

Tributes to Dr Bill Frankland from Friends of Millbank

3. Professor Andrew Rice (5 April 2020)¹

Thank you for this opportunity to pen a few personal reflections about Bill Frankland and to repeat some of his stories.

I was vaguely aware of Bill's distinction as an allergist from childhood and more so from my time as a medical student at St Mary's in the 1970's. However, it was only in the last decade of his life that I had the great privilege of spending time conversing with him, sharing a common interest in the histories of FEPOW medicine and St Mary's.

Much of our conversation revolved around his experiences in Singapore. He was generous with his time and I was totally absorbed when listening to his first hand accounts of what I regard as a zenith of military medicine when doctors like him practiced to the best of their professional ability, with virtually no resources, under incomparably adverse conditions and often at personal risk. We particularly discussed why, during his time at Blakang Mati, he saw no cases of the nutritional peripheral neuropathies prevalent in other FEPOW camps. His considered view was that this was attributable to the fact that they were permitted to grow some vegetables in the camp.

One aspect of Bill's character that I think firmly places him in the category of "great" was an inability to hate. This was evident a few years ago when I was a bystander at a reconciliation meeting of a number of FEPOWS and a Japanese guard, at which Bill was present. Undoubtedly, this was a characteristic founded in his Christian faith, moulded by a childhood teaching from his father following a childhood quarrel over some strawberries with his twin brother.² This remarkable attribute was shared with a number of other FEPOW medical officers, including Sir Edward "Weary" Dunlop who Bill knew well. Bill enjoyed telling the story of how, during early captivity in 1942, Weary played in a rugby match in Changi in the distinctive St Mary's RFC jersey. Of course, as any proud Mary's man would feel obliged to do, Bill enquired as to why an Australian was wearing such a jersey. Dunlop had of course spent time at Mary's before the war and had played for the medical school team. Bill would round off this story recounting how he ran in 4 tries against the Australians.³

I visited Singapore on a work trip a year ago and spent a day exploring in Bill's footsteps. On returning to the UK, I spent a memorable afternoon showing Bill modern photographs of the various places from his time there. The irony of the fact that the barracks on Blakang Mati where he was held as a prisoner of war now being one of Singapore's most luxurious hotels was not lost. He was

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² Chairman's note: Bill's father was the Reverend Henry Frankland, Vicar of St Andrew's, Dacre, near Ullswater. This childhood lesson in reconciliation which so shaped his life and enabled him to forgive the Japanese was described by Bill in an interview published in Church Times: *"I am a Christian who was taught to love, not hate," he says. "When I was nine, I had a fight with Jack. We each had our own garden, and he was growing some strawberries and I jumped on them. I said, 'I hate my brother.' "My father said to me, 'Never use the word "hate". It does you harm. As Christians, we have to love, love, love.' That stayed with me."* (Church Times 9 August 2019 'From Penrith by pony to Saddam's palace' <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2019/9-august/features/features/from-penrith-by-pony-to-saddam-s-palace>)

³ Chairman's note: Friends of Millbank keen to learn more about Sir Edward "Weary" Dunlop are referred to his entry in the Australian Dictionary of Biography (2019) <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/dunlop-sir-ernest-edward-weary-27739> Also: *The War Diaries of Weary Dunlop: Java and the Burma-Thailand Railway, 1942-1945.* (Melbourne: Nelson, 1986) and Sue Ebury's biography: *Weary: The Life Of Sir Edward Dunlop* (Penguin, 1994)

pleased to hear that the sacrifices at Alexandra Hospital are properly commemorated there. I was also able to visit Singapore Cricket Club where Bill was famously ordered to destroy the club's stock of alcohol before the Japanese army arrived.

Bill was especially keen to see that his FEPOW comrades were properly remembered.⁴ Indeed, his last paper was a biographical piece about his fellow doctor Jacob Markowitz(1). Amongst those who did not return, he mentioned often the loser of the toss of the coin Captain Lance Parkinson, murdered whilst administering an anaesthetic at Alexandra Hospital (Kranji CWGC 14. E. 9) and fellow Mary's man Captain John Diver (Kranji CWGC 16. D. 16) whose story is recounted in detail in Paul Watkins' biography of Bill(2). Bill played a part in ensuring that Diver's memory was perpetuated at St Mary's in the form of his legacy into the library. Hopefully this will continue in some form now that the final tangible remnants of the St Mary's Hospital Medical School buildings are being sold off.

Fascinating to me, but perhaps less relevant to most of the Friends of Millbank, were Bill's first hand recollections of the greats of St Mary's history, Fleming, Almroth Wright, but also others like Charles Wilson MC (Lord Moran) "The Great Dean", Moran's successor Harold Edwards and characters familiar to generations of Mary's students such as Tommy Kemp and Henry "Cocky" Cockburn MC.

Bill had an insatiable curiosity about medical science and was fascinated to hear about the latest advances right up to the end. He always wanted to know what was new in my field, whilst I was much more interested in hearing about his life. Even in his final years writing a paper with Bill kept one on one's toes, despite his advanced age he still had an eagle eye for detail and meticulously picked up the various errors that his co-authors would make. Last year he was keen to rectify a typographical error in Fleming's original penicillin paper, some 90 years after the event.

Finally, another valuable insight that I learnt from Bill, was from his experience in working in an emerging area of medical practice which lies slightly outside the mainstream. His insight from a professional lifetime in allergy informs my navigating in Pain Medicine.

It was a privilege knowing Bill. The last time I saw him was in January this year at a splendid lecture by Geoff Gill on FEPOW medicine.⁵ Bill of course was on star form and seeing him enthral RAMC officers some 70 years his junior is a memory that I will treasure.

A great man, distinguished doctor and generous friend of many who will be sadly missed.

1. Watkins PE, Frankland AW. Transfusion on the Burma Railway: The life of Jacob Markowitz. *J Med Biogr.* 2019;967772019855728.
2. Watkins PE. From Hell Island to Hayfever. *The Life of Dr Bill Frankland.* : Brown Dog Books; 2018.

⁴ Chairman's note: Bill actively supported the Captive Memories FEPOW study, the longest running project of the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, commencing in 1945. Initially the focus was on healthcare of FEPOWs, but since 1999 the focus has shifted to recording their unique medical history <https://www.captivememories.org.uk/>

⁵ Chairman's note: Friends of Millbank have similarly been privileged to listen to an excellent lecture by Professor Geoff Gill (and his colleague Meg Parkes) of the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, who jointly delivered the George Blair Memorial Lecture 'Burma Railway Medicine' at Millbank on 21 September 2018. Geoff Gill and Meg Parkes are co-authors of two highly recommended books on FEPOW medicine: *Captive Memories* (2015) and *Burma Railway Medicine* (2017) (both Palatine Books). A third book, *Captive Artists*, by Meg Parkes, Geoff Gill and Jenny Wood, reveals the unseen artwork of British Far East Prisoners of War (Palatine Books, December 2019).