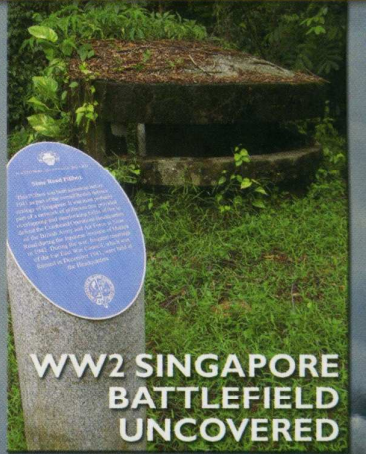


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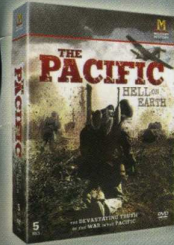
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• PARK LIFE •

REVEALING A HIDDEN BATTLEFIELD FROM THE FALL OF SINGAPORE

Nestling amidst the suburban sprawl of Singapore is a remarkable time capsule. The nineteen colonial “black and white” houses, built around 1928, that make up the Adam Park estate have been left untouched by the surrounding urban development. Yet sitting under the manicured gardens and lantern-lit gazebos is evidence of a more violent and poignant past.

Adam Park was the site of one of the most intensive periods of fighting in the battle for Singapore in February 1942. It was here that men of the 1st Battalion Cambridgeshire Regiment held off repeated attacks by the Japanese troops from the 41st (Fukuyama) Regiment, part of the Imperial Japanese Army's 5th Division, for over three days. In so doing, “The Fen Tigers”, as the men of the Cambridgeshire Regiment were nicknamed, became arguably the only Allied unit to successfully defend its allotted ground throughout the week-long invasion.

In early December 1941, the Japanese began their invasion of Malaya. With the help of numerically superior air forces, the Japanese gradually pushed the British and Commonwealth forces down the length of the Malay Peninsula until, towards the end of January 1941, the decision was made to withdraw the Allied forces from mainland Malaya and concentrate their efforts on defending Singapore.

The Cambridgeshire Regiment was part of the British 18th Division which, having

initially been en route to India, was landed at Singapore on 29 January 1941, to help reinforce the British garrison. The very last convoy of four vessels, bringing the tail-end of the 18th Division, arrived at Singapore on 5 February, ten days before the surrender.

The day after “The Fen Tigers” arrived, the causeway over the Strait of Johore, which linked Singapore with the Malay Peninsula, was destroyed. The siege of the island had begun.

The destruction of the causeway did not delay the Japanese for long and on the evening of 8 February their first landings on the island took place. The “Fen Tigers” had been ordered to defend the perimeter of Seletar airfield in north-east Singapore. However, following further Japanese insertions, one of the Cambridgeshire battalions was moved westwards to cover the Adam–Lornire road in a bid to stop the Japanese 5th Division breaking through the British lines to reach the strategically important pumping stations on the MacRitchie Reservoir and thus cutting the water supply to the city.

The regiment dug in and around the houses

MAIN PICTURE:

No.19 Adam Park. The serene splendour of this building today belies the fact that it was the scene of some of the heaviest fighting in the estate as ‘C’ Company, 1st Battalion Cambridgeshire Regiment fought a house-to-house action with the Japanese who had infiltrated into No.20 next door. (All images courtesy of TAPP/Jon Cooper)

BELOW:

A surviving concrete pill box in Adam Park's Sime Road – a concrete memorial. The structure was actually built to defend the RAF HQ in Sime Road and whilst an information panel has been erected, no mention is made of the desperate battle that raged around it from 13 to 15 February 1942.





ABOVE:
A metal detector survey in the front garden of No.17 Adam Park revealed over forty bullets and cartridges and the traces of no less than eight slit trenches. The building itself was used as the Regimental Aid Post by the Cambridgeshires.

RIGHT:
Mr Sogabe and Mr Inoue, historians for the 41st (Fukuyama) Regiment, are shown around the Adam Park battlefield by TAPP manager Jon Cooper. "If we can figure out why the defence of Adam Park was so successful," says Mr Cooper, "it may be possible to theorise about what would have happened had the British fallen back into similar positions all around the city".



across the Adam Park estate and hunkered down for what became a bitterly-fought siege. At one stage the Japanese infiltrated the lines and occupied adjacent buildings but were eventually forced out by "The Fen Tigers" in vicious house-to-house fighting.

By 15 February 1942, with Allied units on both flanks falling back, the 1st Battalion Cambridgeshire Regiment's CO, Lieutenant Colonel Carpenter, requested permission from his Brigade HQ to withdraw or face being cut off. The answer he got was somewhat surprising – the battalion was to stay where it was and lay down its arms as General Percival was surrendering Singapore!

Having been herded into a tennis court, the Cambridgeshires were marched off to Changi Prison on 19 February 1942. They left behind a scene of total devastation. Across the area where they had stood and fought the invading Japanese, houses were razed to the ground, lawns pot-marked with shell holes and slit trenches, and the dead lay unburied where they had fallen.

But remarkably that was not to be the end of the estate's war-time story. Two months later 2,000 Australian and 1,000 British PoWs (Leicestershires, East Surreys and Gordon Highlanders) were sent to Adam Park which had become PoW Camp No.1. These soldiers were part of the 10,000 strong work party tasked with building a Shinto Shrine on the adjacent Singapore Island Country Club golf course.

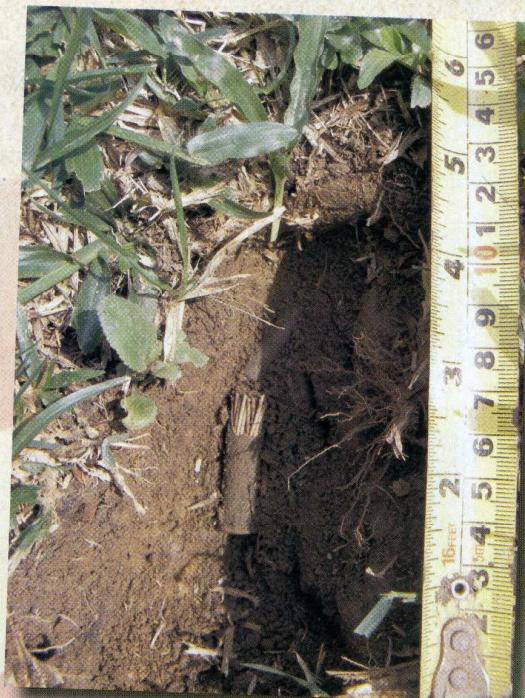
The PoWs made the best of a bad job and turned the bombed-out buildings into reasonable living quarters. With few Japanese on site to worry about and as long as there were the allotted amount of men sent to work each day, the PoWs

were left to sort out their own accommodation. The camp CO, Lieutenant Colonel R.F. Oakes, who had commanded the 2/26th Battalion AIF, and his staff created a military barracks with all the amenities one might expect in a camp back home. There was a surgery, dentist, canteen (run by the Chinese), orderly room, administration building, chapel and, of course, the camp theatre – The Tivoli.

The men lived in, under and around the remaining buildings with about 200 to

250 in each house. Work on the shrine was monotonous, strenuous and tedious. Beatings were a part of daily life, but on the whole the estate offered a reasonable level of comfort including clean sanitation and electric lighting. For the first few months there was little to stop the prisoners walking down to the Bukit Timah Road to trade with locals and catch up on the war news. However, as the months passed by, starvation and vitamin deficiency became a real threat.

Finally work on the shrine was completed. It was at this point news came of a new task for the prisoners – the men were to be used to build a railway. Many thought life in the new camps up country would mean better conditions. The first British contingents left Adam Park for Thailand in October 1942. The remaining Australians were moved into the neighbouring Sime Road camp and finally back to Changi as the Japanese started to run down Camp No.1.



LEFT:
For the TAPP team, it was "incredible" to find bullets and cartridges still intact just a few centimetres under the surface of the pristine gardens at Adam Park nearly seven decades after the bitter fighting that took place here in February 1942. The dangers of such finds only reinforce the need for such excavations to be made under considered and controlled circumstances – exactly as TAPP have done in their work at Adam Park.

struck me that these sites were not where the real fighting took place. In fact these sites were the places the Japanese were looking to bypass.

“Adam Park is the site of debatably the most extended and intense period of fighting in the whole campaign for Singapore so if we were to find evidence of the battle anywhere, it would be here. Not only that but we also have the remarkable bonus of surveying a PoW camp as well. This is a real headache for the archaeologists as the artefacts from both events

look very similar. But as Second World War heritage goes, it's a unique site which incredibly is still intact.”

building which was the location of the PoW camp chapel – here they hope to discover an intact mural behind post-war paintwork. But, points out Jon Cooper, this is no easy task: “Our biggest task at the moment is to raise the required funding – we have already been promised help by the National Heritage Board in Singapore but we need to match any government funds with those from other sponsors. We have reached a point where we cannot continue on the goodwill of volunteers alone – the surveys we have in mind, like finding the chapel murals, require specialised equipment and operators – and we need money to finance this.”

It is hoped that the project will not only unearth an incredible record of artefacts and information in time for the 70th anniversary of the fall of Singapore in 2012, but also, on a more practical level, identify the issues of working on such sites in a tropical, urban environment. TAPP's work at Adam Park will therefore serve as an important “blueprint” for further surveys of the many other Singapore battle sites. ■



ABOVE and RIGHT:

TAPP Volunteers unearth a WO1 rank badge from the front garden of 18 Adam Park. Whether it is from a Cambridgeshire soldier who fought here or a subsequent PoW is not known, though one can only contemplate the fate of the man who once wore it.



It was in January 2009 that The Adam Park Project (TAPP) was established with the aim of assessing the potential for Second World War battlefield archaeology in Singapore. The project team is a collaborative venture between the Singapore Heritage Society, archaeologists at the National University of Singapore and the Centre for Battlefield Archaeology at Glasgow University.

Jon Cooper, TAPP's manager, said: “Much of the Second World War heritage in Singapore has centred around ‘concrete’, i.e. the bunkers, pill boxes and gun emplacements that are dotted around the island, and it

Initial metal detector surveys in the front gardens of houses on the estate have unearthed a number of Second World War-related items including over eighty bullets and cartridges as well locating traces of slit trenches and foxholes in the lawns. One recent preliminary investigation carried out at No.20 Adam Park, in an area of garden destined to become a new veranda, led to the recovery of artefacts such as military buttons, coins and bullets – including a British SMLE charger with three unfired rounds of .303 ammunition.

The TAPP team is currently tracking down the



ABOVE RIGHT:

One of so many. Twenty-two-year-old Sergeant Sidney Tofts of the Reinforcement Company, 1st Battalion, Cambridgeshire Regiment, was killed whilst retaking Water Tower Hill in February 1942. Overlooking Adam Park, this position was initially overrun by the Japanese. Tofts lies in Kranji War Cemetery and is remembered on the Linton village war memorial in Cambridgeshire.

MAIN PICTURE:

Looking across a small valley towards No.13 Adam Park, a feature which became known as the “Valley of Death”. This was the view the Japanese soldiers of the 41st Regiment had of the estate as they launched consecutive attacks during the last two days of fighting in Singapore.

