

# BURMA HEROES REMEMBERED

It was one of the key moments of the South East Asia campaign in World War II and the people of Tredegar continue to remember the gallantry and sacrifice 70 years on.

Eleven members of the 6th Battalion, The South Wales Borderers, lost their lives on March 26th 1944 when the regiment took control of The Mayu Tunnels and the spur of land was renamed The Battle of Tredegar Hill as a reminder of the victory and loss. Those who lost their lives were:-

**Private John Edward Ellis**  
**Private Charles Benjamin Evans**  
**Sergeant Charles Gwilliam**  
**Lance Corporal Edward Holmes**  
**Private Thomas Sims Howells**  
**Private William Eleazer Jones**  
**Corporal Harold Lucas**  
**Private William Emlyn Rogers**  
**Lieutenant Austin Noel Stephens**  
**Private William John Tranter**  
**Corporal Raymond Frederick Wookey.**

Some years later, soil from Tredegar Hill was brought back from Asia in memory of the soldiers who had fallen. A teak log was also brought back and a local building firm fashioned this into a casket. The soil and the casket can be found in Bedwellty House Tredegar where the memorial to those brave men still sits in the hallway today.

On Friday 21st March 2014, The Ambassador to the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, The Honorable Kyaw Zwar Minn visited Tredegar to receive a casket of soil from Tredegar to take to Myanmar as a reciprocal gift and symbol of unity between the countries. The casket was made of Welsh oak by trainees at the Blaenau Gwent Training Centre and it contained inscriptions in Welsh and English along with a scroll commemorating those who lost their lives and soil from Tredegar.

The service, held in Bedwellty House, was led by Rev David Lampard of Saron Congregational Church with readings from Tredegar Mayor Cllr Tommy Smith, Chris Rundel of 2167 Tredegar Air Training Corps and Cllr Alyson Tippings. Following the Blessing of the casket, Peter Hire handed the casket to Lt Col (Retd) Chris Kilmister, Regimental Secretary of the Royal Welsh, who presented it to The Honorable Kyaw Zwar Minn.

The Act of Remembrance was led by Ewart Harse and Mike Pescod of Tredegar British Legion and Ben Hallstead cornet player with Tredegar Town Band.

The Ambassador to the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, The Honorable Kyaw Zwar Minn, expressed his appreciation of being invited to the Commemoration and said 'I spent 36 years in military service before becoming an ambassador, and during that time I studied the great generals of the British Army. Today I have the opportunity to acknowledge the 6th Battalion who fought bravely and sacrificed their lives at the Battle of Tredegar Hill. All the soldiers who fought in the Battle of Tredegar Hill will be remembered from generation to generation.'

This was the Ambassador's first visit to Wales and it was appropriate that he should come to Tredegar for this act of remembrance that again united two countries.

Tredegar Town Mayor, Cllr Tom Smith said, 'the people of Tredegar have never forgotten those who gave their lives in this selfless act of bravery. The Burma Shrine at Bedwellty House serves as a reminder to us all. We hope that this exchange today will bring closer links between our countries, encourage friendship and understanding between our different cultures and promote peace and reconciliation in our communities.'

Nick Smith MP was unable to be there but sent this message:-

'I am very pleased that the Embassy of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar is represented in Tredegar today; to join with us in honour of our local men who fought and died in what we know as "The Battle of Tredegar Hill." We are proud of our military heritage in Blaenau Gwent and it's important to commemorate and reflect on the bravery of this generation of young men. It was a privilege for UK MPs when Aung San Suu Kyi, addressed both Houses of Parliament in June 2012. She asked the UK to "participate and support Burma's efforts towards the establishment of a truly democratic and just society". I congratulate the Tredegar Town Council for organising today's commemoration and I'm sure it will foster friendship and understanding, which is so vital in our global world.'

Alun Davies, AM said. 'Children of Tredegar are taught about the Battle of Tredegar Hill, they are familiar with the story. Visitors to Bedwellty House read about the Battle of Tredegar Hill, they too are familiar with the story. However it is important that we do not become too familiar with the story and forget about reason they were in Burma and today we rightly remember those who paid the supreme sacrifice with their lives.'

The service ended with a series of musical items by 15 year old Sophie White.

The Commemoration Service was held in Bedwellty House on Friday 21st March 2014 and was attended by members of Tredegar Town Council, the Ambassador to the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, members of the Royal British Legion, The Royal Welsh, children from local schools and invited guests.

There are no survivors of those who fought in the Battle of Tredegar Hill. At the last commemorations in 2004, the only two remaining survivors of Tredegar Hill told of their mixed memories of their time in Asia.

Mr John Lawrence said 'We didn't realise at the time that we were making history, to me the battle of Tredegar Hill was just another day. I have never talked about it to the family, we tended not to do that sort of thing. It was just six years out of my life. When you are in your early 20s, you take that sort of thing in your stride. All that I know is that I was in the middle of Burma being irritated that I was not in Tredegar.'

But Mr Arthur Pinney, his colleague from all those years ago, has more graphic memories of those who didn't make it home. 'I knew a man called Corporal Lucas well. The battle was more or less over on the top of the mountain and we were withdrawing but one of his platoon got shot and wounded and he went back for him. And when he went back the Japanese shot him.'

Letter from General W. J. Slim, Commander in Chief of the Allied Forces in SE Asia states, 'Tredegar does well to commemorate the gallantry and sacrifice of its sons, so nobly displayed in the bitter fight for Tredegar Hill in the Arakan, Burma. The Japanese position on the western tunnel on the Maungdaw to Buthidaung road which the 6th Battalion, The South Wales Borderers was ordered to take was of great natural and prepared strength, held by tenacious and fanatical enemy who fought to the last. In its capture, the officers and men of the battalion showed at its highest the traditional fighting spirit and valour of Wales. Their deeds and achievement remain an inspiration to their comrades, to their fellow citizens and their country.'

Lieutenant General Sir A. F. Christison BC KBE, CB, DSO, MC states

'On behalf of myself and officers and members of the 15th Indian Corps Associated with 6th Battalion, The South Wales Borderers in battle, I pay tribute to their gallantry and we remember those who made the supreme sacrifice. The capture of the Maungdaw Tunnels, which are commanded by Tredegar Hill was one of the decisive battles in the Arakan campaign and this strongly defended area had been in Japanese possession for nearly 2 years.

I was privileged to watch the assault by 6th Battalion, The South Wales Borderers and it was with great pride that I saw with my glasses troops swarming over the hill and knew that the position had been won. The attack was carried out after very careful planning by the Battalion and extreme gallantry through probably the most difficult jungle country in Burma, some of the slopes being so steep that it was almost too difficult to get a footing and I saw men dragging each other up. It was a great tribute to the skill and gallantry of the Battalion that the casualties were as light as they were.'