

## **Mrs Elizabeth Appleton Fidoe and the massacre at St Stephens College**

-Phillip Cracknell

Mrs Elizabeth ('Emma') Appleton Fidoe was working as a volunteer military nurse at St Stephen's College Temporary Hospital in Stanley. There had been close-quarter fighting all around the grounds of St Stephens College and the nearby Prep School throughout 24 and 25 December. Early in the morning on 25 December, the Japanese troops burst into the hospital killing the doctor in charge, Lt-Colonel Black and his Second-in-Command, Captain Witney. They then charged into the wards bayoneting patients in their beds in a scene of absolute horror and carnage. This is one of several appalling massacres committed by Japanese troops in the Battle for Hong Kong.

Although these war crimes happened a long time ago one can still feel a sense of outrage for what happened. This is not helped by the failure of Japan to adequately apologize or even admit that these things happened at all. They have not managed to come to terms with their war history, in the way for example that Germany has - instead it has been swept under the carpet, sometimes denied and many young Japanese have no idea what their armies did in the countries they invaded and why this is still a sensitive subject in many parts of Asia.

I can accept there were mitigating circumstances in that machine guns were being fired from the college grounds and possibly from the college buildings, and this may explain the Japanese coming into to the hospital very hard, but this would not justify bayoneting wounded patients in their beds or the torturing of surrendered soldiers - some of whom had their ears cut off and their eyes gouged out; nor the rape and murder of European and Chinese nurses. Emma Fidoe survived the massacre, but she was raped, beaten and abused by Japanese soldiers.

### **Statement of Sister Miss Amelia Fleming Gordon Territorial Army Nursing Service**

On the evening of 23 December, **Mrs Fidoe** and I and all the VADs returned to Sisters Quarters (Dr Pope's House) to find that it had been taken over as the HQ of the Canadian troops. Lt Col Home, Royal Rifles of Canada was surprised to see us and advised us to return to the hospital. However, we stayed there for the night and returned at crack of dawn. On the road down to the hospital, I noticed that the whole route was trenched and occupied by troops with machine guns.

December 24 was a dreadful day - we were shelled, machine-gunned and dive-bombed throughout the day. However, we were so busy that I had no time to actually notice what was going on outside. Dr Hackett arrived from the Prison Hospital with a view to taking our worst cases, eventually taking twelve. He also took with him Captains Lynch and Spence, Lt Ashton-Rose, Dr Balean and several orderlies.

All staff remained in the hospital on the night of 24/25 December. I, **Mrs Fidoe** and five VADs lay down in the Pack Store of the hospital (main building adjacent to the office). The noise was so terrific and the bombing so disturbing that we all returned to the Main Hall. Here there was complete chaos - everyone all bunched together in the darkness with Lt Col Black and Captain Witney.

Just before dawn there was a terrific howl and shortly afterwards Japanese arrived in large numbers at the front entrance where I was standing with the VADs, the later ran into the Main Building whilst I remained with others in the main hall. Captain Scotcher was pulled out and shortly afterwards he instructed me to come out and put my hands above my head. They took my steel helmet and cracked me over the head with it, searched my pockets, took off my red cross band and removed any valuables (watch) that I had. They shouted for everyone to come out and everyone did except Sgt Parkin, RAMC, who attempted to run past but was shot dead instantly.

They gave me the impression they did not think this was a hospital that it was more in the nature of a fortress. We were all marched in single file into one of the adjacent classrooms, the patients also being brought in. Here we remained for about an hour or two, crowded and huddled together with no room to lie or sit down. One of our patients Rfm Sweet, suffering from a wound in the back received another wound in the left elbow and bled profusely. Several of our patients (between 50 and 60 I would imagine) were killed during the day. After two hours (about 9am) we were marched in single file upstairs – dead bodies and blood covered the stairs – and at the top of the landing several Japs hit us as we passed. We were then put into different classrooms, I went into a small room with four VADs (Mrs Smith, Mrs Begg, Mrs Buxton, and Mrs Simmons) where there were five Chinese women (wives of British soldiers). We remained here all day. We were given a tin of bully beef and a tin of milk between us; the Chinese women, who had more freedom, managing to get some water. A particularly bad lot of Japanese soldiers (five in all) came in at 4:30pm and removed Mrs Smith, Begg and Buxton – these three we never saw again. One of the Chinese girls told Mrs Simmons that they had taken out the three VADs to kill them and they would return for us shortly; moreover, they informed us that the Japanese intended killing all British (men and women) if Hong Kong did not surrender that evening. Half an hour later several Japanese ordered us out and we joined up with Mrs Andrew-Levinge and **Mrs Fidoe** and were taken to a room at the end of the corridor. One of the Japanese informing us that Hong Kong “now belong Japanese.

It was a clean room and there was a mattress and blanket on the floor for us and a similar one for the Chinese girls. Five minutes later we were ordered by a Japanese soldier, speaking English, to come and bandage wounded Japanese soldiers. They took us to another room overlooking the tennis court, where there were five dead bodies of Red Cross personnel. We were made to sit down on these bodies (it was beginning to get dark). A little later two soldiers removed **Mrs Fidoe** and two removed me. I was taken to another room, where there were two dead bodies, and made to take off all my clothes whilst they removed theirs. Before touching me they apparently became afraid someone was coming and made me put my clothes on again and I was returned to the room where Mrs Simmons and Mrs Andrews-Levinge still were. **Mrs Fidoe** joined us almost immediately in a weeping state and told us she had been raped. We were all hurried back to the original room with the mattresses but the Chinese girls had now gone. We were left in peace for a short time only – three soldiers came in and took me to a small adjacent bathroom, knocked me down and all raped me one after the other, and then let me return. **Mrs Fidoe** was then taken and underwent a similar experience. Both **Mrs Fidoe** and I were then taken out a second time and raped as before. Mrs Simmons and Mrs Andrews –Levinge remained untouched. We were all now desperate and discovering there was a Yale lock on the door we pulled it locking ourselves in. They returned several times during the night but did not force an entrance.

At 8 am on 26 December two officers and some troops ordered us downstairs where everyone was assembled. Here we were given a tin of bully beef each and some milk and were counted and checked. We four women were then detailed to sweep up all the feathers.

Five Japanese officers later allocated rooms for patients and allowed orderlies to get everything fixed up for the dressing of wounded. We were busy all morning doing dressings the Japanese providing food. One of the Japanese asked Sgt Major Begg to come and identify the bodies of three women to see if one were his wife. The Canadian Padre with Sgt Peasegood, RAMC went out and identified them as the bodies of Mrs Smith, Mrs Begg and Mrs Buxton.

Early in the afternoon, a Volunteer British Officer (Captain Stoker) arrived from Stanley Fort with a patient and I asked him if he could possibly have us four women removed from St Stephens. In the evening about 6 pm the same officer arrived and said he would smuggle us out at once if we were quick. We returned to Stanley Fort in the ambulance he had arrived in.

### **Statement by Sgt. Herbert Peasegood, RAMC**

I was posted to St Stephen's College, Stanley on the 18 December and commenced to open up a medical store and dispensary the same day. There was accommodation for about 200 patients in the main hall and gallery of the College. The following day more patients and staff arrived from the Military Hospital, Bowen Road. At that time the College was in telephonic communication with the rest of the Island.

During the following few days patients, both British and Indian were being received from Wong Nei Chung Gap, Tytam Reservoir and Shouson Hill and members of the RAMC were drifting in from various evacuated collecting posts. I was informed by an Officer of the RA at about 7 am on the 19 Dec that the Japanese had landed on the Island.

About 24 December, to relieve congestion in the hospital a number of the more seriously wounded patients were evacuated to Stanley Prison Hospital. A Machine Gun post was opened up about 100 yards from the hospital and later several new MG posts were placed even nearer to the hospital.

Our food supply was fairly good as we were getting supplies from the food dump on the Repulse Bay Road and later from Stanley Barracks. The water supply until about 22 December was also good but about that date, it was cut off and we had to make do with the water in the tanks.

On the night of the 24 December, I heard an officer shouting to our MG posts to stop firing as the Canadians were retreating and there was a lull for a short time. Their machine guns went into action from the College Hospital verandah and continued throughout the night.

About 6am on 25<sup>th</sup> December I was lying fully dressed on my bed when I heard a rifle shot. I jumped up and opened the door to see a Japanese soldier with fixed bayonet about to enter the

room. He shouted out something in Japanese and I put my hands above my head and then he bundled me through the entrance hall to the verandah where I saw several other members of staff with their arms raised. After an interval of perhaps half an hour, during which time the remainder of the staff and the majority of the patients had been gathered there, everybody was moved into the same room from which I had emerged and I saw the body of Sgt Parkin RAMC lying full length on the floor in a pool of blood. He appeared to be dead when I glanced at him. We were kept in this room for about 2 hours and then we were all taken upstairs and after receiving one or two hits from steel helmets and swords by the Japanese who were waiting at the top. I was put into a room about 10' by 15' with approximately 90 other men at least 30 of which had leg injuries and could not stand. Immediately after, a Japanese soldier came and attacked those in reach with a leather strap, while another proceeded to throw live ammunition about the room hitting quite a number of people including myself from which I received a slight head wound. Every time a Japanese soldier appeared at the doorway we were all told to kneel down which was quite impossible owing to the number of people crowded into the room and those nearest the door who could not possibly conform to this demand received a hit from a strap or rifle.

As time wore on and our position was becoming unbearable owing to the congestion several people fainted and we did at last, after several appeals, arrange to obtain water. This was all we received during our stay in that room until about 9pm. To cope with the needs of nature during this long day necessitated the use of boots as urinals and later people just had to relieve themselves on the floor. About midday there was great activity in the adjoining rooms which sounded as if MGs were being mounted and one or two walls seemed to be blown down.

About 2pm what sounded like a fresh battle began in the grounds of the college and from accounts of people by the windows the Canadians were trying to recapture the College. This battle lasted a considerable time and it was at this stage that patients were being dragged out from our room and screams could be heard and then a shot. The following morning I saw the bodies of people taken from the room laying either on the stairs or in the corridor. About 4pm after several people had tried to jump out of the window, we were told to close it.

Things quietened down about 4pm and remained so until about 9 pm when the noise of MGs being dismantled could be heard. I also heard the word "surrender" from one of the adjoining rooms. A few minutes later about 40 of us were moved to a storeroom and were given water and cigarettes. We then made ourselves as comfortable as possible for the night.

The following morning a Japanese officer fell the staff in and detailed us of to various jobs such as collecting the dead bodies, removing the blood from the stairs and corridors and piling rifles, steel helmets and respirators out in the grounds. Later on in the morning, I went with **Sister Fidoe** and the Canadian Padre in the company of a Japanese officer, to the rear of the kitchen where I saw a pile of something covered by a blanket. I removed the corner of the blanket and found three bodies huddled together, these I identified as Mrs Begg, Mrs Smith and Mrs Buxton three of the VADs of the hospital staff.

We were allowed to collect drugs and dressings etc from the stores and a treatment room was opened upstairs and patients allotted to other upstairs rooms

On the 30 Dec ember the force at Stanley, minus a few RAMC who remained to care for wounded in the fort, were all marched into Hong Kong as far as North Point Camp where the RAMC and AD Corps personnel were told to board a lorry and we were brought to BRMH".

### **Statement by Sgt. John Herbert Anderson, RAMC**

Towards midnight on Dec 24<sup>th</sup> machine gun and mortar fire increased and numerous machine gun posts were set up in the grounds of the hospital. Later on, these posts actually used bales of hospital blankets and mattresses from the linen stores to build machine gun nests within 6 yards of the entrance to the hospital reception hall. Guns were also set up on the rising ground behind the cookhouse and another within arms reach of the flag-pole carrying the red cross. The MG outside Brigade HQ actually had to fire over the top of a large St Georges Cross flag the only other Red Cross available which had been hoisted over the end of the tennis courts. Firing and grenade fire increased until near dawn but it was too dangerous to go outside to see what the position was as the roads and verandahs were caught in a crossfire. Just before dawn on 25<sup>th</sup> December British and Canadian forces dropped back without warning being given to the hospital and the first sign of capture was the arrival of four Japanese soldiers at the entrance to the hospital.

Lt Col Black and I went out to meet them followed by Capt Witney. Cpl Noble and Pte Mooney RAMC were already outside under guard. The two officers, after their equipment had been removed, were taken around the corner of the building but the rest of us were lined up against the wall and had our armbands inspected.

One of the Japanese was sent back, apparently to report to some others who soon arrived, entered the main hall, and shepherded all the nurses and some of the patients out. As this was going on Sgt Parkin, RAMC, who had been asleep in one of the rooms, made a dash for a window and was shot through the head. There were sounds of shouting and shooting as the Japanese ran down the main hall amongst the patients and any patients who were too slow in getting out of bed, or who could not move owing to wounds were bayoneted or shot. Some of the HKVDC tried to escape and others put up a bit of a struggle but they were mostly bayoneted or shot. The SJAB (St John's Ambulance) men were all put in one room and systematically butchered, one only remained alive to tell us what happened. All staff and patients were, first of all, herded into one of the storerooms and later as all survivors were collected by the Japanese and daylight came, they were taken upstairs and put into the small student's dormitories. The women were in one room with some Chinese girls.

86 patients and staff including myself were in a room which was 9' by 12'. After threatening us with hand grenades and warning us not to escape the Japanese set up an MG in the passage outside. After numerous appeals, one of the Japanese fetched us a large jug of water and some dry oatmeal. That was all the food and drink offered to us until 10 pm.

During the day at intervals, parties of Japanese came along and peered in at us, on most occasions seizing one of the men and dragging him out to the corridor. The bodies of four of these men were afterwards found bayoneted and tortured, and sounds of this going on could be heard in the corridor. Up to about 7 pm, we could still hear the women talking.

About 10pm a junior officer arrived and allowed us to move out some of the walking wounded to other rooms still leaving about 40 people to spend the night of 25/26 December in the original small room, in which there was insufficient space to lie down properly. At our request the officer allowed us to bring up buckets of fire hydrant water but there was no sign of food. SM Begg (a patient) whose wife was a VAD asked me to try and find out something about the ladies.

As soon as it was light on the morning of 26 Dec the Japanese collected all persons capable of walking and set them to cleaning up. They allowed myself and a patient to go down and get more water. During the cleaning up we found the bodies of the SJAB and HKVDC. The bodies of Lt Col Black and Capt Witney were found in the staff lavatory and sitting rooms respectively, both had been searched and bayoneted or cut with swords

The bodies of three missing women were found in the grounds covered by a blanket. They had been cut to pieces – Mrs Begg's head was almost severed from her body. Altogether about 60 to 70 bodies of patients and 25 bodies of the staff were collected. Under orders from the Japanese, a huge bonfire was built for the burning of the bodies.

In the afternoon of Boxing Day, the Japanese told us we could have the whole top floor of the hospital east wing. This was occupied and as much medical material as possible was collected. There was no Medical Officer left. Late that evening Capt Stoker arrived from Stanley with some HKVDC and just before dark they returned with a small van and succeeded in smuggling the remaining ladies out to the fort. Also, they promised to send water and food the following day.

By Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> the water situation was desperate. For some reason, the promised supplies from Stanley had not arrived, but enough food had been salvaged from the wrecked stores to give everyone something to eat.

On the evening of the 29 December, Japanese officer offered us a lorry to take us to Stanley Fort with the remainder of the wounded patients.

Most of St Stephens Hospital RAMC were left at Stanley Fort and the remainder 12 ORs marched back to NP Camp via Lyemun Gap eventually arriving at Bowen Road (Military Hospital)".

Here's a photograph of the College Main Building today - looking peaceful and serene - it was here that the temporary hospital was situated and here that the rape, mutilations and bayonetting of patients in their beds occurred.



St Stephens College

In my research at the Hong Kong Public Records Office, I came across this letter dated October 1946 from **Mrs Fidoe** addressed to the Adjutant of the HKVDC. She had been employed as a Private Nurse and in 1936 had joined the Nursing Detachment (ND) of the HKVDC. She was mobilized on 8th December when the Japanese Army invaded the Colony.

19th October, 1946.

The Adjutant,  
H.K.V.D.C. Nursing Detachment,  
Hong Kong.

Dear Captain Morrison,

I joined the H.K.V.D.C. in 1936 as a Trained Nursing Sister to train and lecture to the members. Remaining a member of the unit, I was mobilised on December 8th 1941, and was demobilised in London on May 1st 1946. Returning to England in the Hospital ship "Oxfordshire" on October 29th 1945, I applied for a passage back to the Colony to resume my occupation of Private Nursing, by which means I support myself. For this passage I was required to pay £118. I maintain that, being a member of the H.K.V.D.C. I was entitled to a Government paid passage back, and should not have been asked to pay my own way. Many others travelled with me, none of whom paid their fares.

I do not know whether this matter is in your province, but am hoping that you may be able to help me to recover the money.

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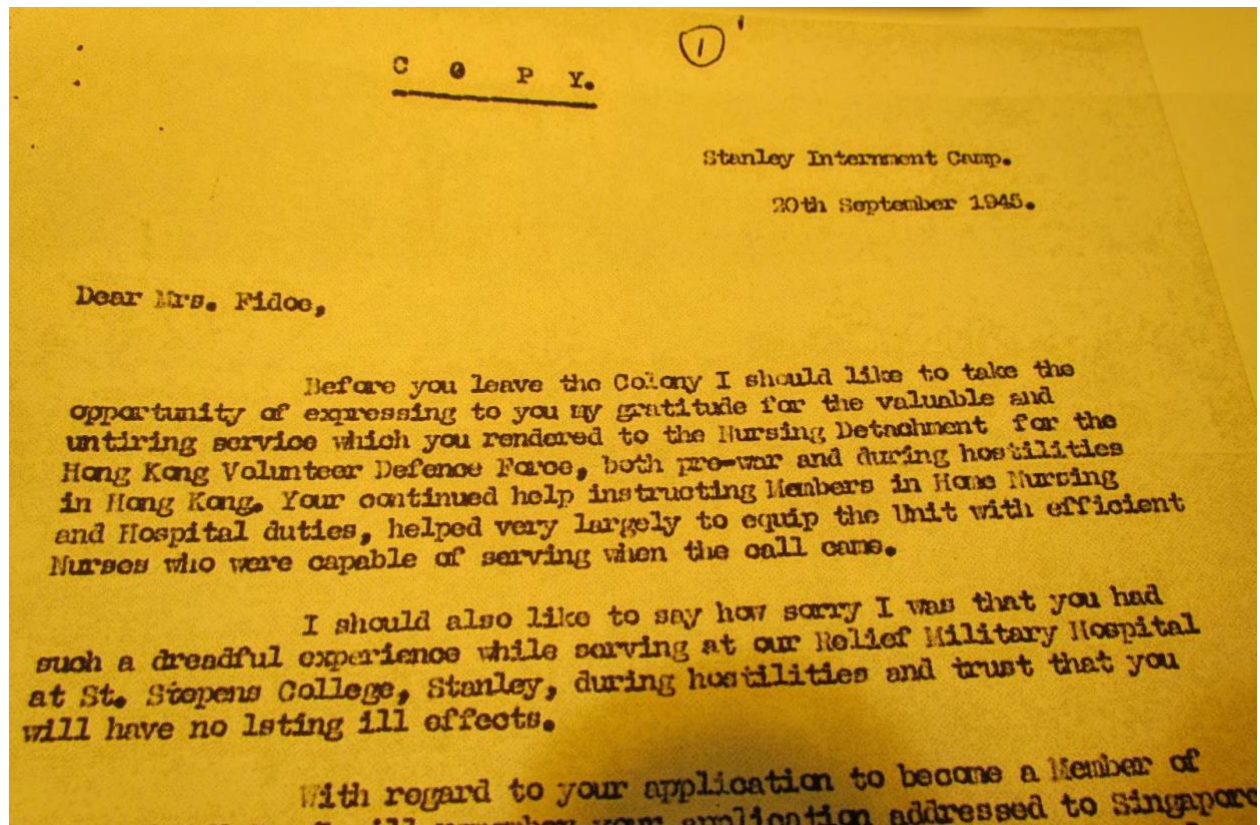
Yours faithfully,  
(Mrs) M. A. FIDOE (Mrs)

In the letter she describes her repatriation to the UK was by way of the Hospital Ship



Oxfordshire in October 1949. The fact that she was repatriated by hospital ship implies she must have been in very poor health by the end of the war.

There was also a copy of a letter from Irene Braude who was Commandant of the Nursing Detachment of HKVDC to Mrs Fidoe written after the Japanese surrender in September 1945 whilst she (Irene Braude) was still in Stanley Internment Camp awaiting her own repatriation.



The letter thanks Mrs Fidoe for her service in the HKVDC and in it she refers to the abuse Mrs Fidoe experienced at the hands of the Japanese soldiery on that fateful Christmas Day in 1941.

"I should also like to say how sorry I was that you had such a dreadful experience while serving in at our Relief Military Hospital at St Stephen's College, Stanley, during hostilities and trust that you will have no lasting ill effects".

I looked for Mrs Fidoe in the various lists of civilian internees at Stanley Camp. These lists included:

The Log of Internees held at Imperial War Museum

The list of internees in Greg Leck's book "Captives of Empire"

Commonwealth War Graves Commission List of Internees



Official List of Internees prepared by Colonial Office (1942)

She was not listed and so I assumed she must have been out of Camp. This would suggest she was a third national possibly Irish. Japanese occupied Hong Kong was not an easy place to survive in. Perhaps she was looked after by one of the Roman Catholic institutions such as the Italian Convent. We don't know where she found sanctuary and how she survived.

Geoff Emerson responded to a posting I made by saying that on one of his Stanley lists he had the following entry:

"Fidoe, E A Mrs. British Trained Sister HKVDC, VAD - Neutral believed in HK"

This suggested that she was categorized as a third national from a neutral country and the reference to "in HK" meant in town and not in Camp.

A series of postings on the popular Hong Kong local history web site "Gwulo" soon revealed more information see <http://gwulo.com/node/16130>

David Bellis who set up and manages the web site advised that she was a prosecution witness in the 1948 War Crimes Trials and yet only three years later she died, no doubt due in some measure to the privations she experienced during the wartime. Henry Ching (whose father Harry Ching) had been Editor of the South China Morning Post and had survived the tense period of Japanese occupation, responded that:

"Elizabeth Appleton Fidoe, also known as Emma Appleton Fidoe, died in the Queen Mary Hospital on 7th December 1950. She was apparently living, at the time, at 17 Bowen Road. This information is on the probate application for her will".

A posting by David Bellis revealed details of her wedding to Staff QM Sgt Joseph Henry Fidoe RAOC, as detailed in the China Mail 31st December 1935

" a wedding of great interest in military circles was solemnized at St. John's Cathedral, yesterday afternoon, when Miss Betty Dudley (Betty being commonly used short form for Elizabeth) became the bride of Staff Quarter Master Sergeant Joseph H. Fidoe of the R.A.O.C. The bride, who arrived on Sunday from Home by H.M.T. Neuralia was formerly the- Matron of the London Jewish Hospital. Her father was connected with the Royal Fusiliers for over 33 years. The bridegroom has been over 21 years with the R.A.O.C. He left England in 1931, following which he was in Egypt Tientsin and Peiping. He has been in Hong Kong for a little over a year".

Research by Nicola on Gwulo.com showed that she had been born Emma Appleton Dudley and was indeed of Irish descent. She found that Joseph Fidoe had been married twice before and that his second marriage had been to Elizabeth's sister. His two previous wives had predeceased him.

This has pieced together a bit more on Elizabeth Fidoe's life. I still wonder where Joseph Fidoe was in 1941. He does not appear under RAOC nor on other listings of the Garrison personnel. Had he predeceased Emma/Elizabeth - or had they separated and divorced - why was she here on her own in December 1941 and where did she live in Japanese occupied Hong Kong during the war years. Where is she buried following her death in Hong Kong in 1950 - presumably in the Catholic Cemetery at Happy Valley. I hope through these pages we might continue to find more about her life and times.

In some ways it is surprising that she came back to Hong Kong, not long after the war ended - one might have thought she would want to stay away from a place with such tragic and horrific memories for her. What a terrible experience she and others had to endure.