

EXECUTED!

LT. J. L. APPLEBY

2/6 FD COY. RAE



AGE 27



6-9-43

J. W. MERCUS

KAN. NAT. GARD.



11-6-11



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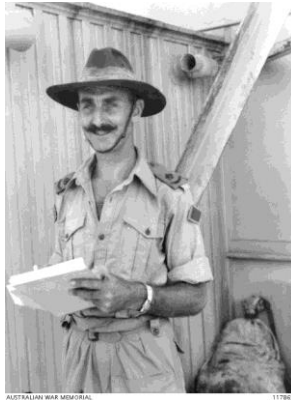
THE GALLANT EXPLOITS OF LIEUTENANT JOHN APPLEBY

WW2 RESISTANCE FIGHTER AND SPY

**ESCAPED AUSTRALIAN PRISONER OF WAR AT LARGE ON JAPANESE
OCCUPIED JAVA 1942-1943. BETRAYED, RECAPTURED AND EXECUTED**

By Peter Russell Scott © 2021

DEDICATION



This article is dedicated to the memory of that great un-sung and gallant leader of sappers under the most trying of circumstances, Major L J 'Robbie' Robertson, Officer Commanding the 2/6th Field Company Royal Australian Engineers from Java 1942 onwards. The man deserved to be awarded the Military Cross at least.

He and his men proudly wore the Purple Diamond, the shoulder colour patch of the Seventh Division Engineers, a beacon that guided his sick and dying sappers along the brutal Burma-Thailand Railway during those dreadful years of slavery, exhaustion, punishment, sickness and death. Robbie was the leader of men who held the sapper beacon high along that dreadful road.



Robbie's battered Purple Diamond from the Burma–Thailand Railway
source: Dawn Holden / The Australian Army Museum of Military Engineering

Robbie's Godson Michael Hitchins from Norfolk in the UK writes:

'.... through his late wife Betty {my Godmother}, I know that Robbie was deeply affected on discovering post-war what John Appleby had done in Java, and the fate that had befallen him and his compatriots. She said he thought about him every day; therefore, I can only imagine the gratitude and pride he would feel knowing that John Appleby was being honoured in this way (by an Australian Gallantry award and the presentation of the Dutch Resistance Memorial Cross).

I also believe that Robbie would be one hundred percent behind the proposal to have LT Appleby's Commendation for Gallantry upgraded to the Medal for Gallantry. I can just imagine his letters to the Hon Darren Chester, typed on his portable typewriter, arguing the case with gusto....'



The grave of Australian Army Lieutenant John Appleby at Ereveld Ancol, Jakarta, Indonesia -
the Field of Honour of the Executed, maintained by the Kingdom of The Netherlands.

Photo: Duncan MacDonald, Jakarta

'Australia and Japan are working closely to help maintain a peaceful Indo-Pacific, as affirmed under the Australia-Japan Special Strategic Partnership.

The Australia-Japan relationship is the nation's closest and most mature in Asia and is underpinned by the strategic, economic, political and legal interests of both countries. Both countries work closely in strategic alliance with the US, and lead in critical regional partnerships with countries such as India and the Republic of Korea.

Australia and Japan regularly participate in joint defence exercises and frequently consult on regional security issues, such as the nuclear tests and ballistic missile launches undertaken by North Korea.

The Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation (JDSC) signed in 2007 provides a foundation for wide-ranging co-operation on security issues for both countries, including law enforcement, border security, counter terrorism, disarmament and counter-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The JDSC also established the regular 2+2 talks between the respective foreign and defence ministers.' Source: Defenceconnect.com.au

In July 2014, during a trade visit to Australia, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe gave a special address to Federal Parliament, in English. In what ABC radio called 'an extraordinarily frank speech', Abe promised to never let the horrors of the past century repeat themselves.

"I can find absolutely no words to say, Abe said, I can only stay humble against the evils and horrors of history. May I most humbly speak for Japan and on behalf of the Japanese people here in sending my most sincere condolences towards the many souls who lost their lives ... and for those who made it through the war, how much trauma did they feel, even years and years later from these painful memories."

Our modern-day relationship with the Japanese people does not nor should not mean that the service and sacrifice of our gallant servicemen and servicewomen (nurses) executed by the Imperial Japanese Army during World War Two should be erased from our conversations as an inconvenient truth in the present-day geopolitical and geostrategic landscape. We must not turn our heads away.

We, the 'the children of the Burma-Thailand Railway' continue, unabated, to remember them.

Peter Russell Scott

Tallebudgera, Queensland

ANZAC Day 2021

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Chief of Staff, Joint Operations Command and Head of Corps RAE Brig John Carey CSC, left, accepts the Netherlands Resistance Memorial Cross posthumously awarded to Lt John Appleby from Netherlands Defence Attaché Lt-Col Elmar Hermans.

Resistance fighter honoured

Cpl Veronica O'Hara

AN ENGINEER officer executed by the Japanese in WWII was posthumously presented the Resistance Memorial Cross by the Netherlands Defence Attaché in Canberra on July 5. It was awarded to Australian Army Officer, Lieutenant John Leslie Appleby, an escaped POW and member of the Dutch Resistance on Java where he was betrayed, recaptured then executed in 1943. Head of Corps RAE Brig John Carey said Lt Appleby was a remarkable man - architect, soldier,

resistance fighter and spy. "What's so unique about him is that after he escaped, he continued to support the Allied operation despite the threat of recapture and subsequent execution," Brig Carey said. Lt Appleby was born in Sydney in 1916 and joined the Citizen Military Forces as an engineer officer at the outbreak of war. He served in the Middle East with 2/6 Field Company, Royal Australian Engineers. After the Allied victory in Syria, Lt Appleby was returning home when a number of units,

including the 2/6, went ashore at Batavia (now Jakarta) to help the Netherlands East Indies forces defend aerodromes and oil supplies from the advancing Japanese Army.

Japanese forces were too strong and within weeks, Australians were ordered to surrender. A number of soldiers “took to the bush”, most were recaptured, however, Lt Appleby was never seen again and his fate only known when his former commanding officer, Maj Leslie Robertson, investigated in the 1980s.

The Resistance Memorial Cross was posthumously awarded to Lt Appleby by the Netherlands in the 1980s but never claimed. Brig Carey accepted the award on behalf of Lt Appleby from Netherlands’ Defence Attaché Lt-Col Elmar Hermans. The Resistance Memorial Cross will be placed in a future display on 2/6 Fd Coy in the Museum of Military Engineering at Holsworthy, Sydney.

Lt Appleby was also awarded the Australian Commendation for Gallantry in 2018. Lt-Col Hermans said the heroic actions of Lt Appleby, and his three resistance friends who were executed together, was an example to all of us.

“My predecessor, Col Harold Jacobs, was able to make a solid case in front of the Australian Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal and stated ‘it is never too late to recognise the service and sacrifice of brave men and women’,” Lt-Col Hermans said. After the war, Lt Appleby’s remains were recovered and re-buried with full military honours in the Netherlands Field of Honour cemetery at Ancol in Jakarta.

ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF THE JOHN L. APPLEBY RESISTANCE MEMORIAL CROSS CITATION

Arranged by courtesy of Warrant Officer Class 1 Arend de Weger (Rtd), Royal Australian Engineers, 2019

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE RESISTANCE MEMORIAL CROSS

In the design of the Resistance Memorial Cross is the resistance against the occupiers of the territory of the kingdom of The Netherlands during the Second World War expressed. The background of that resistance, in all its diversity, is represented by the text in the horizontal bar – dispel tyranny – which is derived from the sixth verse of Wilhelmus. The flaming sword in the vertical bar depicts both the decisiveness of the armed resistance and the fire of the spiritual resistance. The colours of the ribbon attached to the cross symbolize the unity of The Netherlands and The House of Orange, in the midst of the darkness and mourning that the occupiers descend on the people of the Kingdom.

THE CHAIRMAN OF THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE RESISTANCE MEMORIAL CROSS

Considering the Royal Decree of 29 December 1980, number 104, state magazine 715, as well as the decision of 29 March 1981 of the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Minister of Defence and the State Secretary for Culture, Recreation and Social Work,

awards

THE RESISTANCE MEMORIAL CROSS

to
John L. Appleby
born 5 July 1916

's-Gravenhage, 5 May 1982, The chairman
mentioned above, W.Ch.J.M. van Lanschot, R.M.W.O.



PRESENTATION OF THE INSIGNIA OF THE AUSTRALIAN COMMENDATION FOR GALLANTRY

Of

**THE LATE LIEUTENANT JOHN LESLIE APPLEBY 2/6TH FIELD COMPANY ROYAL AUSTRALIAN
ENGINEERS**

Government House Sydney, 25th November 2020

L to R; **Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beasley AC QC**, Governor of New South Wales, **Brigadier Matt Galton DSC**, Head of Corps Royal Australian Engineers, **Major David Spinks**, Executive Officer School of Military Engineering, **Ms Leah Herdman**, Curator Australian Army Museum of Military Engineering.

With acknowledgement to the late Major Robbie Robertson and Sergeant Bert Field DCM MM

The four prisoners knelt blindfolded before their freshly-dug graves near the Chinese cemetery at Batoe Toelis, Java, in the Japanese occupied Dutch East Indies. It was 6th September 1943, and the four Resistance friends had been found guilty by a Japanese military *Ki Kosaku* 'court' of conspiring to harm Japanese authority, of espionage and of resisting arrest. The sentence was death by beheading.

Three of the condemned were soldiers, the escaped Australian Prisoner of War Lieutenant John Leslie Appleby, Royal Australian Engineers, 27, the colonial Dutch East Indies Army (KNIL) interpreter Lieutenant Charles Thomas Hayward 'Tom' Powell, also 27, who was working with the Australians, and KNIL Sergeant Wilhelmus Bechtholt, 38.

The fourth condemned person was Miss Hanna Christa 'Hanny' Hilgers, 25, a local Dutch woman and fiancée of Tom Powell. All were members of 'Vereeniging Anti-Nippon', the Dutch-led Resistance movement on Java, comprising many groups working in union against the Japanese occupation, and in anticipation of an Allied invasion to re-take the Dutch East Indies, an invasion that never came.

They had been brought by car to Batoe Toelis (now Batu Tulis), overlooking the river Ci Sadane. The Imperial Japanese Army's Major Yoshia Katsumura, the Kempeitai secret military police chief at Bogor, had detailed Sergeant Major Sadamu Hamada to lead a party of four Non-Commissioned Officers – Okami, Nakayama, Hirashiba and Endo - to act as executioners.

At about 8am the condemned were led blindfolded to the four graves dug in a line, and made to kneel. The swordsmen stood ready and were reportedly greatly impressed by the victims' bearing as they faced death. As was customary in the Imperial Japanese Army, the sword blades would have been ritually washed; Hamada then gave the order and Lieutenant Appleby and Sergeant Bechtholt were beheaded first, their executioners acting simultaneously. Then it was the turn of the lovers Tom and Hanny to meet their fate, together.



Photograph of Sergeant Len Siffleet from Gunnedah, New South Wales, of Z and M Special Units, Allied Intelligence Bureau, executed at Aitape, New Guinea, 1943. The photograph is believed to be the only surviving depiction of a western prisoner of war being executed by a Japanese soldier. Source: Australian War Memorial

Post-War war crimes tribunal records show that the executioners recalled Hanny as being “a slight girl, small for a European, about 5 feet 1 inch in height and dressed in a blouse with skirt”.



The brave and beautiful Hanny Hilgers VHK. Source: Netherlands War Graves Foundation

The official Japanese Army records of the ‘Anti-Nippon Conspiracy Case’ were collected by Hanny’s sister Elizabeth (Lizzy) from the Kempeitai secret military police at Bogor at the end of the War. These Japanese records detailed that the three executed men had fled the war prisoner’s camps, had joined the Anti-Nippon Conspiracy Organisation led by the Dutchman named Welter, had collected Japanese Military intelligence through Hanny Hilgers, and had collected armaments in order to operate guerilla warfare.

Lizzy Hilgers poignant 1945 letter to John Appleby’s sister Mrs Beryl Pulbrook (later Nancarrow) is shown in Appendix A – the National Archives of Australia documents NAA B3856 140-11-909.

Major Katsamura was interrogated by Allied forces Officers (Flight Lieutenant DC Eyre RAAF, Flight Lieutenant THM McDonald RAAF, Lieutenant I. Smith British Army and James M Vero, US Army) at the end of the War,

Katsamura confessed to having issued the order for the execution, acting, he said, on orders from his Headquarters to take ‘stringent measures’ against any local resistance to Japanese authority.

And so were lost four brave souls, young lives full of so much promise, lives and careers brought to an end by their prolonged, hazardous and gallant resistance against the tyranny of Japanese occupation, and by betrayal. Their secretive service and sacrifice would however not be forgotten, not at least in the Netherlands; In 1982 the four friends were each posthumously awarded the Verzetshedenkingscruis (VHK) - in English the Resistance Memorial Cross. The inscription on the VHK reads ‘DE TYRANNY VERDRYVEN’ (in English, to drive out or dispel tyranny).



The Netherlands Resistance Memorial Cross

Until recently John Appleby has remained unrecognized in Australia and his remains have lain forgotten in a foreign land. In the 1980s his former Officer Commanding, Major LJ (Robbie) Robertson, investigated his fate and published the story in the monograph “The Gap is Bridged”.

In 2018 however, following a Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal (DHAAT) Inquiry into escaped, re-captured and executed Australian Far East Prisoners of War (FEPOW), ordered by the Hon Darren Chester MP, Minister for Defence Personnel, John Appleby was posthumously awarded the Australian Commendation for Gallantry for his resistance activity on Java during WW2, some 75 years after his death.

LT Appleby’s name was put forward for recognition by 2/6th Field Company researcher Peter Scott, a son of the late DX561 Sapper LF (Frank) Scott, who was a fellow Prisoner of War and combat engineer with Appleby in the 2/6 Field Company RAE. Peter Scott is a RAE combat engineer veteran of the Vietnam War.

The nomination was strongly supported by many people including families of the Seventh Division Engineers Association, and by Colonel John Hopman RAE, retired Representative Colonel Commandant of the Special Operations Engineer Regiment and an RAE Vietnam Combat Engineer Officer.

Significant and strong support for Australian medallic recognition for John Appleby also came from Colonel Harold Jacobs, the then Netherlands Defence Attaché for Australia and New Zealand. Colonel Jacobs was able to confirm before the Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal hearing, that Lieutenant Appleby’s name was well known in the Netherlands, and that the Netherlands Government had, in 1982, posthumously awarded him the prestigious Dutch Resistance Memorial Cross.

Colonel Jacobs strongly argued, especially after being challenged by a Tribunal member (who said that the British stopped medallic recognition in 1953 and implied that Australia should be any different), that it is never too late to recognise the service and sacrifice of brave men and women who have given their lives to drive out tyranny so that we may enjoy the freedom that we have to this day.



The Insignia of the Australian Commendation for Gallantry

Despite Lt Appleby's gallant actions clearly meeting the criteria for the higher award of the Medal for Gallantry (see Annexure A), it is evident that a 'one size fits all' award of the Commendation for Gallantry was applied to all those executed Far East Prisoners of War whose gallantry was investigated.

There is no doubt that the DHAAT recommendation was a direct result of the Defence Review Board's clear policy, directed to the Tribunal during the Inquiry, and reported in Chapter 4 para. 17, DHAAT Report on the FEPOW Inquiry of 17 August 2017 that it (the Board) had considered "a couple of individuals for higher recognition" but in the interests of consistency of approach, no recommendation was made for any higher honours".

Who was John Appleby? He was born at Randwick in Sydney in 1916 and when the War broke out in 1939, he was in the fourth year of the five-year Architecture Diploma course at Sydney Technical College.

Many prominent Australian architects studied architecture at Sydney Technical College, prior to there being a university course in architecture available in Sydney. These students did however attend some Architecture lectures at the Engineering Faculty at the University of Sydney. (Wikipedia).

Students who completed diplomas became Associates of the Sydney Technical College, and throughout the twentieth century the ASTC designation came to be highly regarded in many professions, particularly science, architecture and engineering (Catherine Frayne, 2010).

Results for the 1938 academic year of the College, published in the Daily Telegraph of 10th January 1939, included two students in the Architecture Diploma course who would go on to join the Army and become 2/6th Sapper Officers who distinguished themselves by their gallantry.

Completing his final year was Raymond Henry Watts, who passed examinations in professional practice, specification writing, architectural design level 5, and town planning.

Ray Watts was one of the original 2/6th Field Company members who sailed for the Middle East in October 1940 and, as Captain RH Watts RAE, he won the Military Cross in the bloody Syrian Campaign in 1941. He with Appleby was captured POW on Java, and died on 14th July 1943 of multiple diseases on the Burma –Thai Railway, heroically shunning treatment he thought was more urgently needed by the Sappers that he led.

Completing the third year of his Architecture Diploma in 1938 was John Leslie Appleby, who passed examinations for architectural design, modeling, history of architecture, architectural

drawing, building construction, building construction drawing and freehand drawing. A busy year of study but a year of acquiring skills that, unbeknown to him at the time, would stand him in good stead in such tasks as reproducing false Japanese documents on Java in 1942-43.

John Appleby's well advanced Diploma studies were brought to an abrupt end at the end of 1939 when he too, like Ray Watts, volunteered for Army service and was commissioned as an Engineer Officer. In his attestation papers, he gave his occupation as an Architectural Draughtsman, a journeyman position with four years behind him and just one more year to go on the way to becoming a professional Architect.

Both men's lives and careers were tragically cut short by their duty to their Country and by their gallantry. Who knows what great architectural work they might have created if not but for fate and circumstance?

After completing his Army Officer training, the newly minted Lieutenant Appleby volunteered immediately for overseas service and was deployed to the Middle East to join the battle-hardened group of combat engineers in the 2/6th Field Company RAE. These sappers were veterans of the North African Campaign against, firstly, the Italian army of the fascist Dictator Benito Mussolini, and then the Grand Panzer Armee of the brilliant and honourable German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel.

The 2/6th was then heavily involved in the bloody Syrian Campaign against the Nazi-aligned Vichy French. This was a real stoush where Australian forces bore most of the casualties, 416 killed and 1136 wounded, losses far greater than the combined British, Indian and Free French casualties.

True to their Corps motto 'Ubique', and just as in North Africa, the 2/6th Engineers were everywhere, attached to Infantry in the front line, building bridges and culverts to allow mobility on the battlefield, laying mines, taking up French mines on Commando-like operations, being attacked by enemy aircraft and being shelled by off-shore enemy ships. During the Syria fighting, a further ten of the 2/6th sappers were killed when called upon to carry out their secondary and parallel role as Infantry soldiers.

What was the 2/6th doing on Java? After the Allied victory in Syria, the Seventh Division was returning home by sea to defend Australia, when a number of units including the 2/6th were put ashore at Batavia (present day Jakarta) by the British General Archibald Wavell to help the Netherlands East Indies forces defend aerodromes and oil supplies from the rapidly advancing Japanese Army. This was after Singapore had fallen to the Empire of Japan.

They were under the command of Brigadier Arthur Blackburn VC, and designated 'Blackforce'.

The Australian Prime Minister John Curtin and his War Cabinet dithered for four days over whether or not to put the Diggers ashore at Batavia and in the end the impatient Wavell took the unilateral action to disembark them, into almost certain captivity.



Australian Troops disembarked from HMT Orcades, Batavia, 19th February 1942

Wavell backloaded the troop transport Orcades with his ADBA Command Staff, and some civilians, and they sailed away into the sunset.

The Japanese forces were too strong, and within three weeks, on 9th March 1942, after some brief and fatal skirmishes in which the 2/6th Sappers lost more lives, the Australians were ordered to surrender, thus becoming Prisoners of War. As rain and gloom descended, a number of soldiers “took to the bush”, mostly to be re-captured, however John Appleby was never seen by his Unit again. His fate and gallantry as a Resistance fighter only became clear after the War.

The mystery of what happened to John Appleby was investigated and documented in the 1980s by his former Java Commanding Officer, Major Leslie ‘Robbie’ Robertson, an outstanding Officer who led his ‘Lost Company of Sappers’ for 3½ years while they were Prisoners of War on Java (with Weary Dunlop), at Robertson Barracks, Changi, and as slave labour on the construction of the brutal Burma–Thai Railway.

Note: Robbie constantly argued with the Imperial Japanese Army captors (who he jokingly called ‘the management’) over his men’s welfare, and took many beatings in the process.

Some of Robbie’s sappers who survived the building of the Railway were then sent by “Hell-Ships” to Japan itself in late 1944.

They were leased out by the Japanese Army, physically and mentally abused as slave labour in Japanese industries, and many including Sapper Frank Scott’s group, were used as coal miners in Baron Mitsui’s under-sea mines at Fukuoka (POW) Camp 17 near Nagasaki.

The Mitsui Company has never been held to account for its’ dreadful treatment of the Prisoners of War slaves, whose torment only ceased when the nuclear bomb was detonated over Nagasaki, less than 20 miles from Camp 17.

Lieutenant Michael Flynn was in charge of the 2/6th Field Company “Japan Party” but on arrival in Japan he was sent to Fukuoka Camp 22, where he also took beatings for his men, being forced at one stage to kneel in the snow for 12 hours.

But back to John Appleby. In the 1980s Robbie learned that, after their capture in 1942, a small POW advance party under Lieutenant Appleby was deposited by the Japanese at the Coen Chinese School in Batavia. Appleby, together with the Anglo/Dutch KNIL Lieutenant Tom Powell, who could speak German, developed a ploy to escape; they would masquerade as German planters, several of whom were known to be on the estates in West Java, and sail to Australia in a vessel pilfered from the local yacht club.

With assistance from Captain Edwards from the staff of POW leader Brigadier Blackburn, Appleby and Powell carried off an audacious escape from the POW staging camp, unnoticed in the initial confusion of prisoners milling around. The resourceful Edwards convinced the Japanese the next morning that two men were not in fact missing from the tenko (counting) parade, and that he had seen a guard remove two men at the last minute at prior to boarding the train for Batavia at Tjibatoe; this spurious explanation was accepted by the Japanese who were afraid to admit any shortcomings in their counting.

Tom Powell and his mother lived at the English 'Box Club' in Batavia, while his fiancé, Hanny Hilgers also lived in the fashionable district of Menteng, not far from her mother and sister Elizabeth (Lizzy).

At first the escaping duo Appleby and Powell went to the Box Club, but finding it full of Japanese troops, they headed for Hanny, and were concealed at Mrs Hilgers' home for many months. During this time, they continued their plans to get away by boat in the guise of fishermen; they browned their skins with iodine and wore native garments. However soon realized that their plan would not work for one reason – their blue and grey eyes!

Abandoning their sea plans, they then joined the local Dutch underground resistance, secretly operating a radio receiver to gain any news to pass to Allied Forces. Appleby was adept at lettering and with Powell's assistance; they produced many false documents using Japanese characters.

At the end of March 1942, the Commander of the KNIL Air Force, Major General LH van Oyen, began making radio broadcasts to the Netherlands East Indies from Melbourne, Australia. When he ended his broadcasts with the words "I hope to see you again soon," his listeners in the Indies believed that this meant that Allied landings by the Allies in Java were imminent. Dutch language broadcasts from Radio San Francisco advised listeners to "Keep your courage up! We'll be coming soon!" These proclamations fueled an unrealistic optimism about the future course of the war, and encouraged clandestine resistance activities that ... when discovered by the Japanese, were ruthlessly crushed. (Fred L Borch, *Military Trials of War Criminals in the Netherlands East Indies 1946-49*, Oxford University Press, 2017). These broadcasts would have spurred Lieutenant Appleby on to carry on with his clandestine activities in preparation for an Allied landing.

The Hilgers home was raided many times by the Japanese but Appleby and Powell escaped detection for over nine months by being concealed during the raids in a Chinese cabinet. When Appleby went down with appendicitis, he was moved to a local hospital, St Carolus, run by Catholic Nuns, where he the assumed the identity of "Hansi Klein", a "Swiss" who could speak only German.

Hanny had meanwhile obtained a secretarial post at a Japanese run office in Batavia, where some of the women workers occasionally entertained their bosses in their homes. One of these women, Gonda de Haan, came to know about Appleby and Powell and told the Japanese. When a raid was held and the Japanese tried to open the Chinese cabinet, they were side tracked by Hanny.



Old Batavia source: luk.staff.ugm.ac.id/itd/Batavia/

The betrayal necessitated the removal of the duo from Menteng and, after contact with resistance leader Lieutenant Kriek Welter, KNIL, they were moved to Bogor. Both had false papers, Appleby disguised himself as a German planter and Powell as a Eurasian clerk. The two escaped prisoners traveled freely by train, dressed in pith helmets and local gear, and wearing copies of authentic Nippon armbands.

In Bogor they were secreted in a private mental home and cared for by a staff nurse Roos. They continued their undercover work in a resistance unit led by a man named Backhuys, who provided them with revolvers and grenades. They maintained contact with Hanny through an undercover agent and through Hanny's regular visits to Bogor.

In July 1943, the Kempeitai (Japanese military secret police – the equivalent of the Nazi Gestapo) became increasingly troubled at the spying activities of the Dutch Resistance, and the possibility of an Allied invasion of Java from Australia. They consequently set up special "courts" under *Ki Kosaku*, or Yellow Operation, where anyone suspected of espionage or obstruction of Nippon operations could be beheaded on interrogation evidence only.

Despite the capture of the resistance leader Backhuys, Appleby and Powell continued on with their activities, always in anticipation of an Allied landing. When European staff at the mental hospital were interned by the Japanese, Appleby and Powell had to hide elsewhere; Lieutenant Rodie of the Australian 2/2nd Pioneers (on Brigadier Blackburn's POW staff) knew of their

exploits, and even hatched a plan to bring them back to Batavia hidden in Chinese coffins rather than risk a move in the boot of a car.

Somehow, they reached the home of Mrs Hilgers and Elizabeth who were waiting for them in the dark, and who then spirited them away to the home of Mr P.M. Mulder of 11 West Street, Buitenzorg (Bogor). Mr Mulder took the fugitives in, hiding them in a cleverly constructed bomb shelter in his back yard which was already harbouring a Sergeant Bechtholt KNIL who was also in the resistance. From the bomb shelter the three carried on their clandestine work.

At this time things were not going well for Hanny at her workplace. Her office colleagues were Japanese sympathizers and more than friendly with them, especially the sinister Major Murase, head of the local Kempeitai. 500 guilders was offered for every 'British' head 'dead or alive'. One or more of Hanny's colleagues knew about Appleby and Powell and of Hanny's secret visits to them, and then passed that information to the Kempeitai.

On 8th August 1943 Hanny and Elizabeth were arrested by the Kempeitai and jailed; the elderly Mrs Hilgers would also have been taken, but was too ill to be moved. On the basis of information proffered by Hanny's office colleagues, the Kempeitai suspicions of Hanny and the Mulder house were confirmed. The betrayal was complete.



A group of Kempetai source: www.verzetmuseum.org

Appleby's re-capture. A detachment of Kempeitai at Buitenzorg lead by Sergeant Major Hamada then went to the Mulder home, and after giving Mr Mulder 'the water cure' (he was hung by a rope, beaten by Hamada and given water torture), traced the three fugitives to the bomb shelter. Realising that the game was up, the three emerged from the shelter and, after an exchange of gunfire, tried to explode their grenades to kill both themselves and the Kempeitai. The grenades, however, were old and defective, failed to detonate and the three fugitives were overpowered.

Hanny and the three men were then brought together and charged: conspiring to harm the Nippon power, espionage, and resisting arrest. Aided by the evidence of Hanny's office associates, the *Ki Kosaku* 'court' handed down a decree of guilty and the death sentence.

Following the end of the War, the remains of the four Resistance friends were recovered from Batoe Toelis and re-buried with full Military Honours in the Netherlands Field of Honour cemetery (Ereveld) at Ancol, a northern suburb of Jakarta, where they lie today in the care of the Netherlands War Graves Foundation.

Ancol is the ‘cemetery of the executed’, the resting place of more than 2,000 men and women; Christians, Muslims and Buddhists who were killed at this place because they resisted against the Japanese occupiers. Some are in mass graves.



The soldiers John Appleby and Wilhelmus Bechtholt side-by-side at Ereveld Ancol
photo: Duncan MacDonald



The lovers Tommy Powell and Hanny Hilgers side-by-side at Ereveld Ancol. In the background centre are the preserved remains of Hemelboom, or Heaven's Tree, under which hundreds of East Indies, Dutch and Commonwealth prisoners were executed. photo: Duncan MacDonald

The inscription on the Dutch Resistance Memorial Cross reads – “To dispel Tyranny”; Tyranny will continue to rise up, again and again, and there are sure be times coming when we Australians will need to adhere to this motto once more. As stated by our great Dutch friend Colonel Elmar Hermans in Canberra in July 2019, the heroic actions of the executed Lt Appleby and his three resistance friends are an example to us all.

In the words of Pericles, 495 – 429 BCE:

“Freedom is the sure possession of those alone who have the courage to defend it.”

So, if you are travelling to Jakarta, take the time to visit Ereveld Ancol, and pay your respects to John Appleby and his three Resistance friends, and to all others who lie there. Lest we forget them.

UBIQUE

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Peter Russell Scott was born in Tamworth NSW in 1947 and was initially educated at Tamworth High School to the Leaving Certificate, then the Sydney Technical College as a Land and Engineering Survey Draftsman.

From 1968 to 1970 he served in the Australian Regular Army (National Service Supplement) and saw 12 months active service in South Vietnam as a Field (Combat) Engineer with the 1st Field Squadron RAE, attached on operations to the 5th and 7th Battalions Royal Australian Regiment Royal Australian Infantry, and with the 1st Armoured Regiment and 3rd Cavalry Regiment Royal Australian Armoured Corps.

On completion of his military service obligation, he returned to his career in the NSW Department of Lands, continuing his education at Mitchell College of Advanced Education in Town Planning, and the University of New England in Natural Resources Management.

Peter is a foundation member of the Vietnam Tunnel Rats Association Inc and an Associate Member of the Special Operations Engineer Regiment Association.

His late father, Sapper Frank Scott was a proud member of the 2/6th Field Company RAE and was captured Prisoner of War on Java with John Appleby. Peter remains a staunch advocate for recognition of John Appleby's gallantry under 'constant hazardous circumstances' on Java at the wholly appropriate level of Medal for Gallantry, rather than the one-size-fits-all Commendation for Gallantry recommended by the Directorate of Honours and Awards 'in the interests of consistency'.

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