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Author: Jon WORT



The Cross of Sacrifice, Rangoon Cemetery, Myanmar

A CONCISE BIOGRAPHY OF:

MAJOR H. P. SEAGRIM

A concise biography of Major Hugh Paul SEAGRIM, G.C., D.S.O., M.B.E., who served with the British Indian Army between 1939 and 1944: being awarded the George Cross for his gallantry.
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A Concise Biography of Major H. P. SEAGRIM

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Author: Jon Wort (copyright held by author)
Assisted by: Stephen HEAL and Robert PALMER
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Introduction

How many times have you walked past, or more likely, driven past a War Memorial and given it scant attention? Likewise, even on Remembrance Sunday when wreaths and poppies are laid, how many people give any attention to the names recorded on that memorial, let alone know about the lives of the men and women whose names appear on that memorial? I must admit that despite my passion in military history, I too have driven past several War Memorials without stopping and reading what is inscribed on them. In the town of Northam, not far from Bideford, North Devon, stands an imposing memorial erected in 1920. It is located at what is now a busy road junction on the entrance to the town centre and where the by-pass to Westward Ho! diverges. One day, I stopped and viewed the War Memorial, and to my surprise, I found two names on there that meant a lot to me: D. A. SEAGRIM and H. P. SEAGRIM. I knew that the former was the holder of the Victoria Cross, the U.K.'s. highest award for gallantry, and the latter the holder of the George Cross, the highest award for bravery while not in the face of the enemy. This is their story and their links with the town of Northam.



Figure 1 and 1A

Above – Northam War Memorial in North Devon.
 Right – The 1939 – 1945 Panel on the Northam War Memorial showing the names of D. A. SEAGRIM and H. P. SEAGRIM.

Taken by the Author (2019)

Major Hugh Paul SEAGRIM, G.C., D.S.O., M.C., was the youngest of five brothers, all of whom joined the British Army or British Indian Army prior to the Second World War. One of his elder brothers was Lieutenant Colonel Derek Anthony SEAGRIM, V.C. of The Green Howards. The award of the Victoria Cross and George Cross, the United Kingdom's highest awards for gallantry, to two siblings of the same family is unique.

The Victoria Cross is awarded to members of the Armed Forces for the highest acts of gallantry in the face of an enemy, in other words in battle. At the beginning of the Second World War, this left the dilemma of how to recognise acts of bravery by civilians or by members of the Armed Forces in situations other than in combat. The George Cross was instituted on 24 September 1940 by King George VI. The medal was introduced during the blitz of British towns and cities, to recognise the incidents of superb gallantry by civilians and members of the armed forces in situations other than in the face of the enemy. In a proclamation, King George VI stated:

In order that they should be worthily and promptly recognised, I have decided to create, at once, a new mark of honour for men and women in all walks of civilian life. I propose to give my name to this new distinction, which will consist of the George Cross, which will rank next to the Victoria Cross, and the George Medal for wider distribution.

The George Cross, and its lesser associated award, the George Medal, replaced the former Empire Gallantry Medal. They also replaced the Albert Medal and Edward Medal, which had been issued earlier in history, and holders of those medals could replace them with either the George Cross or George Medal as appropriate. Both the George Cross and George Medal can be awarded posthumously for: *'Acts of the greatest heroism or of the most conspicuous courage in circumstances of extreme danger.'*

Family Background

The Reverend Charles Paulet Cunningham SEAGRIM and his wife Annabel had five sons. The Reverend SEAGRIM, a former missionary in Basutoland and Cape Colony, was an able and very popular senior priest. The SEAGRIM family was steeped in military history – the boys' grandfather fought in the Crimea and spent many years in India. All five sons joined either the British Army or British Indian Army.

The eldest son, Charles Montagu Dudley SEAGRIM was born on 19 September 1900 in Colchester, Essex. He was commissioned in the Royal Artillery circa 1920 but retired on grounds of ill-health on 20 September 1930. Cyril Vivian SEAGRIM was born on 8 August 1902. He was commissioned in the Royal Engineers on 31 August 1922 (service number 14505). He served throughout the Second World War and retired on retirement pay on 7 March 1946. He was awarded the Order of the British Empire during the war and was granted the honorary rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

Derek Anthony SEAGRIM was born on 24 September 1903 at 14, Charminster Road, Bournemouth, in Dorset, England. Known as '*Bunny*' to family and friends, he attended the King Edward VI School in Norwich. He failed his entrance examination to the Royal Military College but was accepted after another prospective Gentleman Cadet dropped out. He was commissioned in The Green Howards (Alexandra, Princess of Wales's Own Yorkshire Regiment) on 30 August 1923, in the rank of Second Lieutenant.

John Halsted SEAGRIM was born on 24 September 1906 at Kingsclere in Hampshire. On passing out from the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, he commissioned in the Indian Army on 28 April 1928 (IA/637). He joined the 2nd Bn. 2nd Punjab Regiment, and served throughout the Second World War to retire on 15 October 1948 with the honorary rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

Hugh Paul SEAGRIM, the youngest of the five brothers, was born on 24 March 1909 in Ashmansworth, near the River Hamble, not far from Southampton. Hugh was less than a year old when his father became rector of Whissonsett-with-Horingtoft, two small adjoining villages about twenty miles from Norwich. The Reverend SEAGRIM remained in Whissonsett in Norfolk until his death on 4 May 1927, aged sixty-two years. Hugh, whose nickname in the family was '*Bumps*', played in the local cricket team with his brothers, went sailing on the Broads, rode ponies and shot pheasants. He attended the King Edward VI School Norwich. He was tall, dark, 'rather cadaverous' and wanted to be a doctor, however, when his father died, he felt the family would not be able to afford to send him to university. Hugh was eighteen years of age on the death of his father, and decided on a career in the military, which was common for young men whose family had little means and no other obvious career choice.

It was felt that four sons in the Army was quite enough for one family, but the Royal Navy turned Hugh down because he was colour blind. He too therefore went to Sandhurst. Like many a young officer of limited means, he opted for service with the Indian Army. After a one-year attachment to the Highland Light Infantry in Cawnpore, he was posted to the 19th Hyderabad Regiment.



Figure 2: Sign in Whissonsett - Photo Mike Bradley OBE



Figure 3: The village sign at Whissonsett

Derek Anthony SEAGRIM

Derek SEAGRIM served in Jamaica, Egypt, Palestine and China with the 2nd Battalion, The Green Howards. He was a good sportsman, being in the team that won the Army Athletics championship in 1923 and he played hockey for the battalion team that won the Egypt Championship in 1928. He was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant on 30 August 1925 and to the rank of Captain on 2 October 1935. For many Regular Army officers between the two World Wars, promotion was slow. In addition, routine Army life could be tedious, so many applied to be seconded to one of the British Colonial regiments. In addition, Regimental life in the U.K. could be expensive, but serving abroad was comparatively cost effective for young and single officers. Derek was employed with the King's African Rifles between 11 November 1930 and 11 September 1936, during which period he held the rank of Temporary Captain until he received his substantive promotion to that rank. On his return to his Regiment, Derek served in Palestine as an Intelligence officer with the 1st Battalion, for which he received the Palestine Medal and Clasp.

At the outbreak of the Second World War, Derek was an Air Liaison Officer in East Africa. This is shown in the Army List as a Temporary Special Appointment which lasted from 19 November 1937 until 7 October 1939. Derek SEAGRIM was promoted to the rank of Major on 30 August 1940 and served on the staff for the Greek Campaign in 1941. He was Mentioned in Despatches on 8 July 1941. Major SEAGRIM was promoted to the rank of Acting Lieutenant Colonel on taking command of the 7th Battalion, The Green Howards on 4 October 1942; just prior to the Second Battle of El Alamein in North Africa.

Four months later, his battalion were to attack at the strongest point of the Mareth Line in Tunisia. As they approached the start line, five-hundred yards from an anti-tank ditch, nine feet wide and nine feet deep, the night sky was lit up by exploding shells and tracer bullets. The element of surprise had gone, but the advance continued. Enemy gunfire was targeted on the tank ditch and the noise was deafening. A captain recalled SEAGRIM: *'just strolling around as if he was on the parade ground'*. As his men clambered up ladders on the other side of the ditch, they were met by a hail of machine-gun fire and the attack ground to a halt. Lieutenant Colonel SEAGRIM charged ahead and wiped out the machine-gunners with his revolver and grenades. His men followed and saw him tackle a second machine-gun post, personally killing or capturing about twenty Germans. His leadership led directly to the capture of the bastion. Throughout the night, SEAGRIM moved from post to post, directing fire against a wave of German counter-attacks. His orders had been to hold on at all costs, and he was determined to follow them. Throughout the following day, the battalion stood firm. It was a vital victory. Derek SEAGRIM was recommended for the immediate award of the Victoria Cross.¹ Fifteen days after the battle, he died of wounds sustained in the Battle of Wadi Akarit. Derek Anthony SEAGRIM died at a military hospital near Sfax on 6 April 1943. He is buried in Sfax War Cemetery, Tunisia, Plot XIV Row C Grave 21. His Victoria Cross is now on display in the Imperial War Museum.

¹ The citation for the award of the Victoria Cross is shown on Page 23.

Hugh Paul SEAGRIM



Major H. P. Seagrim, G.C., D.S.O., M.B.E.
Figure 4: Hugh Seagrim – From
'Grandfather Longlegs' by Ian Morrison

Hugh SEAGRIM was commissioned on the Unattached List for the Indian Army on 31 January 1929. As was usual for new officers joining the British Indian Army, Hugh SEAGRIM had to serve for a year with a British Army battalion stationed in India. He was admitted to the Indian Army on 9 August 1931 and promoted to the rank of Lieutenant. Although commissioned in the 19th Hyderabad Regiment, he was attached to the Burma Rifles and posted to Taiping in Malaya, joining the regiment as a twenty-two-year old subaltern. He was posted to the 1st Bn. The Burma Rifles, where he took three months leave to travel throughout Japan.

He liked and admired the Japanese. He was also fond of Burma and its people. SEAGRIM had to wait seven years for his next promotion, which was to the rank of Captain on 31 January 1938.

He passed his examination in spoken Burmese in just five weeks, a remarkable achievement. He travelled extensively through the Burmese countryside, usually accompanied by between six and a dozen Karen tribesmen from his rifle company. He felt it was important for an officer to: *'know the men he commanded'*. In Rangoon, he was famous at six foot four inches as a talented goalkeeper in the regimental football team and even played for the All-Burma side that beat the Islington Corinthian tourists in 1937. As the only European, he was named captain, but insisted the Karen centre-half should have the honour instead. He was not particularly sociable, refused to mix with the polo set and didn't drink much, but according to a fellow officer, was easily the best-liked man in the mess: *'One of the most amusing talkers I've ever known... to listen to him for five minutes was a tonic'*.

SEAGRIM enjoyed driving fast in his three-litre Bentley and later, on his motorbikes, Nortons and Ariel Square-Fours; powerful machines with Austin Seven engines. He loved music, read voraciously and, as a frequent sufferer of dysentery, experimented with novel diets. He once existed for twenty-five days on just water, fruit juices and milk. The general feeling among SEAGRIM's fellow officers seems to have been that he was eccentric, clever, delightful and occasionally odd. Maybe even the man himself, who often said he would rather be a postman in Norfolk than a general in India, didn't realise the immense courage within.

Force 136

Following the Fall of France in 1940, a new volunteer force of very brave individuals was raised to wage a secret war against Hitler's armies. This special force was called the Special Operations Executive, and their mission was to carry out sabotage and subversion behind enemy lines. On 16 July 1940, Hugh DALTON, a civilian, was appointed by Winston Churchill with the orders to 'set Europe ablaze'.



Figure 5: Force 136

In addition to Europe, this same fervour to raise Special Forces was also apparent in the Far East. As soon as war was declared by the Japanese, a number of British soldiers were sent from Singapore to Rangoon to prepare Burma's defences against Japanese attack. In addition, in the event that Burma should fall, they were to ensure all industrial support would be denied to the Japanese. Meanwhile Burma's Governor, Reginald DORMAN-SMITH, appointed H. N. C. STEVENSON, Assistant Superintendent at Kutkai in the northern Shan States, to raise a countrywide levy force, to stem the impending invasion. STEVENSON was chosen because he had some success training Kachin tribesmen to become guerrilla fighters.

In Malaya, 'left behind' parties were also being raised in the event of any Japanese invasion. Sadly, the fall of Singapore meant that they were not fully trained and in position before the Japanese landed and took Singapore. One notable exception was Major Freddie Spencer CHAPMAN, who spent four years behind the lines blowing up railways and other strategic targets, whilst evading capture from the Japanese.



Figure 6: A Karen Levy - from 'Grandfather Longlegs' by Ian Morrison

STEVENSON immediately appointed a British Major, Hugh SEAGRIM, to help organise the Karen levies. SEAGRIM, who at the time war broke out was in India, flew back to Rangoon and immediately went to Papun, only twenty miles away from the Thai border, to form what would become the first of the Karen levy corps.

The Karen police had already come under attack from Thai border forces, with one raid on the local police station seeing the Karen inspector killed. Although fighting was not constant, more raids were expected, and it was hoped that SEAGRIM and his men would be able to stop any further incursions. SEAGRIM decided to move his base of operations away from Papun to Pyagawpu, three days march from Papun and surrounded by a number of smaller Karen villages. Over eight-hundred villagers answered the call to arms. However, due to lack of weapons, once they had been enlisted most of them were sent back. SEAGRIM divided the levies into areas; SAW WILLIE SAW, a forest ranger, was responsible for the areas around Kadaingti; SAW DARLINGTON, a former teacher and carpenter at a Wesleyan mission school was responsible for the Papun area; while Pyagawpu fell under the jurisdiction of SAW DIGAY, an influential lumber contractor.

Further north in Taungoo, over three-thousand Karens were recruited to defend northern Karen state and the essential road to Mawchi. Once again, the numbers of Karen volunteers easily surpassed the weapons and equipment available. The Karens fought valiantly against the Japanese who were advancing towards Taungoo with the objective of securing the airfield, which at the time, was defended by one Karen Company and the Chinese 5th Army. Although Taungoo eventually fell, the Karen Company, commanded by Captain A. THOMPSON, and consisting of about one-hundred and fifty men, was able to inflict heavy casualties against the Japanese forces before being forced to retreat. As they withdrew, they blew up a number of bridges, thereby delaying the Japanese advance by several days.

The Burma Independence Army (B.I.A.) first entered Burma in January 1942. One group entered via the south at Victoria Point, another at Tavoy, one more at Messow and the fourth and largest contingent, which included AUNG SAN and Colonel SUZUKI, entering via Moulmein. There had been suggestions that the invasion would take place via the Shan States, some strategists (including STEVENSON) believing that Yunnan would split from China and declare allegiance to Tokyo, but such fears were unfounded, with the Shan States being left to the Thais, commanded by PHIN CHOONAVAN, and his son, later prime-minister CHATICHAI, who captured Kengtung in May 1942.

Initial public reaction to the B.I.A.'s advance was good, with most Burmese cheering the arrival of what was seen as a force of liberation. Large numbers flocked to join the B.I.A., which found its ranks further swelled by the release of prisoners. Although many of the new recruits were unarmed, they were able to obtain further weaponry from looted military and police installations.



Figure 7: Lt Ba Gyaw

While many Burmans supported the B.I.A., the Karens, long-time adversaries of the Burmans, continued to support the British. As past racial animosities once more rose to the fore, the Karens were to find themselves the victims of a rampaging ill-trained militia bent on ethnic destruction. The B.I.A. found very little resistance from the British, who had already decided to withdraw from Rangoon. The Karens in the Burma Military Police, amid rumours of clashes between Burmans and Karens and realising that their families and villages were at risk, immediately began deserting with what weapons they could find and returned to protect their families. It was not only the Karens that were in danger from marauding dacoits practising a form of lawlessness that had been part of the Burmese way of life for years, but also fleeing Indians, who were following the great exodus to India from the advancing Japanese.

Late in 1942, Force 136, an organisation set up by the Special Operations Executive (S.O.E.), agreed a plan to drop four Karen parachutists into the Karen Hills. The four, led by BA KYAW, were to scout the location where they were dropped, to see if it was safe for a transmitter to be placed there. The intention was for the unit to assess the safety aspects of dropping two British officers; Major (ABRO/274) James Russell NIMMO and Captain Eric John McCRINDLE, together with a team of Karen radio operators into the Salween area. They were to link up with SEAGRIM and establish an intelligence and sabotage network.

During the night of 18 February 1943, SAW BA GYAW and his comrades were dropped into the hills, however, due to weather conditions it was impossible to drop the transmitter. The R.A.F. persevered over the coming month and eventually it was decided that NIMMO and five other Karens should parachute into the hills, bringing the transmitter with them. Finally, on 12 October 1943, they were able to land and two days later made contact with SEAGRIM and BA GYAW. In quite a remarkable feat of signalling, they were in contact with India on 15 October.

It was whilst working in the jungle that Hugh SEAGRIM carried out an action that was to have far-reaching and long-term effects. AUNG SAN had been appointed as Commander-in-Chief of the Burma Defence Army (later the Burma National Army), which was set up under very tight Japanese control in an attempt to allow BA MAW to remain as the head of a puppet government for Burma. It did not take AUNG SAN long to realise that what he meant by independence and what the Japanese were prepared to allow were poles apart. Indeed, it soon became apparent that he had exchanged an old master, albeit a benign one, for an infinitely tyrannical new one. As one of his followers said to General SLIM, General Officer Commanding-in-Chief 14th Army: *'If the British sucked our blood, the Japanese ground our bones!'*

AUNG SAN became progressively more disillusioned with the Japanese, so early in 1943, SEAGRIM managed to pass news to General SLIM's headquarters that AUNG SAN's feelings were changing. On 1 August 1944, AUNG SAN was bold enough to speak openly and publicly about the Japanese and their idea of independence for Burma, his beloved country.

Force 136 and its agents, with the full approval of Admiral MOUNTBATTEN, offered AUNG SAN a safe conduct to General SLIM's headquarters with a promise that agreement or not, he would be returned unharmed to his own people. On 15 May, he crossed the Irrawaddy at Allanmayo, to where General SLIM sent an aircraft to take him to his headquarters at Meiktila the next day. Whether Hugh SEAGRIM's part in this was of great significant is unclear, but General SLIM in his book *Defeat to Victory* clearly indicates that he was a part of a process that would have long-term consequences.² It is doubtful that either of them could have foretold the consequences of AUNG SAN's subsequent assassination, and his daughter's (AUNG SAN SUU KYI) subsequent long-term imprisonment and her rise to fame as 'the Lady'.

One story surrounding the visit is worthy of retelling. When AUNG SAN was asked why he felt that he could leave Burma and travel to see SLIM, and not be held prisoner, his answer was simply that General SLIM was a British General and therefore he would keep his word. For the most part, SEAGRIM relied on receiving most of his information from SAW PO HLA, a delta Karen born near Myaungmya. PO HLA had been educated at Rangoon University and graduated with degrees in Religion and Philosophy. After working for the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company, he joined the 11th Battalion, The Burma Rifles. When the Japanese started searching for ex-Burma Rifles soldiers, he escaped and after an informer reported him to the Kenpeitai, eventually fled and found his way to SEAGRIM in the summer of 1943. PO HLA was responsible for travelling through the hills, conveying messages and receiving information. On one trip to Rangoon, PO HLA had also been able to meet two Karen leaders working with the Burmese government, HENSON KYA DOE and SAN PO THIN. From them he learnt that there was much discontent within the Burma Defence Army. This was the former Burma National Army (B.N.A.), which was renamed in 1943. In addition, he learned that AUNG SAN and its leaders were already planning to revolt against the Japanese in the near future.

By early 1944, SEAGRIM had been joined by another parachutist, Captain McCRINDLE; while NIMMO, and three Karen parachutists, had set up their own camp north of the Mawchi road. The number of parachutists dropping into the Salween area had not gone unnoticed by the Japanese, and soon seventeen Japanese soldiers, claiming to be from a goods distribution unit, arrived in Papun. Obviously, news of this influx of Japanese soldiers was soon conveyed to SEAGRIM and as part of his attention to detail and secrecy he moved his camp near to the village of Komupwado, about ten miles south-west of Pyagawgpu

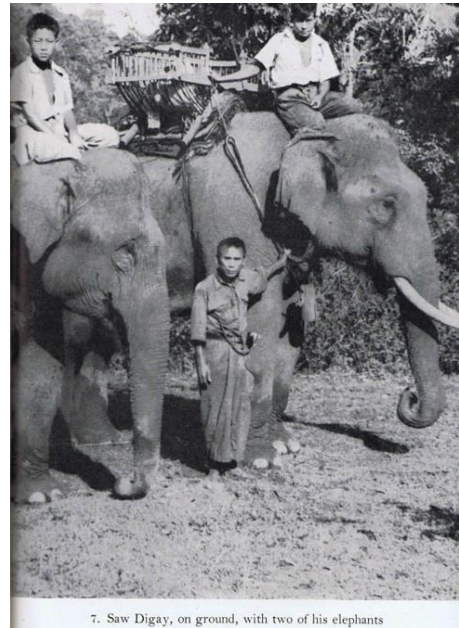
² *Defeat into Victory* by Field Marshall Sir William Slim GCB, GCMG, GCVO, GBE, DSO, MC Page 516

For PO HLA, there was worse news. The Japanese had heard about his trip to Rangoon and his meeting with SAN PO THIN. The Kenpeitai had arrested his parents, his fiancé, some relatives and some of his contacts in Rangoon.

Fearing for the welfare of his relatives, PO HLA planned to deceive the Japanese by spinning them a bogus story concocted by SEAGRIM and McCRINDLE. He surrendered to the Japanese on 23 January. Fortunately, the Japanese believed his story and treated him well, including asking him to help in obtaining the support of the Karen community.



Figure 9: Lt. Motoichi INOUE



7. Saw Digay, on ground, with two of his elephants

Figure 8:

However, while PO HLA was in Rangoon, a Kenpeitai detachment, under the command of Captain Motoichi INOUE, arrived in Kyuakkyi. The Kenpeitai were the military police arm of the Imperial Japanese Army, but unlike the Corps of Military Police in the British Army, the Kenpeitai were responsible for security. At the same time as they were putting on cinema shows for the villagers and giving sweets to children, the Kenpeitai set about brutally interrogating the locals as to the whereabouts of SEAGRIM and the Karens fighting for him.

One man, an ex-Burma Rifles Jemadar called MAUNG WAH, was brutally beaten for three days, until the Japanese, realising he was not going to give them any information, gave him an ultimatum. He was told to go to the hills and return with the whereabouts of SEAGRIM, a map of his camp and sentry posts and if he did not return in one week, action would be taken against the old man's family. On arriving at SEAGRIM's camp, MAUNG WAH told the British officer everything that had happened and asked SEAGRIM to contact India and ask them to drop weapons so that the levies in Kyuakkyi might fight against the Japanese. This SEAGRIM did, but India refused, saying now was not the time for a Karen uprising.

SEAGRIM told the old man to go back and tell the Japanese what he knew. Unfortunately, by the time he returned home he discovered that the Japanese had already extracted the information, by torture, of a young levy following the Kenpeitei's discovery of the village's hidden arms cache.

The next day reinforcements of a Japanese Infantry regiment were drafted into the area and they set off into the hills to capture SEAGRIM and his party. The Kenpeitai and Japanese infantry travelled into the jungle with the young levy and PO HLA, (whose role in the deceit was now known) and they arrived in Pyagawgpu. Here they arrested a number of elders, including one of SEAGRIM's most trusted friends, TA ROE. They forced them to lead them to Komupwado. SEAGRIM had already left his base, after being contacted by MAUNG WAH, as he had decided it was best for his own safety to keep moving.

Capture

For SEAGRIM, time was running out. The Japanese, on their return to Pyagawgpu, came upon four young Karens who fled at their sight. One was caught and forced into disclosing that he had helped SEAGRIM. He was tortured, which led to his revealing the whereabouts of SEAGRIM's camp. The Japanese once more deployed into the hills, on the way meeting a number of Karen Police, including a young officer called BO MYA, who would later rise to the lead the Karen struggle into to the 21st Century. They were led to Kaw Moh Baw Der village, close to where the British were camping.

The Japanese surrounded the camp and a fire fight ensued in which McCRINDLE was fatally shot. SEAGRIM and the rest of the party were able to escape into the thick jungle. However, in retaliation for the death of a Japanese corporal, who had fallen at the hands of McCRINDLE, the villagers in the area were constantly harassed, tortured and beaten on a daily basis. Captain Eric John McCRINDLE was killed on 15 February 1944, aged thirty-two years, and is commemorated on Face 11 of the Rangoon Memorial.

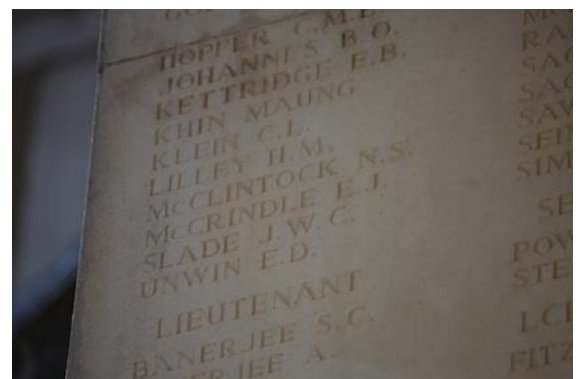


Figure 10: Face 11 Rangoon Memorial

NIMMO, who had set up his own camp in the north not far from Mawtudo, was to face a similar fate to that of McCRINDLE. Using information probably found in Komupwado, a detachment of Kenpeitai from Taungoo arrived and began torturing the local Karen villagers in the area. Information as to the whereabouts of NIMMO was beaten out of the one of the locals finally and the Kenpeitai soon surrounded his camp. NIMMO died instantly as he emerged from his tent, revolver in hand. A number of Karen levies were wounded with a larger group being able to escape.



Figure 11: Maj J R Nimmo DSO buried in Rangoon War Cemetery

Thirty-one-year-old Major James Russell NIMMO was also killed on 15 February 1944. He is buried in Rangoon War Cemetery in grave 2.G.17. He was born in Falkirk, Scotland, and graduated with a B.A. from Canterbury. He then went out to Burma to work prior to the war, so joined the Army in Burma Reserve of Officers (A.B.R.O.) in the rank of Lieutenant in 1940.

He was made a Companion of the Distinguished Service Order (D.S.O.) on 13 January 1944, on publication in the London Gazette. His citation reads:

On the 12th October 1943, this officer was dropped by parachute 380 miles inside Burma for the purpose of establishing wireless communication with India, and collecting personnel who remained after the Japanese invasion and who were believed still to exist under the leadership of Major SEAGRIM. Captain (A/Major) NIMMO has since succeeded in both these tasks, which present an earnest to British intentions to reconquer Burma, until which time he is committed to remain within it.

The fact that this officer has had to undergo the strain of preparing himself to carry out this hazardous mission each moon period since February 1943 owing to bad climatic conditions, coupled with the skill with which he has fulfilled each task, reflects determination, courage, devotion to duty of a very high order.

For security reasons, this citation should not be published.

Life for the Karen villagers became intolerable. Angry that SEAGRIM should remain at large, the Japanese intensified their persecution of the villagers and their reign of terror. Parties of Japanese were stationed in the larger villages, and the local people were forcibly organised into groups to search the hills. All this time, they suffered the brutal ill-treatment and beatings meted out by the Kenpeitai. SEAGRIM's location eventually became known when one of the survivors (PA AH) from the attack on his camp surrendered, when faced with the threat against his family in Mewado from the Japanese Kenpeitai.

PA HA could see men being beaten and hear the most pitiful moans and groans and although his story of hiding in the jungle since the ambush on SEAGRIM's base had been believed, he had to talk to someone to unburden his mind. Unfortunately, he chose that same young Karen who, early in February, had revealed SEAGRIM's presence to the Japanese.

The young Karen went straight to Captain INOUE and told him that SEAGRIM was now at Mewado. Captain INOUE set off immediately for Mewado, taking both PA AH and the young Karen, together with some Kenpeitai men. At Mewado, he summoned the headman and told him that unless he revealed SEAGRIM's exact whereabouts, his village would be burned to the ground and all the villagers, men, women and children would be arrested.

The headman said that he would see SEAGRIM in the morning and all night wrestled with his conscience, praying to God and seeking guidance. In the morning he went to SEAGRIM and asked, "*What shall we do?*" OHN GYAW suggested suicide, but SEAGRIM chided him, saying that it was unlike a Christian to take his own life. He himself would go down and give himself up to the Japanese. Only by doing so did he believe that the atrocities to the Karens would cease. His own duty, he said, was quite clear. Although telling OHN GYAW to remain in hiding in the hills, the young Karen insisted on staying with SEAGRIM.

Before setting off down the hill, SEAGRIM gave the headman his watch and asked him to look after it and send it to his mother in England. The three of them went down to Mewado. SEAGRIM surrendered to INOUE who was staying in the brother-in-law's house. When SEAGRIM arrived at the house, he shook hands with INOUE and accepted a cigarette from him; the first he had smoked for two years. Although being offered the packet, SEAGRIM refused and almost the first thing he said to INOUE through the Burmese interpreter was: '*Treat the Karens generously. They are not to blame. I alone am responsible for what has happened in the hills.*'

They then travelled together through Papun and on to Rangoon, where he was imprisoned in the New Law Courts. Despite assurances from INOUE that those Karens who had helped him would be left alone, he was soon joined by DIGAY, DARLINGTON, WILLIE SAW, PO HLA and the old man MAUNG WAH, among many others. They were moved subsequently six miles outside of Rangoon to the main Jail at Insein, an area which is not only famous for holding the largest Burmese prison, but also one of the largest Karen areas in the Burmese capital.

Imprisonment and Execution

On 2 September 1944, Major Shunjii KOGA of the Japanese army passed sentence on SEAGRIM and his party. Major KOGA read out the sentence: *The following are sentenced to death – Major SEAGRIM, Lieutenant BA GYAW, SAW HE BE, SAW TUN LWIN, SAW SUNNY, SAW PE, SAW PETER, SAW AH DIN.*

The following ten Karens are sentenced to eight years' rigorous imprisonment:

SAW PO HLA, SAW TA ROE, SAW DIGAY, THRA MAY SHA, THRA KYAW LAY, SAW RUPERT, SAW HENRY, PO MYIN, SAW THA SAY, SAQ YAY.

It was translated into English and Karen.

Although he undoubtedly had the opportunity to escape the firing squad, SEAGRIM refused to beg for mercy or make any other attempts to placate his Japanese captors. Instead, he stepped forward and said: *'First you said that I would be treated honourably as a Prisoner-of-War. Now you sentence me to death. I do not mind what you do to me. But, I do ask you, if you are going to punish anyone, punish only me. Do not punish these Karens. It is only because of me that all these Karens have got into trouble. This war is between the Japanese and the British, not between the Japanese and the Karens. I beg you to release all these Karens here.'*

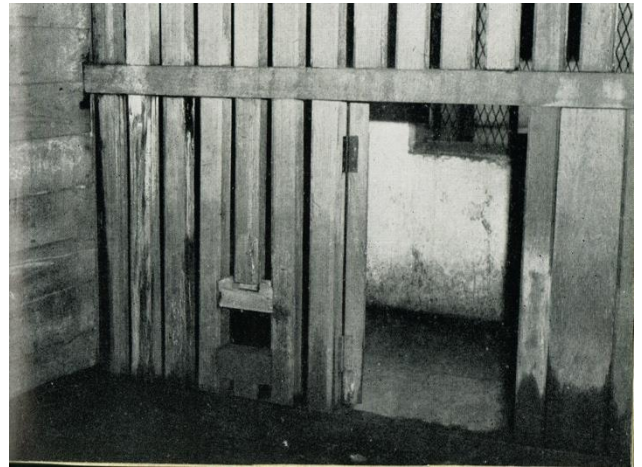


Figure 12: A cell at Rangoon Prison - from Grandfather Longlegs by Ian Morrison



Figure 13: Execution Ground - from Grandfather Longlegs by Ian Morrison

On Thursday, 14 September 1944, Major Hugh SEAGRIM was executed, along with seven Karens. Their bodies were dumped in a communal grave at Kemmendine Cemetery, Rangoon. Post war, their bodies were exhumed and are now buried in a collective grave 4A 13-20 in Rangoon Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery in Myanmar.

Major Hugh Seagrim

Rank: Major

Service No: 49359

Date of Death: 14/09/1944

Age: 35

Regiment/Service: 19th

Hyderabad Regiment³

Awards: G C, D S O, M B E

Grave Reference: Coll. grave 4. A.
13-20.



³ Although recorded as Hyderabad Regiment, Major Seagrim was actually serving with the Burma Rifles at the time of his death.

<p>Lieutenant Ba Gyaw Rank: Lieutenant Date of Death: Between 01/01/1944 and 31/12/1946 Regiment/Service: Karen Rifles, 1st Bn. Grave Reference: Coll. grave 4. A. 13-20.</p>	
<p>Saw He Be Rank: Recruit Date of Death: Between 01/01/1946 and 31/12/1946 Regiment/Service: Karen Rifles, 1st Bn. Grave Reference: Coll. grave 4. A. 13-20.</p>	
<p>Saw Tun Lwin Rank: Rifleman Service No: 50134 Date of Death: 27/03/1946 Regiment/Service: Burma Rifles, 2nd Bn. Grave Reference: Coll. grave 4. A. 13-20.</p>	

<p>Saw Sunny⁴ Rank: Recruit Date of Death: Between 01/01/1944 and 31/12/1946 Regiment/Service: Karen Rifles, 1st Bn. Grave Reference: Coll. grave 4. A. 13-20.</p>	 A black rectangular gravestone with a gold-colored circular emblem at the top center. The text "SAW SAN AYE" and "KAREN RIFLES" is engraved in gold below the emblem.
<p>Saw Pe Rank: Recruit Date of Death: Between 01/01/1944 and 31/12/1946 Regiment/Service: Karen Rifles, 1st Bn. Grave Reference: Coll. grave 4. A. 13-20.</p>	 A black rectangular gravestone with a gold-colored circular emblem at the top center. The text "SAW PE" and "KAREN RIFLES" is engraved in gold below the emblem.
<p>Saw Peter Rank: Gunner Service No: 2727 Date of Death: Between 01/02/1944 and 29/02/1944 Regiment/Service: Burma Auxiliary Force Grave Reference: Coll. grave 4. A. 13-20.</p>	 A black rectangular gravestone with a gold-colored circular emblem at the top center. The text "2727 GUNNER", "SAW PETER", "BURMA AUXILIARY FORCE", and "FEBRUARY 1944" is engraved in gold below the emblem.

⁴ Anglicized spelling taken from Grandfather Longlegs by Ian Morrison

Saw Ah Din

Rank: Recruit

Date of Death: Between 01/01/1944
and 31/12/1946

Regiment/Service: Karen Rifles, 1st Bn.

Grave Reference: Coll. grave 4. A. 13-20.



Remembrance

At their old school, King Edward the VI, (now named Norwich School), a house is named Seagrim House after the two distinguished Old Norvicensians who attended the school during the 1920s. They were both prefects and first team sportsmen, leaving the school in 1920 and 1927 respectively, to attend the commissioning course at RMA Sandhurst and become professional soldiers.

In the village of Whissonsett, where 'Bumps' and 'Bunny' grew up with their parents and three brothers, there is a Saxon-style cross in memory of the two gallant brothers, erected on the village green. It was unveiled in June 1985.



Figure 14: The plaque at Whissonsett village presented by the Karen people.

A small party of Karen tribesmen travelled from Burma to the dedication and placed a plaque on the pillar of the cross in remembrance of Hugh SEAGRIM, who they had nicknamed 'Grandfather Longlegs'.

Both men are also commemorated on the War Memorial in the town of Northam in North Devon. This is because following the death of their father in 1927, their mother went to live at 7 Nelson Terrace, Westward Ho! This village being part of the town of Northam. Both the sons left their estates to their mother. Derek left an estate of £1,984 19s 10d, and Hugh left an estate of £3,891 15s 7d. The home addresses of both Derek and Hugh were given as 7, Nelson Terrace. This was in fact the home address of their mother's twin sister, Vera Georgina Pellew LANE (nee SKIPPER). Vera had married Charles Middleton Robert Douglas-LANE on 11 August 1900, a year after the death of his first wife. By 1911, they were living in a house called 'Fairholme', in Bideford, North Devon. Charles and Vera had one son and one daughter and employed five domestic servants. Charles is shown in the 1911 Census as living by private means. Charles and Vera moved to 7, Nelson Terrace by 1931, and Charles died there on 20 August 1931. He left an estate of over £6,000 to two stockbrokers in London. Vera continued to live in Westward Ho! and died in Bideford on 27 January 1961, aged eighty-four years. It is presumed that Annabel went to live with her sister in 1927, and following the death of her sister, she spent the last two years of her life living at The Nook, Iwerne Minster, Dorset. She died there on 24 January 1963, aged eighty-six years.

Award Citations

Victoria Cross (VC) – Lt Col Derek Anthony Seagrim⁵

The award of the Victoria Cross to Lieutenant Colonel SEAGRIM was published in the London Gazette on 13 May 1943:

The KING has been graciously pleased to approve the posthumous award of the VICTORIA CROSS to: Major (temporary Lieutenant-Colonel) Derek Anthony Seagrim (26914) The Green Howards (Alexandra Princess of Wales Own Yorkshire Regiment) (Westward Ho Devon). On the night of the 20th/21st March 1943 the task of a Battalion of the Green Howards was to attack and capture an important feature on the left flank of the main attack on the Mareth Line. The defence of this feature was very strong, and it was protected by an anti-tank ditch twelve feet wide and eight feet deep with minefields on both sides.

It formed a new part of the main defences of the Mareth Line and the successful capture of this feature was vital to the success of the main attack. From the time the attack was launched, the Battalion was subjected to the most intense fire from artillery, machine-guns and mortars and it appeared more than probable that the Battalion would be held up entailing failure of the main attack. Realizing the seriousness of the situation, Lieutenant-Colonel SEAGRIM placed himself at the head of his Battalion, which was at the time suffering heavy casualties, and led it through a hail of fire. He personally helped the team, which was placing the scaling ladder over the anti-tank ditch and was himself the first to cross it.

He led the assault firing his pistol, throwing grenades and personally assaulting two machine-gun posts which were holding up the advance of one of his Companies. It is estimated that in this phase he killed and captured twenty Germans. This display of leadership and personal courage led directly to the capture of the objective. When dawn broke, the Battalion was firmly established on the position, which was of obvious importance to the enemy who immediately made every effort to regain it. Every post was mortared and machine-gunned unmercifully, and movement became practically impossible, but Lieutenant-Colonel SEAGRIM was quite undeterred. He moved from post to post organising and directing the fire until the attackers were wiped out to a man.

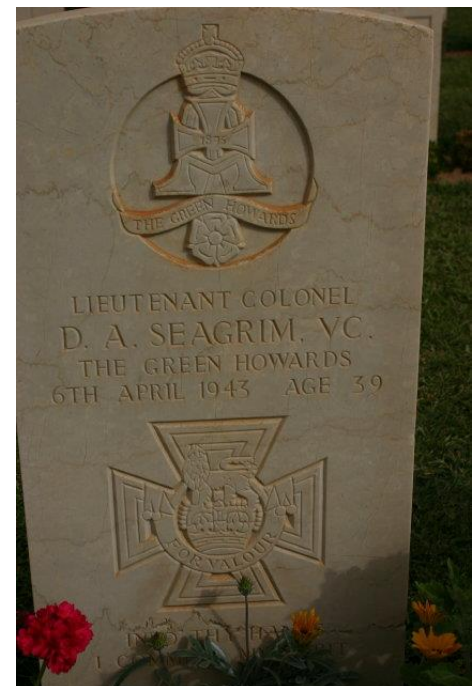


Figure 15: Lt Col D A Seagrim VC - photo by Mike Bradley OBE

⁵ The Whissonsett War Memorial lists Lt Col Seagrim's first name as Derick. The Sfax War Cemetery in Tunisia has a headstone marked Lt. Col. D. A. SEAGRIM, VC. Most Victoria Cross lists have Lt Col Seagrim's first name as Derek.

By his valour, disregard for personal safety, and outstanding example, he so inspired his men that the Battalion successfully took and held its objective thereby allowing the attack to proceed. Lieutenant Colonel SEAGRIM subsequently died of wounds received in action.

Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE) – Maj Hugh Paul Seagrim⁶

Major SEAGRIM's award of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire was published in the London Gazette on 28 October 1942:

It was to this officer's faith in the Karen that the formation of the Karen Levies was largely due. For weeks, he sat several days' march behind the Japanese forward positions and trained Karen irregulars. His presence and training maintained Karen morale and friendship to us long after the civil administration had ceased to exist and our armies had retreated north. His actions in thus living behind the enemy will prove of great benefit to us when we counter-attack, for he built up a useful number of guerrillas who on several occasions' resisted incursions by pro-Jap Burmese rebel bands.

Distinguished Service Order (DSO) – Maj Hugh Paul Seagrim⁷

Major SEAGRIM's award of the Distinguished Service Order was published in the London Gazette on 13 January 1944:

This officer has remained 880 miles within enemy-held territory since its occupation by the Japanese forces in April, 1942. During this period, he has sustained the loyalty of the local inhabitants of a very wide area and thereby has provided the foundation of a pro-British force whenever occupying forces arrive in that area. This officer has now been contacted by Major NIMMO, A.B.R.O., and is passing valuable military intelligence by wireless. The fact that he has remained alone in constant danger and has maintained pro-British sympathies in such adverse circumstances, has proved his determination, courage and devotion to be of the highest order.

⁶ Grandfather Longlegs – The life and gallant death of Major H P Seagrim GC, DSO, MBE By: Ian Morrison – Appendix 6.

⁷ Ibid.

George Cross (GC) – Major Hugh Paul Seagrim

Major SEAGRIM's award of the George Cross was published in the London Gazette on 12 September 1946:

The KING has been graciously pleased to approve the posthumous award of the GEORGE CROSS, in recognition of most conspicuous gallantry in carrying out hazardous work in a very brave manner, to: Major (Temporary) Hugh Paul SEAGRIM, D.S.O., M.B.E. (IA.985) 19th Hyderabad Regiment (now The Kumaon Regiment), Indian Army.

Although the citation for his George Cross is not gazetted the following extract is taken from his biography 'Grandfather longlegs' by Ian Morrison:

Major Seagrim was the leader of a party, including two British and one Karen officers, which operated in the Karen Hills, Burma from February, 1943 to February, 1944.

Towards the end of 1943 the presence of this party became known to the Japanese who commenced a widespread campaign of arrests and torture in order to discover his whereabouts. In February, 1944 the two British officers with Major SEAGRIM were located, ambushed and killed, but Major SEAGRIM and the Karen officer escaped.



Figure 16: Maj Hugh Seagrim's Headstone - Rangoon Cemetery, Myanmar

The capture of the two British officers' equipment furnished the enemy with all the information they required of Major SEAGRIM's activities and they accordingly redoubled their efforts to locate him. Captured documents show that the Japanese arrested at least 270 people including elders and headmen. Many of these were tortured and killed in the most brutal fashion.

In spite of this, the Karens continued to assist and shelter Major SEAGRIM, but the enemy managed to convey a message to him that if he surrendered, they would cease reprisals Major SEAGRIM accordingly did so about March 15, 1944.

He was immediately conveyed to Rangoon along with certain other members of his party. On September 2, together with eight others, he was sentenced to death. On hearing the sentence Major SEAGRIM pleaded that the others be excused since they had had to obey his orders and that he alone should suffer the death sentence.

Throughout his sojourn in jail, he made every effort to comfort his men and sustain their courage by his Christian example, and the degree to which he had inspired them may be realised from the fact that they all expressed their willingness to die with him. The death sentence on Major SEAGRIM was carried out shortly afterwards.

There can hardly be a finer example of self-sacrifice and bravery than that exhibited by this officer who in cold blood deliberately gave himself up to save others, knowing well what his fate was likely to be at the hands of the enemy.

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Major H. P. SEAGRIM

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Authors: Jon WORT; Robert PALMER M.A.

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