

POW survivor Dick Corbett's Japanese occupation of Burma five rupee note, bearing 26 signatures of POWs (24 air force men, 1 British Army private, 1 unknown) liberated from Rangoon Jail on 3 May 1945 [Version 10]

(In the possession of Lynne Davidson, Corbett's daughter)

J.133930 W/O Richard "Dick" CORBETT was a Royal Canadian Air Force fighter pilot from Toronto, Canada. Flying a Hawker Hurricane on RAF 11 Sqn, he was shot down by Japanese fighters on 5 Feb 1944. He force-landed in a rice paddy field in enemy territory in the Arakan area of India, only a kilometer or so from Allied lines. Soon captured, he was eventually transported to Rangoon Jail.

Names shown in black are as they were written on the rupee (as best I can interpret).

These men were freed in Rangoon; they were left behind in the jail when the Japanese force marched over 400 of the more able-bodied Rangoon POWs out of the city on 25 April 1945 and abandoned them on the 29th, near Pegu, Burma.

*Names shown in **yellow tint** are also found on a signed one rupee note kept by ex-Rangoon Jail POW **Don Lomas** RAF (who signed the five rupee note) and now held in the Lomas collection of the Imperial War Museum.*

Only one signature out of 26 is illegible. It is assumed that he was an air force POW, though this remains unsubstantiated. He also signed Don Lomas's one rupee note, but a study of both signatures still has not resulted in a positive ID.

One signer out of 26 was a British Army private known to have been a Rangoon Jail POW, but his date of capture is unknown.

24 out of 26 signatures are known to have been air force. The date of each airman's aircraft loss (which sometimes was earlier than his capture date) is indicated for each of these 24 men.

A scan of the entire reverse side of the rupee note (where all 26 signatures appear) is found at the end of this document.

The note may have been signed on one day or over several days in late April and/or early May 1945. The last of the Japanese personnel disappeared from Rangoon Jail on the night of 28/29 April; on the 29th, then, the POWs left behind realized they were "free" and on their own, unbeknownst to their own forces. These signers (not counting the one unidentified signer, whose details are unclear) were officially liberated on the 3rd and were all taken aboard the hospital ship HMHS Karapara on the 4th. The ship departed Rangoon Harbour on the 5th and docked in Calcutta on the 9th. The Americans on the 5th, or the following day, were then transported to their separate hospital.

POW survivor Dick Corbett's Japanese occupation of Burma five rupee note, bearing 26 signatures of POWs (24 air force men, 1 British Army private, 1 unknown) liberated from Rangoon Jail on 3 May 1945 [Version 10]

Nine liberated prisoners had voluntarily stayed behind in Rangoon on further duties and were flown to Calcutta on the 7th – still two days before the men on the Karapara docked in Calcutta. None of the names of these nine is a positive match to the one unknown signature on the five rupee note.

Eleven names written across the width, starting on the left side of the note:



These eleven, top to bottom:

James M. McKernan

32281809 S/Sgt **James M. MCKERNAN**, B-24 gunner, US 9th Bomb Sqn, 7th Bomb Gp, from Olcott, New York, USA. Aircraft hit by ground fire, pilot mortally wounded, during a low-level attack on a Burma-Siam Railway target, **5 April 1944**. Only 4 bailed out before impact, including McKernan.

Clifton L. Bray

O-664956 1st Lt **Clifton L. BRAY**, P-51 pilot, US 530th Fighter-Bomber Sqn, 311th Fighter-Bomber Gp, from El Paso, Texas, USA. Engine failure, on fire, during a fighter sweep in central Burma, **22 May 1944**. Bailed out at 300 ft, chute opened in tree tops, Bray's right arm and leg were tangled in the shroud lines.

Raymond A. Maloney

O-726056 1st Lt **Raymond A. MALONEY**, B-24 bombardier, US 9th Bomb Sqn, 7th Bomb Gp, from Virgin, Utah, USA. After bombing Insein locomotive shops near Rangoon, the B-24 was set upon by fighters in a running battle. Finally shot down north or northwest of Bassein, Burma, **1 Dec 1943**.

Lt. Lionel F. Coffin

O-751537 1st Lt **Lionel F. COFFIN**, B-29 co-pilot, 40th Bomb Gp, 25th Bomb Sqn, from Duluth, Minnesota, USA. Over Rangoon on **14 Dec 1944**, a massive explosion under the B-29 formation occurred immediately after bombs were released. A plausible cause: the mid-air collision, then premature detonation, of a controversial mixed load of 500 & 1000 lb bombs. One B-29 (42-24726) went down with no survivors. From another (42-93831), six of eleven bailed out and were captured. A third B-29 (42-24457) crashed "20 miles northeast" of Rangoon; its crew of twelve, including Coffin, bailed out and became POWs. A fourth B-29 (42-24574) was abandoned by its crew "100 miles west of Rangoon", with all eleven falling into captivity. The seven planes that returned from the mission were damaged to such an extent that an estimated 18,000 man hours would be required for repairs.

J. A. [or Jack?] Shortis F/O RAF

185119 F/O **Jack A. SHORTIS**, Mosquito navigator, RAF 82 Sqn, from Dagenham, UK. On **19 Dec 1944**, during a low-level rhuarb near the junction of the Chindwin and Irrawaddy Rivers, his Mosquito either hit the water or impacted a defensive cable strung across a waterway. The aircraft crash landed and disintegrated, but Shortis and his pilot, RAAF W/Cdr Lionel Hudson (who signed the Don Lomas one rupee note), survived their injuries and then incarceration.

R.C. Shanks

O-1699413 Capt **Robert C. SHANKS**, B-29 pilot/aircraft commander, US 45th Bomb Sqn, 40th Bomb Gp, from Grand Prairie, Texas, USA. His bomber went down on **14 Dec 1944**. See the Lionel F. Coffin entry for more details. Shanks was aboard aircraft 42-24457.

Joe O. Wilson

665257 1st Lt. **Joseph O. WILSON**, P-51 pilot, US 311th Fighter-Bomber Gp, 529th Fighter-Bomber Sqn, from Foreman, Arkansas, USA. On **21 June 1944** aircraft suffered engine failure during a strafing run on a railway target north of Mandalay. With his aircraft on fire, Wilson jumped.

Burt Parmalee

O-864755 2nd Lt **David B. PARMALEE**, B-29 flight engineer, US 45th Bomb Sqn, 40th Bomb Gp, from Guilford, Connecticut, USA. His bomber went down on **14 Dec 1944**. See the Lionel F. Coffin entry for more details. Parmalee was aboard aircraft 42-93831.

Karnik Thomasian

12183215 Sgt **Karnik A. THOMASIAN**, B-29 left gunner, US 45th Bomb Sqn, 40th Bomb Gp, from Manhattan, New York, USA. His bomber went down on **14 Dec 1944**. See the Lionel F. Coffin entry for more details. Thomasian was aboard aircraft 42-93831.

C.H. Bockman

19075514 S/Sgt **Clifford H. BOCKMAN**, B-24 engineer, US 9th Bomb Sqn, 7th Bomb Gp, from Lone, Washington, USA. After bombing Insein locomotive shops near Rangoon, his B-24 was set upon by fighters in a running battle. Finally shot down north or northwest of Bassein, Burma, **1 Dec 1943**.

G.M. Farley

14107685 T/Sgt **Grady M. FARLEY**, B-24 flight engineer, US 493rd Bomb Sqn, 7th Bomb Gp, from Russellville, Alabama, USA. On **14 Nov 1943**, on the way to the secondary target (Pakokku, Burma), the bomber formation was set upon by 50th Sentai Oscars. With an engine on fire, Farley's B-24 dropped from formation and flew erratically before eventually pulling up, again seemingly under control. After a head-on fighter attack, however, the B-24 dropped down, turned over on its back, and dove straight in, from 10 or 11,000 ft.

Immediately to the right of the Farley signature, but flipped 180 degrees from the Farley signature:



[Unknown ex-Rangoon Jail prisoner, presumably]

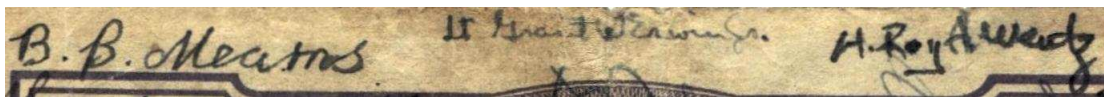
(This signature is also on the Lomas one rupee note (shown on the following page). It looks like “Th”, as if the first name is Thomas, followed by an upper case “S” and ending in an “m”. However, so far no positive match has been made to any known liberated prisoner, and the “Th”, “S”, and “m” may be wrong.)

POW survivor Dick Corbett's Japanese occupation of Burma five rupee note, bearing 26 signatures of POWs (24 air force men, 1 British Army private, 1 unknown) liberated from Rangoon Jail on 3 May 1945 [Version 10]



The mystery signature on the Lomas one rupee note, which matches the mystery signature on the Corbett five rupee note.

Across the bottom of the note, upside down, from right to left:



B.B. Mearns

1550374 P/O **Bernard Brodie "Barney" MEARNs**, Beaufighter navigator, RAF 211 Sqn, from Aberdeen, Scotland, UK. Force-landed in central Burma from engine trouble after a low-level attack, **12 Aug 1944**.

Lt. Grant W. Erwin Jr.

O-558862 1st Lt **Grant W. ERWIN, Jr**, B-24 navigator, US 9th Bomb Sqn, 7th Bomb Gp, from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA. Bombing Insein locomotive sheds on **1 Dec 1943**, hit by AA and Oscars. On fire, exploded over the Bassein district, Burma. Only 2 are known to have bailed out. Erwin jumped at 300 ft.

Lt. Roy A. Wentz

659938 1st Lt **Roy A. WENTZ, Jr**, B-24 navigator, US 9th Bomb Sqn, 7th Bomb Gp, from Springfield, Illinois, USA. After bombing Insein locomotive shops near Rangoon, the B-24 was set upon by fighters in a running battle. Finally shot down north or northwest of Bassein, Burma, **1 Dec 1943**.

POW survivor Dick Corbett's Japanese occupation of Burma five rupee note, bearing 26 signatures of POWs (24 air force men, 1 British Army private, 1 unknown) liberated from Rangoon Jail on 3 May 1945 [Version 10]

Six signatures directly below the B. B. Mearns signature:



These six, top to bottom, (with two** upside-down in relation to the Mearns name):

J. Harris

1315284 F/Sgt **Jack HARRIS**, B-24 air gunner, RAF 159 Sqn, from Ynysybwl, Wales, UK. Illuminated at night by searchlights over Rangoon, the bomber was shot down from behind by 204th Sentai Oscar aces Hiroshi Takiguchi and Bunichi Yamaguchi, on **29 Feb 1944**. Crewmate of Don Lomas, who also signed the 5 rupee note.

Joe Wells

6934111 S/Sgt **Joseph B. WELLS**, B-24 gunner, US 9th Bomb Sqn, 7th Bomb Gp, from Boone, Iowa, USA. After bombing Insein locomotive shops near Rangoon, the B-24 was set upon by fighters in a running battle. With shrapnel wounds and a bullet through his thigh, he bailed out north or northwest of Bassein, Burma, **1 Dec 1943**. He suffered a back injury upon landing.

****J. D. Lomas**

1360083 F/Sgt **John Donald LOMAS**, B-24 wireless operator/air gunner, RAF 159 Sqn, from Mytholmroyd, W. Yorks, UK. Illuminated at night by searchlights over Rangoon, the bomber was shot down from behind by 204th Sentai Oscar aces Hiroshi Takiguchi and Bunichi Yamaguchi, on **29 Feb 1944**. Crewmate of Jack Harris, who also signed the 5 rupee note.

****H.C. Edwards (NZ)**

413171 W/O **Howard C. EDWARDS** RNZAF, P-47 pilot, RAF 30 Sqn, from Wanganui, NZ. Inbound on a fighter sweep of Mingaladon airfield near Rangoon, **3 Nov 1944**, the aircraft developed engine trouble and caught fire. Edwards chose to force-land and was ejected before the aircraft overturned upon hitting waterlogged ground northeast of Pathwe, Burma.

C.C. Meyer Capt. A.C.

O-383620 Capt **Cornelius C. MEYER**, B-29 pilot/aircraft commander, US 25th Bomb Sqn, 40th Bomb Gp. USA hometown unknown at this time. His bomber went down on **14 Dec 1944**. See the Lionel F. Coffin entry for more details. Meyer was aboard aircraft 42-24457.

E.R. Griffiths

1334202 W/O **Edward Richard GRIFFITHS**, P-47 pilot, RAF 146 Sqn, from Brighton, UK. On **11 Nov 1944**, in an attack on Meiktila airfield, Griffiths believed his fighter had been hit by machine gun fire. He reported engine trouble and crashed.

Three names across the top of the note, left to right:



Daren C. Engel

19171011 Sgt **Daren C. ENGEL**, B-25 top turret gunner, US 83rd Bomb Sqn, 12th Bomb Gp, from Springfield, Oregon, USA. Bomber shot down in the Meiktila, Burma area by Oscars of the 64th Sentai, **6 Oct 1944**.

R. Viney

Non-air force Rangoon Jail survivor 5677421 Pvt **R. VINEY**, British Army, Somerset Light Infantry. His name, rank, service number, and unit are listed in the document "*British PW Liberated from Rangoon Central Jail*", found at The National Archives, Kew, London. (This list does not include the POWs released near Pegu Burma after a forced march by their captors). Viney's details are also found in a handwritten list of 6 Block POWs compiled in the jail by 4612658 L/Cpl Willie Matthews, 2nd Duke of Wellington Regiment, now held by the Imperial War Museum.

POW survivor Dick Corbett's Japanese occupation of Burma five rupee note, bearing 26 signatures of POWs (24 air force men, 1 British Army private, 1 unknown) liberated from Rangoon Jail on 3 May 1945 [Version 10]

So, it is known that R. Viney was in the group of released prisoners which included all of the air force men who signed the rupee. His capture details are unknown.

C.A. Kidd

151171 F/O **Cyril Alexander KIDD**, Beaufighter navigator, RAF 177 Sqn, from London, UK. Shot down by ground fire while patrolling the Kalewa – Ye-u – Monywa area in Burma, **14 Aug 1944**.

Two signatures written across the width of the note, right edge:



These two, top to bottom:

H. Reekes

1853242 F/Sgt **Hubert A. REEKES** (known as "Bill", "Wilbur", and "Willy"), B-24 ball turret gunner, RAF 215 Sqn, from Brighton, UK. On **8 Jan 1945**, the 2nd pilot's error caused a complete loss of power nearing the Burma-Siam Railway target. A prepare-to-jump command was issued, and Reekes exited his turret in anticipation. When engines were restarted, a crewman gave a thumbs-up signal to Reekes, positioned by the rear floor escape hatch. In the confusion Reekes misinterpreted the communication as the signal to jump. Landing safely, he was soon captured. Post-liberation he was not punished by his superiors for his errant jump.

D.W. Hogon USAAF

O-799184 2nd Lt **Dudley W. HOGON, Jr**, P-51 pilot, US 530th [?] Fighter-Bomber Sqn, 311th Fighter-Bomber Gp, from Augusta, Georgia, USA. Escorting B-24s to Rangoon, Burma, **27 Nov 1943**. On return, attacked and shot down in flames by 64th Sentai Oscars. Bailed out near Gwa Bay, Burma.

The full rupee note is shown on the following page.

POW survivor Dick Corbett's Japanese occupation of Burma five rupee note, bearing 26 signatures of POWs (24 air force men, 1 British Army private, 1 unknown) liberated from Rangoon Jail on 3 May 1945 [Version 10]

