' to China and ultimately to threaten the heart of the British Empire – India itself. When Rangoon fell in March 1942, it looked as if nothing could stop the advancing Japanese – although, after severe testing, the Indian front line held.

By July 1944, the tide had turned in the Allies' favour and, after the hard-won victories of Imphal and Kohima, the British Indian 14th Army swept across Burma and re-took Rangoon in one of the most successful British campaigns of WWII. In large part, success was made possible by the lasting legacy in the northern jungle hills of Burma of the charismatic Major Hugh



Hugh Seagrim – photograph and portrait



Hugh Seagrim – 1936, aged 27



Roy Pagani – 1945 and 1962



From Hamamatsu, with love



Noriko plays the Kawai GX3

There has been a new arrival at Fellowship during the summer shutdown – a brand new Kawai grand piano.

In line with the continuing drive for excellence in the building and its equipment for the benefit of HGS residents, the Committee decided, after advice from its musical consultants, Barry Millington and Deborah Calland, to replace its upright Yamaha with a grand piano.

Barry's and Deborah's contacts in the world of music led to advice from the highest level, the international concert pianist Noriko Ogawa and the former pianist and Head of Keyboard at the Purcell School, Roshan Magub.

Noriko was in large part responsible for selecting the instrument we purchased (a Kawai GX3 model) after trialling many others during the search. Roshan helped enormously by arranging favourable terms with one of the foremost piano suppliers in the country, Jaques Samuel Pianos, which just managed to fit our budget.

We have remained faithful to Hamamatsu, a town in Japan about 160 miles southwest of Tokyo. All pianos made in Japan are made here. Kawai has been making just pianos from 1927. Yamaha, the maker of the upright we bought in 2009 and are now replacing, also has its production facilities in the

town. So both Fellowship pianos come from the same town.

We are most grateful for the timely financial assistance received from the Residents Association, which allowed us to go the final mile. We also are very glad that the executors of the late John Hewson's estate asked that his generous bequest to Fellowship should go towards the new piano. It is particularly fitting as John, who was Chairman during the extension and refurbishment of Fellowship House, always stressed the importance of quality. He also, of course, started the Friday afternoon music appreciation sessions. Appropriately, the Yamaha has been sold to a musical Suburb family.

On September 17, an informal evening recital with drinks was held to welcome the new piano. Guests were a few of the many Suburb residents supportive of Fellowship's quest to provide excellence in music and the arts for the benefit of the Suburb. We were lucky enough to benefit from Noriko's offer to play and speak. It was a beautiful evening.

A few days later, two of the guests went on holiday to Japan. Their 'Bullet Train' stopped on the way from Tokyo to Osaka. They looked out of the window. This is what they saw:



For more information about Fellowship, and what it does, go to www.fellowshiphouse.co.uk.



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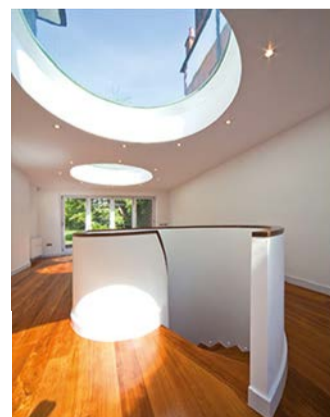
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