

Malaya & Borneo Non World War Graves

1948 – 1966

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During the year 2003, members of this Association waged a campaign, which was directed against the upkeep and conditions of the cemeteries and graves in Malaysia.

Articles were published in local newspapers, military magazines and could be found on the World Wide Web (WWW the internet). These articles were grossly exaggerated and must have come from hearsay and certainly not from people who had visited these graves in recent years.

One member went as far as to have his photograph superimposed against the Cross of Sacrifice at Batu Gajah, when by his own admission he had never been there. This was published in a local newspaper and branch newsletter and can be found on the WWW.

I found this distressing and insulting to my mates, who are buried there, also to the many people who travel from around the World to attend the annual commemorative service that is held at Batu Gajah.

Firstly, I will give you the comment that have been made by members regarding this subject and that have been published in various magazines and newspapers. This will be followed by my interpretation of the situation as I see it after my own visit in 2002 and comment made by other recent visitors to the cemeteries.

COMMENT:

Some of our soldiers are buried by the side of the road, while others are buried in civilian cemeteries scattered throughout Malaysia. The graves are mixed and not even in rows.

REPLY:

There are no graves by the side of the road. Apart from two military cemeteries Kranji, Singapore & Terendak, Malacca all British & Commonwealth Servicemen and dependants are buried in dedicated Christian cemeteries and all have identifiable graves. Unlike the Commonwealth War Graves in Taiping where there are 850 graves but only 332 are identified.

These Christian Cemeteries were established since we ruled Malaya from 1786. Many notable Colonial officers of all ranks, who governed the country before Malaysia gained its independence, are buried in them. I see nothing wrong with being buried in a civil or Christian cemetery, you only have to look around the cemeteries and churchyards in the U.K. to find thousands of servicemen's graves from World War I & II and other campaigns are also buried in civil cemeteries and churchyards.

The Christian Cemeteries where British & Commonwealth Forces and Dependants are buried are:-

Christian Cemetery Western Road Georgetown Penang

Christian Cemetery Kamunting Road Taiping Perak

Christian Cemetery Batu Gajah Perak

Christian Cemetery Seremban Negri Sembilan

Christian Cemetery (Military Annex) Cheras Rd. Kuala Lumpur

This is not a Commonwealth War Graves cemetery, though there are some

666 graves from World War II in the civil section.

All the above-mentioned Cemeteries have graves that are not mixed and are in rows, with the exception of Seremban.

What may give the impression that graves are scattered is that separate plots have been allocated for the various denominations, such as C of E and Roman Catholic, and others are family/dependant's plots.

COMMENT:

While some graves at God's Little Acre at Cheras Rd. KL are relatively well looked after, those at a civilian cemetery near Taiping are in a very bad way.

REPLY:

This is a very incorrect statement; members from the Leicester Branch have visited this and other cemeteries in 2002, 2003, 2004 and found it is as well cared for as the others cemeteries. This can be seen in the photographs taken by members.

COMMENT:

Although the soldiers graves are the responsibility of the Ministry of Defence they are in civilian cemeteries and maintenance is sub-contracted to local firms.

REPLY:

I have already answered the question of graves in Christian cemeteries.

The maintenance of the graves is the responsibility of the Military Section of the British High Commission, Kuala Lumpur and like many cemeteries throughout the world they have no alternative but to sub-contract the work. The graves are inspected regularly by the Military Section and contracts reviewed if necessary.

COMMENT:

Shabby and worn headstones and battered memorials.

REPLY:

Yes, over 50 years and with severe tropical conditions head stones have deteriorated and so have those of us that are left.

However when I talked to the military advisor in 2002 a programme was already in place to commence replacement of the worst ones. I have yet to find evidence of any battered memorials. The large black marble Roll of Honour plaques at Batu Gajah and Western Road, Penang and Terendak military are in good condition, so are the Crosses of Sacrifice at Batu Gajah and Cheras Road K.L.

Not forgetting the three Roll of Honour plaques that are in the entrance portal of the Kamunting Road cemetery.

The Malaysian Government have now refurbished the National Monument in the Lake Gardens in Kuala Lumpur and the crests of the units involved have been replaced.

COMMENT:

Some of the scattered bodies could be exhumed and reburied within the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery.

REPLY:

There are no scattered bodies. In the year 2000 the remaining scattered bodies were moved into Cheras Road K.L.

As an Association we do not have any say in whether a serviceman is exhumed or what happens to his remains or if a cemetery is moved. That is solely up to his relatives and there are still many around.

The movement of any graves is very costly and the fact that Malaysia is an Islamic dominated country whose law forbids graves to be exhumed, could make this an issue. Politically it would be wise to leave graves where they are. Most of these graves are now over 50 years old, so let the remains R.I.P

COMMENT:

Their graves are scattered in civilian cemeteries throughout Malaysia and are subject to bi-annual inspection. If the authorities are aware of veterans or relatives visiting, a special effort is made to ensure those graves are made presentable. There are no Military Cemeteries.

REPLY:

Veterans and relatives visit these graves all the year round and from all parts of the world. To suggest that a special "clean up" is conducted whenever the cemetery or British High Commission gets wind of a visit, is ludicrous.

There are two Military Cemeteries

1. Terendak Military Cemetery Malacca

British and Commonwealth Forces are buried here along with their dependants

There is also a large black marble plaque commemorating all of those who have no known grave. Also buried here are men of the Australian and New Zealand armed forces who died in the Vietnam War.

2. Kranji Military Cemetery Singapore

This cemetery is attached to the War Cemetery at Kranji and was opened in 1975 and contains 1,378 burials of servicemen and dependants whose bodies were exhumed from the various Military and Christian cemeteries that were closed by the Singapore Government at that time.

Cheras Road Christian Cemetery K.L. was never classed as a War or Military Cemetery though it contains the burial of 666 bodies from WW11 in the civil section and in the Military Annex, there are approximately 500 burials from the Malaya Emergency.