

# THE FORGOTTEN PAST OF KHS

TUESDAY, JULY 20, 2010

## THE JAPANESE INTERREGNUM-TOA SEINEN GAKKO; IKENOBU SAN, TSUBOCHI SANAND NIPPON-GO

/PART I

In the 1930s events in Europe and Asia were moving closer and closer to World War II. But to the British Colonial regime in Malaya, they were far away, unreal and perhaps irrelevant. Life went on at its languid and pleasant pace. In the local scene, the Kajang High School, under Mr. C. E. Gates, the Head Master, achieved notable progress. During his tenure, he inspired his charges to strive and to excel.

In the 1936 Mr. Gates had to go on retirement and sailed for home and England, the Englishmen's "Other Eden". As his steamer sailed away, Mr. Gates must have felt tremendously gratified for the legacy he had left behind-Kajang High School Golden Age.(1) However, little did he foresee that Kajang High School was about to undergo a drastic makeover, as indeed the rest of the Malay Peninsular, in form and substance.

About a year after Mr. Gates had left, there was excitement and joy over the visit of Pandit Nehru, the famous Indian Nationalist on June 6, 1937.(2) The headmaster, Mr. J. B. Carr gave permission for pupils and masters to hear a public address by Pandit Nehru from 11.00 am to 11.30 am. They must have come away imbued and flushed with patriotic and nationalistic sentiments.

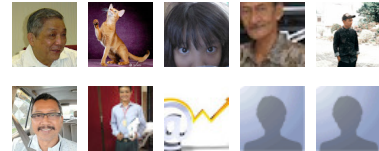
There was much youthful enthusiasm and verve too as the Kajang High School students celebrated their 9th Annual Sports on July 17, 1937.( 3 ) For the first in the school's history, real hurdles were used courtesy of Towkay Low Ti Kok, one of the school's founders and benefactors. The good Towkay presumably might have imported the hurdles from England out of his own pockets.

### PART II

The ominous visit to the Kajang High School by several Commonwealth military top brass on Sept 14 1941 must have caused consternation to teachers, masters and pupils alike as it might mean something very serious and grim was afoot.

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PREFACE

HANAFIAH LUBIS

KAJANG, HULU LANGAT, SELANGOR, MALAYSIA

Hello everyone out there. This blog is about the early years of the Kajang High School, most of which are nearly forgotten due to the absence of written records. These notes could perhaps help awaken interest in its past and unearth other forgotten

The commonwealth military entourage was led by Major-General Sturdes of the Australian Army and Major-General Murray Lyon, General Officer Commanding (G.O.C) British Army Northern Area. They told Mr. O.G. Williams that the military would take over the school in February 1942.(4)

However, about three months later on Thursday December 7,1941, Mr. Williams was instructed at 12.45 by Bloomfield on the telephone to evacuate the school by Monday morning. (5) Acting on instruction and perhaps too shell-shocked to do anything else, the Head Master carried out the evacuation exercise. The "war refugees" rushed helter skelter over to the Convent School at Church Road (now Jalan Gereja) on Monday morning December 11, 1941. One of them was the late Abd Rashid Busu (deceased 2013), Victor Ludorum, Vice School Captain, student-organizer of the School Geography Room and Mr. Williams' blue-eyed boy.

The Kajang Convent was then under the charge of Mother Martha I J. (6 ) She was confronted with the "exodus" from the Kajang High School. Her girls apparently continued to attend classes in the morning while the boys occupied her premises in the afternoon from 1.15 pm to 5.30 pm.(7)

In all probability, Mr. O.G williams was still the Head Master during the transition from the Kajang High School in Jalan Semenyih to the Convent in Jalan Gereja. But sensing bad times ahead, he must have left Kajang in great haste to join the rest of British community in their helter-skelter dash to Singapore.

After Mr. Williams' departure, a senior member of the teaching staff, Mr. T. Mailvahanam took over as Head Master. He was transferred to the Kajang High School in 1930 when the school was established. He had a brief stint as Head Master in 1932.(8) Before coming to Kajang he had taught at the Klang High School and the Maxwell Road High School in Kuala Lumpur. In Kajang, Mr. Mailvahanam occupied Government Quarters No. 166 Jalan Timur (9), now non-existent.

### **PART III**

The exodus of the British community in Kajang and indeed elsewhere, was the harbinger that something was seriously amiss. Prior to this, life had been pleasant. Nobody expected the unexpected and so British Malaya "slumbers" on(10). However, it was rudely awakened on December 8, 1941. The Japanese had landed. The beaches at Kota Baru, Kelantan the main invasion point were swarming with Japanese soldiers.

The Japanese invasion of British Malaya, presumed to be an impossibility, was well under way, a grim and shocking reminder that

memories. They are especially written in anticipation and celebration of its coming 91st anniversary on March 17, 2010. Hope readers especially KHS alumni and other friends of KHS will perhaps find these notes helpful.

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it was Curtain Fall for the British in Malaya and things wouldn't be the same again.

From Kelantan and other beachheads in the north ,camouflaged with leaves and twigs in the wake of their armored columns, the Japanese soldiers swept down the Peninsular on their bicycles. Their fighter planes which had earlier neutralized British defenses provided them with air-cover.

Within a month of their landing, the Japanese soldiers had reached Kuala Lumpur(11). The people of Kajang had braced themselves for any eventuality. They had dug trenches in which to seek cover upon hearing the wailing of the ARP (Air Raid Precaution) siren, the harbinger of the aerial onslaught. The Japanese intended to bomb Kajang and their planes had flown several reconnaissances for that purpose.

The much-anticipated bombing occurred on January 12, 1942(12). The target was of course the Kajang Railway Station at 15th Milestone, Reko Road. The intention was to interdict the British retreat to Singapore.Unfortunately, the bombs fell in the grounds of the cathedral-like Catholic Church which was just across the railway tracks in front of the Railway Station. It was badly damaged; the residence of the Infant Jesus Sisters in the Convent School ground was destroyed (13). The Japanese warplanes at the same time bombed the Rice Stockpile Center near the Railway Station and strafed the neighborhood. There were scores of civilian fatalities. Several dead bodies lay sprawled in the drains and on the stretch of Reko Road from the Sun Cinema (now a Buddhist Center) to the Kampung Bukit (Reko Road) Muslim Cemetery. There were a few dead bodies too in front of the Kajang English School building\* near the Sun Cinema.

Several brick houses which suffered the aerial attack had gaping holes punched by machine- gun bullets into their walls. These tell-tale signs were evident in the neighborhood in 1947 when this writer, aged nine, moved in with his parents to live in his uncle's house called the Sentosa at No 11 Reko Road or Kampung Bukit, Kajang(now non-existent).The house had undergone some repairs and had a fresh coat of paint.It was a walk away to the Rice Stockpile Center.Before the outbreak of the War, it was a private school known as the Kajang English School\* . As far as it could be ascertained,it had not suffered any significant damage.

#### **PART IV**

The Japanese bombing raid of Kajang Town mercifully, didn't cause any significant damage to the Kajang High School. Perhaps it was not considered legitimate target on the basis of their assessment of intelligence reports from their espionage network operating from the Japanese Photo Studios in Jalan Tukang.

On entering Kajang after the British and Commonwealth troops had fled, the Japanese army seized the Kajang High School and turned it as the Headquarters of the Japanese Imperial Army in the District of Ulu Langat.(14) They also removed the brass plaque commemorating the opening of Kajang High School. It read thus :

"This tablet was unveiled on the occasion of the opening of this School by His Highness Ala'iddin Suleiman Shah, G.C.M.G, Sultan of Selangor, on 19th of March 1930."(15)

The disappearance of the plaque was perhaps the only "collateral damage" sustained by the school. A sizeable collection of English books kept in the school were left largely untouched and they were all carted back to Singapore Raffles College in 1946.(16) Those books were brought to Kajang High School just before the outbreak of war to be "mothballed" in its safe sanctuary. So it was thought. But there was a claim that the school had been converted as the first Teachers' Training College in the country before the end of WW 2 and those books were brought over to stock its library. However, this was not corroborated in the school journal dated 27.09.1945 by the Head Master, Mr. Mailvahanam. Just for the record, the British established the first Teachers' Training College in Taiping in 1898.(17)

As the Head quarters of the Japanese Imperial Army in Ulu Langat, the name of the school was changed to TOA SEINEN GAKKO.(18) It was no longer known by its old British colonial name. Everything associated with British Colonialism and Western Culture in the school was forthwith eliminated and prohibited. Of course the English Language, the standard-bearer of Western Culture, was proscribed and supplanted with the language of the new masters- NIPPON-GO.

Highest on the liquidation list of the Japanese were the pro-western and anti-Japanese elements in the Kajang population. The school mythology claims that torture and summary executions of those perceived to be anti-Japanese rule were carried out at Kajang High School. An incident in 1949 tend to lend credibility to this popular belief. A human skull was found by a pupil on the site which was being cleared for the school's Primary Department. He caused quite a sensation by putting the skull at the end of a short stick and twirling it around before his wonder struck and gaping school-friend spectators! Digging further at the site, several boys found the rest of the skeleton. It was taken out and cleaned under the supervision of the school's first Senior Science Master, Mr. A.D. Dennison-a useful and authentic visual aid during biology classes.

## **PART V**

As the Kajang Catholic Church had suffered "collateral damage" due to the Japanese bombing of the Railway Station, the Japanese army ordered the closure of the Kajang Convent.(19) The Kajang High School (TOA SEINEN GAKKO) classes in the Convent were ordered to shift to a new location- a movie house called the Queen's Theater

(later known as National Theater) on the bank of Sg. Jeluk just a stone's throw from the Convent.(20)

Mr. T. Mailvahanam who had earlier taken over from Mr. O.G. Williams was allowed to continue as Head Master and ordered to start Japanese classes at the Queen's Theater. He stated in the School Log that two Nippon-go (Japanese Language) teachers, known as Nippon-jin sensei, were sent to teach Japanese in July 1942. They were IKENOBU SAN and TSUBOCHI SAN. The Headmaster wrote that they ceased teaching at the end of the year.(21)

It appears that IKENOBU SAN was also instructed to teach Japanese to Mother Martha's pupils.(22) She had started a small class in the church ground after the Convent was closed. It was a sine qua non for the class to function. However, not long afterwards he perished in the Straits of Malacca when the boat taking him home to Japan was bombed and sunk.

One of the surviving students of the Japanese class of TOA SEINEN GAKKO held at the Queen's Theater was young V. Pathamanathan. Being a very determined and resolute youth, he didn't quit school but was prepared to undergo the discipline and rigor of the Japanese regime at the Queen's Theater.

The pupils at the Queen's Theater had to learn Nippon-go as fast as they could under pain of punishment. In addition they had to undergo "Thaiso", drills which were like calisthenics. They were taught at Mother Martha's too.(23) Two other pupils whom Pathmanathan could recall attending classes with him were Hashim (tall and fair) and Ismail. Both of them were from Cheras.(24)

The Japanese classes and Thaiso were held in the morning and afternoon. The Japanese Language was taught to the exclusion of other subjects. In between classes, they had to do gardening on vacant plots of land on the banks of Sg. Jeluk. In this way, pupils were taught self-reliance. Such simple agriculture pursuit in the backyard were naively perceived to be the way to achieve self-sufficiency in food production. The Allied naval blockade of the Malay Peninsula had brought unprecedented hardship and deprivation among the population. Rice was extremely difficult to get, not mention other needs.

The long dark nights and the nightmare of the Japanese Interregnum came to an end when the Atom Bombs fell on Japan. After the defeat of the Japanese, Kajang High School was reopened on September 27, 1945. Mr Mailvahawam who was still Head Master had to hand over the baton to Major Waters July 11, 1946. He continued to remain on the teaching staff until 1949. He used to come to conduct Spelling exercises in SMC 1B ( Special Malay Class) of that year-the indefatigable School Master that he was.

Postscript :

Following the defeat of the Japanese in the Pacific War, Kajang High School was reopened on September 27, 1945. It became an English School again and reverted to its old name, no longer TOA SEINEN GAKKO. Mr. Mailvahanam, loyal as ever to the school, took over as Head Master in the transition period but had to hand it over to Major Waters July 11, 1946.

When the Kajang High School was reopened those who had skipped school altogether or those who had remained in the school and went through the rigor and tough regime of the TOA SEINEN GAKKO but with little or no schooling, began to stream in to join the Alma Mater again. The joy and elation, when they met the first time, was felt only in the "deep heart's core" but was palpable and could only be expressed with difficulty, choked as they were with deep emotion, when trying to recall their lost years.

Among the earliest to enroll themselves were N. Murugiah- School Captain 1945;1946; T. Sivagnanam- School Captain 1947 and K. Kandasamy- School Captain 1948.

Others who were also the "early birds" were Abdul Rahman Abbas who left school in 1947 and joined the Malayan Civil Service; Muhd Shukor bin Ali who was Editor of the School Magazine 1948 and later graduated from the prestigious London School of Economics (LSE); Satwant Singh (Dr.) who became Chairman, Kidney Foundation of Malaya; and Pretam Singh (Dr) who became Consultant Orthopedic Surgeon, Federation of Malaya. He was the son of Mr. Chanan Singh, a member of the teaching staff.

Of course, the youth whose steely determination had seen him through hard times at the Japanese classes of TOA SEINEN GAKKO, V.Pathmanathan also came back to continue his studies. He emerged as one of the school's brilliant scholars in the immediate post-war years. Having achieved excellence in the Cambridge Oversea School Certificate, he joined the Post School Certificate Class (PSCC) and thereafter became a freshman at University Malaya. During his senior years at KHS, he managed to write a piece, The Place of Business in The World of Today for the school magazine- an early indication that economics was his forte. But he was destined to be a "School Master" and had taught both in our Alma Mater and Sekolah Menengah Sains Selangor for some years before being elevated as Head Master of a prestigious primary school in Petaling Jaya.

As for Mr. T. Mailvahanam, he remained on the school's teaching staff for a while under a subsequent Head Master, Mr. G.W.L Clark. This writer didn't recall seeing him in the school scene post-1949. He just faded away, like the legendary old soldier.

LABOR OMNIA VINCIT

\* As recounted by Kang Buang (deceased) a long-time resident of Kajang and an alumnus of Kajang English School--- Han.Kamalbahrin

Lubis.

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**HANAFIAH LUBIS KHS 1956.**

POSTED BY HANAFIAH LUBIS AT 7:48 AM

LABELS: JAPANESE ARMY, KAJANG HIGH SCHOOL, WORLD WAR 2

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**1 COMMENT:**



**Philip Tan** July 10, 2021 at 2:00 AM

Hi Hanafiah Lubis,  
I am Ir. Dr. Philip Tan Ah Kow @ Tan Chee Lin. I am from KHS  
Class of 1962. Someone posted the article in our KHS 62  
WhatsApp chat-group. We read with keen interest on this  
part of the history of KHS which we never knew.  
Thank you very much.

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