



# THE NEWSLETTER

AUTUMN 2020

BR0753



## VJ - DAY 15 AUGUST 2020 COMMEMORATION



**Editor**  
Anne Evans  
01491 578238  
zanne.evans@sky.com

**Sub-Editor & Distribution**  
Mollie Jeffrey  
Mobile: 07768 851615  
Mollie@billjeffrey.com

**Contributing Editor**  
Colour Serjeant Tallulah Scott

**Speaker Coordinator**  
Sara Abey  
henley@saraabey.com

**Membership Secretary**  
Mollie Jeffrey  
Mobile: 07768 851615  
Mollie@billjeffrey.com

**Poppy Appeal**  
Annie Arscott

**Community Support**  
Nick Launders  
07711 268924  
Nicklaunders@gmail.com

**Branch Secretary**  
Helen Walsh  
01491 638885  
helentwalsh2014@gmail.com

**Website**  
www.rbl-henley.org  
Dan Evans  
dh.evans@sky.com



Photo's courtesy of Henley Herald

## Dates for your Diary

**Meetings, when possible, will resume on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday of the month, unless otherwise advised.**

**Venue** – The Christ Church Centre

**Talk 11.30** (please be seated by 11.20) Lunch 12 for 12.30

**Please** book for lunch by the Thursday before by email to Helen Walsh on helentwalsh2014@gmail.com or 01491 638885

### Meeting & Talks 2020

The schedule of Meetings and Talks has been unavoidably cancelled owing to the ongoing Covid-19 situation and until the Government give us the all-clear.

However Sara Abey, our Speaker Coordinator, has been working on setting up interesting talks for 2021 and would appreciate your involvement, so if you have any suggestions or ideas for a speaker, or even an appropriate lunchtime entertainment, please email Sara Abey on: [henley@saraabey.com](mailto:henley@saraabey.com)

### VJ-Day 2020 - Henley-on-Thames

During this lockdown period your committee has been holding virtual meetings via Zoom. Our focus recently was to consider how we, as a Branch, would commemorate VJ-Day.

Taking into account the Government restrictions put in place for our safety, Henley & Peppard Branch of the Royal British Legion is proud to have been in a position, with aid from the Henley Town Manager Helen Barnett and Henley Mayor, Councillor Ken Arlett to commemorate VJ-Day for our community in line with the National act of remembrance on Saturday 15 August when the surrender of Japan effectively ended World War II.



The brief ceremony was well and safely attended. Two Standards were on Parade with John Green carrying the RBL Henley & Peppard Branch Standard and James Nelson the Henley Dunkirk Veterans Standard. Additionally we had the good fortune to have Fr Jeremy Tayler from Henley's St Mary's Church present to read a prayer of thanksgiving and recite the Far East Prisoner of War Prayer which includes the words "The price that was paid we will always remember. Every day, every month, not just in November. We shall remember them".

Bugler, ex Scots Guard, Stuart Henderson sounded the Last Post and The Reveille, Lt. Col. Blaker spoke the Exhortation, and after a poignant 2 minute respectful silence, brought the ceremony to a close with the haunting **\*\*Kohima Epitaph "When you go home, tell them of us and say, for your tomorrow we gave our today"**

Town Mayor, Ken Arlett afterward thanked Lt.Col Peter Blaker, President of the Henley & Peppard Branch of the RBL, John Green Branch Chairman and Father Jeremy Tayler.

In addition our Branch has prepared a Certificate of Appreciation for Stuart Henderson for the part he played in imbuing the ceremony with solemn gravitas.



**\*\* The Kohima Cemetery reflects the diversity of the 14<sup>th</sup> Army, Christian, Jews, and Muslims who fell at Kohima are buried alongside one another. The Hindus and Sikhs are cremated, and all their names are written together on the Kohima Cremation Memorial.**

## Branch member Maj Paddy Nicoll remembers

My uncle, Lt Douglas Nicoll, dropped down for Oxford Uni to join-up in WW2 and, as a young officer in 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The Black Watch, joined Orde Wingate's second Chindit expedition into Burma. Tragically he was killed in action on the 8<sup>th</sup> May 1944 after a Japanese ambush near White City.

His death is recorded in The Black Watch and the King's Enemies (page 249). "Among the killed were Lieutenants McGuigan and Douglas Nicoll; Nicoll had been first wounded in the head and bandaged, and then killed by a sniper at fifteen yards range when speaking to Green and Swannell". Lieutenant Colonel Green commanded 73 Column and Captain Swannell was an officer in the Column.

His well-tended grave is in Taukkyan War Cemetery in Myanmar.



My grandfather, Maj. Earle Nicoll M.C., C.d.G., served in 4<sup>th</sup> Bn for both WW1 and 2, my father, Col. Earle Nicoll C.B.E., L.V.O., both 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Bns in WW2, Korea and Cyprus and I myself did an 8 year commission with the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn including Northern Ireland, Iraq and Mozambique. I am currently a Reservist with 77<sup>th</sup> Brigade in Hermitage who have the honour of wearing the Chindit Chinthe on their arm.

## Pat Alvis nee WAAF Sgt. Ansell 1942 - 1946

Mollie Jeffrey's dear friend, Pat Alvis who worked in Bomber Command remembers this period very well and writes:

"At long last the Japs did surrender on Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> August 1945, and VJ Day was proclaimed. Many of us gathered at Tealby, and there were great celebrations down at the pub. Then we all went back to camp or to another celebration, a camp dance which went on till the small hours! I personally had very many mixed feelings, remembering my dear brother Peter, who had died on his 24<sup>th</sup> birthday in the jungles of Thailand on 29<sup>th</sup> January 1943. He had joined the Territorials in 1938 at the time of 'Munich', and I had known so many of his Royal Artillery friends over the years till they went abroad to India in October 1941. I found it very hard to feel real jubilation with so many people I had known who had paid the ultimate price of the war. But life went on".

During her posting at Hendon Pat remembers "It was about this time that we had a wonderful visit from two of dear Peter's old friends who had been POWs with him at Kanyu River Camp in Thailand. John Donovan and Ken had survived the ghastly ordeal for three and a half years. John had lost his leg with jungle ulcers caused when cutting bamboo to clear the way for the building of the notorious Burma railway. He had had to endure amputation without any anaesthetic as the Japs would not allow the use of Red Cross supplies (in fact they used them all for themselves). He had a bamboo stump for his false leg and had stored part of Peter's diaries in the stump to hide them from the Japs. We were so grateful to him for saving them for us to keep and read.

John had put his life at risk in saving the diaries; part of the time he had buried them in a tin box on camp, but when they were moved around he hid them in his bamboo leg. He had also had to reduce the pages, and only saved the ones he felt were helpful. I think there were many too graphic to keep, which would have been too hazardous for him. They were all so remarkably brave for so long in the face of such ruthless and barbaric treatment.

We also had a visit from Jack Chalker who made it home. Jack had been a very close friend, and also a remarkable artist, and had managed to do numerous graphic small sketches which he hid wherever he could. However, the Jap guards did find some and he was beaten mercilessly. Later the Jap Commander made him paint postcards, which he sent home to his family in Japan

## Victoria Cross - Naik Gian Singh



15th Punjab Regiment

Another for whom VJ Day was particularly poignant is Charanjit Sangha, 56, whose Father, Naik Gian Singh, was awarded the **Victoria Cross** for his bravery in battle.

Mr Sangha said: "My Dad joined the British Army in 1937. He was only 17 and served in the 15<sup>th</sup> Punjab Regiment. He told me, and I heard from other people, that wherever there were difficult times, or they knew that the enemy was stronger, the last resort was to put the Punjab Regiment in there; they will sort it out!

"My Dad used to tell us that all of the people around him were killed. He was the last one there. He was only about 50 yards from the enemy foxhole. He could see 15-20 Japanese there and an anti-tank gun. He knew if he tried to run back that he would not survive as there was no back-up at all. He thought: 'I am going to die now, so I might as well do something.'

"He grabbed hold of his machine gun and some hand grenades and, up in front of the enemy, he started throwing the hand grenades. The Japanese were not expecting that as they thought the enemy was all dead. He killed all of them and captured the anti-tank gun. By doing that, the route was clear for the Army to come back.

"He was severely injured after that and unconscious for a few days. The bullets were all over him. Until his dying day, in 1996, his leg always used to hurt from those wounds. Years later, my Father chose to receive the Victoria Cross in London. There was a big, big parade in London's Hyde Park."

*Photo and script courtesy of PoppyScotland*

## Jean PA Campbell SRN



Jean PA Campbell SRN

Born Glasgow 1909

Joined Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps becoming a Senior Sister. Continued nursing all her life.

Matron Southend Hospital and finally Chief Nursing Officer South West Metropolitan Region

Lived last 20 years of her life in School Lane Wargrave

Died 2002

My Aunt, Jean Campbell was in the QAs and spent most of the war in India.

She nursed in hospitals, hospital trains and hospital ships which travelled around the Indian coast.

In late July 1945 her ship was suddenly re-routed eastward towards Singapore. On reaching the Malacca Straits the ship stopped and waited for 10 days before going into Singapore to aid the prisoners being released from Changi and other prisons. Her ship then brought the sick back to the UK.

She had been involved with the wounded from Kohima in 1944.

She never really talked about the gory or unpleasant side of things. She had a wonderful time in India and the people she met and experiences she had, defined her life. Seeing how others had suffered was a terrible shock only really mentioned when Tenko was on TV.

**Judith (Campbell) Phelan**

## Key facts about the Burma Campaign – In Sickness and in Health

- December 1941 – August 1945 – it was the longest campaign fought by the British and Imperial forces during WW2.
- The Japanese entered the War in December 1941, advancing through the Far East seemingly undefeatable. 1944 was the turning point and a victorious 14th Army began its pursuit of the Japanese into the Burmese jungle.
- At the beginning of the Burma campaign, disease was a significant threat to maintaining military strength. 80% of the British and Imperial forces evacuated from Burma in 1942 had contracted some form of disease. In 1942, for every soldier evacuated with wounds, 120 were evacuated through disease.
- Treatment typically meant an absence from duty of a minimum of 25 days plus travel time from the front to hospital in India. A soldier would be out of action for several months and weaker from the illness.
- The Allies asserted that in Burma, sickness (malaria and dysentery) for the Commonwealth troops was more dangerous than the Japanese.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lwbEeWs21QA>

The 14<sup>th</sup> Army in Arakan - The Arakan Campaign January 1943 - May 1945:

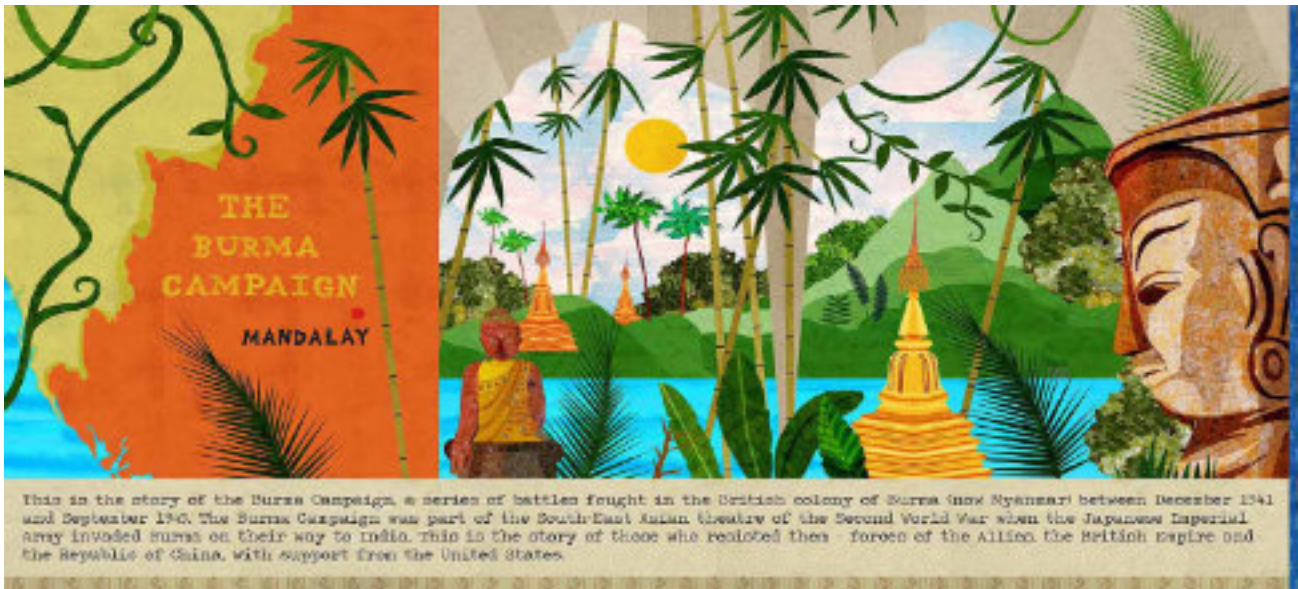
### Why was it called the forgotten army

- **In 1941 the UK and USA agreed that resources and military effort would be focused on Europe.**
- **It was a long way from home.** Communications between service personnel and the home front was difficult. Letters, if they hadn't been lost at sea to Japanese attacks took a long time to get through. Also, there were no live radio or TV broadcasts from the campaign so for most of the public they had very little knowledge beyond the odd newspaper report of what was happening. In addition, many of the British and commonwealth servicemen had been in the Far East for a long time. By 1945 many had been there for the duration of the war.
- **Embarrassment** was another element – The war in the Far East for the British and much of the Commonwealth was, for the first few years, a source of embarrassment as the Japanese defeated all the British and Commonwealth forces sent against them.
- **The Numbers** – In terms of numbers, resources and sacrifice, the war in North Africa, the Mediterranean and Europe was far greater than Asia and Pacific for the British. As one writer has suggested, 'only 30,000 British servicemen died in the war against Japan, as compared to 235,000 in the war against Germany.'
- **Churchill's influence**  
Winston Churchill played a significant role in the way the history of the war was written. Evidence suggests he didn't view the pre-partition Indian Army highly, and repeatedly ignored its achievements. The great pre-partition Indian victories at Kohima and Imphal in 1944, and at Meiktila and Mandalay in 1945, were largely ignored by him.
- **Europe-centric coverage** the big events in the Far East in 1944 overlapped with great events in Europe, with large numbers of war correspondents and radio journalists in Europe but not in the Far East. There was only one radio journalist at the Battle of Kohima – Richard Sharpe, and he got there by accident and only stayed 3 days.
- **Learning about the conflict**  
The teaching of the Second World War across the UK, for many reasons, has tended to focus on a very small part of that conflict, meaning that not only are children and young people not aware of the facts around the war in Asia-Pacific, there is even less knowledge about the role of the Commonwealth in this war.

Therefore, many communities in the UK remain unaware of their own communities' contributions, service, and sacrifice.

Visualising History: Remembering the Forgotten Army is a new exhibition by illustrator and researcher Kremena Dimitrova. The exhibition tells the story of the Fourteenth Army in the Burma Campaign and investigates the lasting legacy of the multicultural army.

[www.thenma.org.uk](http://www.thenma.org.uk)



The 14th Army was marshalled together by one man, General Sir William Slim who was loved by his men for his humanity and admired for his shrewd military skill. A combination of his leadership and the breathtaking bravery of those under his command ultimately led to a victory on the 15th of August 1945 known as VJ-Day (Victory over Japan Day).

Kremena says of her work "In creating the exhibition *Visualising History: Remembering The Forgotten Army*, I was determined to help everyone expand their knowledge of this important historic era, going beyond what is often taught in schools and discussing how people from different backgrounds worked together to overcome adversity in the forgotten theatres of the Second World War. By bringing the Fourteenth Army's amazing story to life we can all remember their service and learn from the people who, during the Second World War, helped each other regardless of race, religion or cultural differences."



The 14th Army was also supported by the Women's Auxiliary Service W.A.S.(B). They sustained the army from front-line mobile canteens and moved down through the country with them. Grateful soldiers wrote poems about the 250 W.A.S.(B) who in their green uniforms, or sometimes in make-up and pretty frocks, offered tea, sausage rolls, bacon sandwiches, tinned peaches and pears and condensed-milk fudge.



The operational area of the 14th Army was about 100,000 square miles, or rather larger than Great Britain. Half a million men lived and fought in the jungle. Every day it was necessary to bring in by rail, road, air or water 1,800 tons of food to feed 500,000 soldiers plus 300,000 labourers. The treacherous mountain and jungle terrain was difficult to navigate, which is why apart from trucks, they used mules from India, Africa and USA, South-African donkeys, elephants and oxen to transport the supplies.



Fighting so far away in Burma, soldiers would often not get enough supplies. They ate boiled rice most of the time. They had nothing. Even a piece of string was a treasure. Anything they had, they shared amongst each other. They depended on each other for everything. They lived together. They fought together. They did everything together.



RATIONING ORDERED ON CANNED FOODS

"It's not sure what foods to pick."

"The different tastes, habits and religious customs of his fellow soldiers, who are British, Indian, Africans and the rationing problem even were complex."

"The different tastes, habits and religious customs of his fellow soldiers, who are British, Indian, Africans and the rationing problem even were complex."

In May 1945, VJ-Day was celebrated. In Europe, the war was over. Soldiers from The Burma Campaign were given no reception on return to their home countries. The bands stopped playing after the European war had ended..




"And our war in Burma went on for... I don't remember... 4 or 5 months longer?"

"Until the 19th of August 1945, VJ-Day (Victory over Japan) that is!"


The Burma Star continues to support the veterans, so they can retain their special relationship and morale and their unique spirit of comradeship. There are many memorials to the Burma Campaign around the world with some of the major ones being the Rangoon Memorial, the National Memorial Arboretum and Kohima Museum. The Kohima Cemetery reflects the diversity of the 14th Army, Christians, Jews and Muslims who fell at Kohima are buried alongside one another. The Hindus and Sikhs were cremated and all their names are written together on the Kohima Cremation Memorial.

### Rangoon Memorial

located in the centre of Doolittle War Cemetery in Burma it commemorates nearly 2000 East forces of the British Empire who died during the campaigns in Burma and who have no known graves.



### The National Memorial Arboretum



The trees of international friendship and reconciliation has Japanese cherry trees and Japanese and English maples symbolising the desire for peace and reconciliation between nations. The Right Reverend Colin Tennant, Bishop of Coventry and the Japanese Ambassador, Lt Colonel Hayashi planted two trees together.

The 14th Army held the longest battle line of any army during the Second World War, stretching from the Bay of Bengal to the borders of China. It also fought in some of the most arduous countries in the world.

A more detailed or identifiable in all the illustration of war. Through the survey that also convey spirit of comradeship that was engendered by the 14th Army continues.



The 14th Army's greatest victories were in the Arakan, at Daphai, Kohima, Kennedy Peak, Mandalay and Meiktila, which led to the defeat of the Japanese Imperial Army, the liberation of Burma, and subsequently to the end of the Second World War. The 'Forgotten Army' should not be forgotten for its work in the most adversarial of conditions. It was always on the end of supplies, and still triumphed and conquered all against all odds. Without the 14th Army's endurance and sacrifice, victory and the freedoms and way of life we enjoy today would not have been possible.



## The 14th Army's Legacy

**21st Century Britain** is a diverse and multicultural society partly as a result of the diverse forces who fought alongside each other during the Second World War. The food, drink, music, film, fashion and politics that shape our everyday life are all because of the war. The end of the Second World War on 2 September 1945 resulted in a mass migration of people as many thousands were demobilized. The symbolic starting point of this mass migration to Britain – the 'mother country' was the journey of the SS Empire Windrush from Kingston, Jamaica, to Tilbury, Essex. In June 1948, on board were over 500 West Indians intent on starting new lives in Britain.

The UK had a severe labour shortage after the war, especially in the transport network and the newly created National Health Service. Immigrants worked mainly in areas of great labour shortage, such as on buses and in hospitals.

As the UK economy boomed in the late 1950s and 1960s, migrants from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Ghana, and many other Commonwealth countries came to work in the manufacturing, engineering, textile and the service sectors, including a significant number at Heathrow Airport in west London.

Catering also benefitted from migration and many Indian restaurants and takeaways were established. Many from the Indian in the UK found employment in small businesses, including grocery shops and taverns.

**1m** MEN AND WOMEN

**20** NATIONALS

**100** LANGUAGES

**வணக்கம்**



# Henley Army, Sea and Air Cadets

## Cadet raises £1100 for British Legion

Cadet Serjeant Tom Fielder, 16 from Henley Detachment, Oxfordshire Army Cadet Force (ACF) has raised over £1100 for the Royal British Legion (RBL) by walking a marathon to local war graves.

Sjt Fielder walked 26 miles (a marathon) to 51 serviceman graves & war memorials. He held a small service at each grave, followed by a minute's silence and planted a poppy remembrance cross. Tom walked to graves in Binfield Heath, Highmoor, Sonning Common, Henley & more.

Sjt Fielder has chosen the RBL as the cadets have been unable to organise their usual street collection. His goal was to raise £500, which was achieved in a matter of days. Tom continued to raise awareness of his marathon walk within the local community & within cadets. Tom even gave a radio interview with British Forces Broadcasting Servicing (BFBS). After all of Sjt Fielder's hard work, he has successfully raised over £1100.

Mr John Green, Chairman of the Henley & Peppard Branch, RBL said "Many Congratulations, what an amazing achievement!"

Major Wayne Thrussell, Officer Commanding of Nivelles Company said "Well done, what an absolute amazing effort, you should be very proud of yourself. A true Ambassador of the Company, Battalion & ACF!"

The money raised will provide support for members of the Royal Navy, British Army, Royal Air Force as well as veterans and their families. Whether it be for care and independent living, physical and mental wellbeing, financial and employment support, or even just guidance.

The Army Cadet Force is a national youth organisation for 12-18 year olds, sponsored and supported by the Ministry of Defence designed to deliver challenging and varied training based on military themes and concepts.

Henley Detachment at the Drill Hall in Friday Street & parade every Wednesday from 1900 to 2130hrs. We would love for new Cadets and Adult Volunteers to come visit us and experience something new, whether that is our virtual parade night or once we re-open for face to face training. For any Henley Detachment enquires please email AUO Mel Haynes, [3360hayne@armymail.mod.uk](mailto:3360hayne@armymail.mod.uk)

The RBL has prepared a Certificate of Appreciation in recognition of Sjt Fielder's splendid achievement and John Green, Branch Chairman added a personal message of thanks and wished him well in his Army career.

### Sjt Fielder paying his respects



### Rotherfield Greys War Memorial, holding the Company Flag



1. The Army Cadets gives young people - from all walks of life - access to fun, friendship, action, and adventure. We challenge young people to learn more, do more and try more. We inspire them to aim high and go further in life, no matter what they aim to do. With 41,000 cadets and 9,500 adults in more than 1,600 locations around the UK, the Army Cadets makes a big impact on young people, parents, and communities. For more information visit [armycadets.com](http://armycadets.com)
2. Oxfordshire Army Cadets has over 20 detachments in every major populated location in the county.

The 14<sup>th</sup> Army in the Arakan 1944 - [www.youtube.com/watch?v=lwbEeWs21QA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lwbEeWs21QA)



Keystone, Hulton Archive / Getty Images

### What triggered the Japanese invasion of Southeast Asia in 1941?

Conflict in this theatre **began** when the Empire of **Japan invaded** French Indochina in September 1940 and rose to a new level following the Attack on Pearl Harbour, and simultaneous attacks on Hong Kong, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore and Malaya on 7 and 8 December **1941**.

### Why did Japan attack the US at Pearl Harbour?

**Japan** intended the attack as a preventive action to keep the United States Pacific Fleet from interfering with its planned military actions in Southeast Asia against overseas territories of the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and the United States.



### What Motivated Japanese Aggression in World War II?

In the 1930s and 1940s, Japan seemed intent on colonizing all of Asia. It seized vast swathes of land and numerous islands; Korea was already under its control, but it added Manchuria, coastal China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Burma, Singapore, Thailand, New Guinea, Brunei, Taiwan, and Malaya (now Malaysia). Japanese attacks even reached to Australia in the south, the U.S. territory of Hawaii in the east, the Aleutian Islands of Alaska in the north, and as far west as British India in the Kohima campaign. What motivated a formerly reclusive island nation to go on such a rampage?

Three major interrelated factors contributed to Japan's aggression during and in the lead-up to World War II. These factors were:

1. Fear of outside aggression
2. Growing Japanese nationalism
3. A need for natural resources

Japan's fear of outside aggression stemmed in large part from its experience with western imperial powers, beginning with the arrival of Commodore Matthew Perry and an American naval squadron in Tokyo Bay in 1853. Faced with overwhelming force and superior military technology, the Tokugawa shogun had no option but to capitulate and sign an unequal treaty with the U.S. The Japanese government was also painfully aware that China, hitherto the great power in East Asia, had just been humiliated by Britain in the first Opium War. The shogun and his advisers were desperate to escape a similar fate.

### After the Meiji Restoration

To avoid being swallowed up by the imperial powers, Japan reformed its entire political system in the Meiji Restoration, modernized its armed forces and industry, and began to act like the European powers. As a group of scholars wrote in the 1937 government-commissioned pamphlet, "Fundamentals of our National Policy": "Our present mission is to build a new Japanese culture by adopting and sublimating Western cultures with our national polity as the basis and to contribute spontaneously to the advancement of world culture."

These changes affected everything from fashion to international relations. Not only did Japanese people adopt western clothing and haircuts, but Japan demanded and received a slice of the Chinese pie when the former eastern superpower was divided into spheres of influence at the end of the nineteenth century. The Japanese Empire's triumphs in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894 to 1895) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904 to 1905) marked its debut as a true world power. Like the other world powers of that era, Japan took both wars as opportunities to seize land. Just a few decades after the seismic shock of Commodore Perry's appearance in Tokyo Bay, Japan was on its way to building a true empire of its own. It epitomized the phrase "the best defense is a good offense."

A sometimes virulent nationalism began to develop in the public discourse as Japan achieved increased economic output, military success against larger powers like China and Russia, and a new importance on the world stage. A belief emerged among some intellectuals and many military leaders that the Japanese people were racially or ethnically superior to other peoples. Many nationalists emphasized that the Japanese were descended from Shinto gods and that the Japanese emperors were direct descendants of Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess. As historian Kurakichi Shiratori, one of the imperial tutors, put it, "Nothing in the world compares to the divine nature of the imperial house and likewise the majesty of our national polity. Here is one great reason for Japan's superiority." With such a genealogy, of course, it was only natural that Japan should rule the rest of Asia.

### **The Rise of Nationalism**

This ultra-nationalism arose in Japan at the same time that similar movements were taking hold in the recently unified European nations of Italy and Germany, where they would develop into Fascism and Nazism. Each of these three countries felt threatened by the established imperial powers of Europe, and each responded with assertions of its own people's inherent superiority. When World War II broke out, Japan, Germany, and Italy would ally themselves as the Axis Powers. Each would also act ruthlessly against what it considered to be lesser peoples.

That is not to say that all Japanese were ultra-nationalist or racist, by any means. However, many politicians, and especially army officers, were ultra-nationalist. They often couched their intentions toward other Asian countries in Confucianist language, stating that Japan had a duty to rule the rest of Asia, as an "elder brother" should rule over "younger brothers." They promised to end European colonialism in Asia or to "liberate East Asia from white invasion and oppression," as John Dower phrased it in "War Without Mercy." In the event, the Japanese occupation and the crushing expense of World War II did hasten the end of European colonialism in Asia; however, Japanese rule would prove anything but brotherly.

Speaking of war expenses, once Japan staged the Marco Polo Bridge Incident and started its full-scale invasion of China, it began to run short of many vital war materials including oil, rubber, iron, and even sisal for rope-making. As the Second Sino-Japanese War dragged on, Japan was able to conquer coastal China, but both the Nationalist and Communist armies of China put up an unexpectedly effective defence of the vast interior. To make matters worse, Japan's aggression against China prompted western countries to embargo key supplies and the Japanese archipelago is not rich in mineral resources.

### **Annexation**

In order to sustain its war effort in China, Japan needed to annex territories that produced oil, iron for steelmaking, rubber, etc. The nearest producers of all of those goods were in Southeast Asia, which—conveniently enough—was colonized at the time by the British, French, and Dutch. Once World War II in Europe erupted in 1940 and Japan allied itself with the Germans, it had justification for seizing enemy colonies. In order to ensure that the U.S. would not interfere with Japan's lightning-fast "Southern Expansion"—in which it simultaneously struck the Philippines, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaya—Japan decided to wipe out the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl harbour. It attacked each of the targets on Dec. 7, 1941 on the American side of the International Date Line, which was Dec. 8 in East Asia.

The Imperial Japanese armed forces seized oil fields in Indonesia and Malaya. Those countries, along with Burma, supplied iron ore, and with Thailand supplied rubber. In other conquered territories, the Japanese requisitioned rice and other food supplies, sometimes stripping local farmers of every last grain.

However, this vast expansion left Japan overextended. Military leaders also underestimated how quickly and fiercely the United States would react to the Pearl harbour attack. In the end, Japan's fear of outside aggressors, malignant nationalism, and demand for natural resources to support resulting wars of conquest led to its August 1945 downfall.