



AD-VISOR

The Newsletter of the Birkenhead Institute Old Boys

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Editorial

I would like to direct our readers to the Readers’ Letters, particularly the email from Wendy Wood. It’s the only “Letter” I’ve received for this issue, but it’s a wonderful tale.

This newsletter is best read online. - In case you’re reading this on paper, wondering what the blue text means. Blue text is for Hypertext, that means text that is a link to something else, either within the document or on the Internet. So, to make Hypertext work, you need to be reading this on a computer, with access to the Internet. Click on the Blue text and it will take you to a related subject, somewhere else. Try it on [HERE](#), then on the browser click on the “Back” button to return here.

This copy of the AdVisor is online at:-

https://birkenheadinstitute.co.uk/BIOB%20AdVisor/AdVisor_2021.pdf

Obviously, you can’t click on anything when you’re reading a paper copy!

Keith Dutton (Tate 1960/63)

Usual Reminder

If you've received this through the-mail, then please consider sending me your e-mail address, or even a family or friend's e-mail address, where I can contact you more quickly and cheaper than the-mail system. This is particularly useful when an Old Boy passes on, I can notify you of the funeral details much quicker. If there's any old boy's news, then you can hear from me as soon as I find out.

Since the coronavirus pandemic, I recommend that you DO NOT use your work email address on BIOB. There is a danger that you may miss some important emails if you're not in work. Taking out a "gmail" address is very simple, and I would recommend it, you can then receive your emails anywhere including on your mobile phone.

At the moment we have a large number of email addresses that fail when I send emails. So, please also **remember to update me** if you move address, or change your e-mail address, make sure you stay in the loop. This can be done online at our website see https://www.birkenheadinstitute.co.uk/BIOB_Membership.html.

Web Site www.BirkenheadInstitute.co.uk

As usual I have made some changes and additions to the website, mostly involving newly available photographs. The website is at www.BirkenheadInstitute.co.uk. As last time, it's the same basic website as before, but with additional functionality. If you write the old address of www.BIOB.co.uk you'll still find it, we still own the old address, it's set up as a "re-direct".

Unfortunately, due to the lockdown, I have not been able to visit Wirral Archives and scan the rest of their copies of the "Visor" school magazine. At present we have a total of 97 "Visor" magazines online. For those who don't know, the first "Visor" was published at Christmas 1927. You can find them here. https://www.birkenheadinstitute.co.uk/BIOB_School_Visor.html

I've finished, as much as I can on investigating the names on the WW2 War Memorial plaque in the Central Library. When the 1921 Census information is released next year, 2022, I will continue to update the website. Please check back at regular intervals and see how it's progressing. https://www.birkenheadinstitute.co.uk/BIOB_WW2.html

If anyone has any suggestions for additions, improvements or changes please let me know at webmaster@biob.co.uk

My main objective when I created the website back in 2010 was to make a place where anyone looking for information about the Birkenhead Institute could look. I want our website to be the primary source of research information on the Birkenhead Institute. As far as I could, I made sure that all photographs were identified, and all people in the photographs were identified. I created a system whereby all people were numbered, so that anyone who could identify someone could let me know their number and give me their identity. I have had an excellent response to my request for names and dates of people in the photographs, but I will only be satisfied when everyone, and every event is fully identified.

Data Security

A few words of reassurance on the data that we hold on you. All your data is held in a password protected database on a single computer. Your data is NOT held on the internet. Your data will not be shared with anyone else, without your express permission. So, if a long-lost friend contacts me asking for your details, I will not share that information with them. I will contact you with their details and ask you to contact them. Only if you give express permission at that point will I share your information, and only with that individual.

Funds

Our funds have reduced significantly during the pandemic. The fixed costs have remained, mainly the Website, but also postage costs for the Ad-Visor. We have also sent flowers to the widow of our old friend Ken Jones.

So, we would welcome donations to funds. Send a cheque or arrange a bank transfer at https://www.birkenheadinstitute.co.uk/BIOB_Donate.html

Old Farts Day – Prenton RUFC

More formally known as the Former Player's Reunion Day. An opportunity to meet with your former playing colleagues, and a chance to share a beer and reminisce.

The Old Farts Day will be held this year on October 2nd. – on the day after the Annual Reunion Dinner, so, if you travel for an overnight visit to the dinner, why not visit Prenton Rugby Club for a few beers and a catch-up.

[Prenton RUFC](#) is at Prenton Dell Rd, Birkenhead, Prenton, Merseyside CH43 3BS
0151 608 1501

Tollemache Road

The response from pupils who attended Tollemache Road has continued to improve, but not nearly as much as I hoped. Does anyone have any photographs, stories, school magazines or memorabilia from any period, but again, especially from Tollemache Road, that they would be prepared to loan to me so that I can scan them for the web site? All material will be returned. Contact me at Editor@BIOB.co.uk.

A Special Announcement

I have just been looking through the old copies of the Ad-Visor, just to get my facts correct. I first started helping Harry Burkett on this publication in 2008. Slowly, but surely, I took over the running of the whole organisation. I have enjoyed this experience immensely, however, I am now finding it increasingly difficult to manage everything.

When I took it over, there was no record of how to access the previous website, so I had to start again. Apart from a dumb spreadsheet on Excel, there was no computerisation of the systems, and nothing had been done for the accounts for several years.

I have built and managed our website, I have built and managed a sophisticated database of members. I have edited this magazine. I have kept the accounts updated and I have kept up with notifying members of any news we have.

I particularly wanted to record everything for my successor to carry on and keep the organisation running.

It is now time for me to quit, and we need another (younger) volunteer to take this on. Without someone coming forward, this organisation is in danger of folding. I am happy to help with the transfer, but I can't carry on, on my own. The management could easily be split into smaller parts, depending on the individual's expertise. This is my final Ad-Visor, the last dinner that I organise, by Christmas 2021 I expect to fully retire.

Finally, if anyone, who has been particularly successful in life, and owes a debt of gratitude to Birkenhead Institute for their education, and would like to sponsor BIOB, please apply to webmaster@BIOB.co.uk.

BIOB Merchandise

We still have supplies of BIOB Cufflinks, Tie Tacks, and Lapel Badges, they can be viewed and purchased on the website at

http://www.birkenheadinstitute.co.uk/BIOB_CuffLinks.html

http://www.birkenheadinstitute.co.uk.co.uk/BIOB_Lapel_Badge.html.

Cufflinks at £12 per pair, or £7 each (for replacements) Tie Tack/Lapel Badges are £5. Postage on orders is £3.00.

Unfortunately, the Ties have now SOLD OUT, there are no current plans to re-stock.

Old Instonians Golf Society 2021 Pyke Cup

Last year (2020) due to the Coronavirus, the Pyke Cup was cancelled. This year, providing the government rules permit it, the competition will be held on the day of the Annual Reunion Dinner, this year at **Prenton Golf Club**. The green fee has been reduced to £22.50 for our members, to be paid on the day.

If you have any general questions concerning the golf, please call Keith Dutton 07779 160929.

The golf, on the day, will be supported by Phil Robinson 0151 625 5366 who is an Old Boy and a Prenton Golf Club member, and has kindly offered to volunteer. Phil is also a previous winner of the trophy.

OBITUARY

Bill Billings	1950/55
Ken Hassal	1939/44
Brian Johnson	1955/60
Ken Jones	1948/56
Ian McFarland	1940/44
Geoffrey Howell Woolaston	1942/48

Readers' Letters

The "escape" clause. - I have corrected most of the spellings, and some of the grammar, but take no responsibility for the content. The views expressed here are those of the correspondents and are not necessarily those of BIOB or the Editor. So, feel free to write to me anytime the mood takes you. It all goes in!

An email from Ray Roberts 1950-57

Writing from New Zealand

At school, I think I was moderately shy (slight stutter) – I will now speak on anything to anybody! fairly academic – I am currently completing, at 81, a second Masters - an M Phil here in Auckland! - and no sportsman – I'll tell you about that later!! Possibly because I lacked self-confidence, or possibly because Johnny Robbins (British Lion etc) disliked me! That's because I did my best to get out of the annual cross-country and avoided games by getting

myself a job as advertising manager for The Visor and got most Wednesday afternoons off! Apart from JR above, the teachers I admired and remember best were Messrs Richards (junior science) Jerry Hall (English) Nancy Price (Art) and, above all, W. E. Williams (History) – all influenced me. And then of course there was the school watch dog, Lennie Malcolm. I remember my fellow-classmates quite vividly and Phil Jones and myself are close friends to this day. I have been in touch with Jeff Walsh (not as often as I should like). Went to Liverpool University to read English, taught at Bootle Grammar school at Netherton, then at Sheldon Heath Comprehensive in Birmingham (Mid-sixties). Most of my surviving friends in UK today stem

from that period. Finally, as HOD until 1979 at Ellergreen, in the shadow of the Anfield floodlights. Probably why I'm more of an Everton than a Liverpool supporter, but as I am a diehard fan of Tranmere Rovers (I hear your cries of despair!) I feel I can support both.

Judo changed my life. As an eight stone weakling who had sand regularly kicked in his face (see the Charles Atlas adverts) I searched desperately for some antidote by which I could turn the tables and discovered 'Teach Yourself Judo' - Impossible, of course, but I did find one of the only two clubs in Liverpool when I was in the in the fifth form and I travelled every Monday and Wednesday (Bus and ferry in Winter, push bike in summer) from Woodchurch to Green Lane (Liverpool) to practise at the ATM Judo club and as they say, the rest is history! I continued at university, we won the National champs, and I founded Arrowebrook Judo Club in Upton and helped with Poulton Victoria in Wallasey ... which takes me back to New Zealand.

Quite a few members of the club were ex-seamen and they all said with one voice that New Zealand was the greatest country in the world. So, when the opportunity came, I took it. It was a sort of 'act of God'. It was February, pitch black and pouring with rain, I'd had a bad day at Ellergreen, I was on the bus and not in the car and when I got off in Lime Street instead of crossing the road and cutting through to Central for my train to New Brighton, for some reason despite the heavy rain I walked along Lime street to Lewis's and outside the Adelphi was a huge poster saying "NZ Teacher recruitment campaign here today".

I walked in and a few months later on December the 27th 1969 I was on the Canberra en route to NZ as HOD at Wairoa College (Co-ed and 85% Maori) in Northern Hawkes Bay and I have never regretted the decision. Wairoa (pop 6000) is to New Zealand as the Outer Hebrides is to UK. Very Remote and often cut off by floods and landslips in winter., but typical of NZ having all the amenities - hospital, rugby clubs, squash and tennis clubs, drama society etc - with very few people to use them. Very rich cattle breeder's and agricultural community - but very few of the rich sent their offspring to Wairoa College! They all went as boarders to Napier - 75 miles down the road. NZ then was like going back in time. "Arrive in Auckland and put your watch back twenty years" as the old saying has it, but my four years in Wairoa were four of the happiest years of my life! Founded the Judo Club, played soccer for the town team and won the Eastern League (one below NZ's national

league) and the Eastern Cup Competition, rowed for the Wairoa coxed four. Went to all the Balls in season - Hospital, Nurse's, Stock and Station agents, Primary teachers. I could go on. At end of school at 3pm I could be beach fishing 10 minutes after leaving the classroom, trout fishing in the Wairoa River in 20 minutes, Deer shooting in the Urewera National Park in an hour. The great surf beaches on the Mahia Peninsula (site of NZ's current rocket/space industry) were only 45 minutes up the road. A total sea-change from Brum or Greater Merseyside. (And, incidentally, it was the closest I came to marriage!).

I eventually moved to Auckland in 1974 as HOD English at Kelston Boys High School and stayed for 11 years, working for some of the time with the DP, later Principal, Graeme Henry (of All Blacks and Welsh fame). Whenever Graeme was on leave with ABs etc I moved up to Senior Master. My sporting pursuits continued. I'd avoided rugby in UK - hence my reputation as a non-sportsman, but I was invited by some of the staff to play Open Grade for Ponsonby. NZ rugby was a passionate game - fast, furious, and tough - and very skilful. I played until I was forty plus It was, to me, Judo without the running in between throws.

My teaching career had its moments - things I might have got away with in UK (then, not now!) I didn't in NZ - possibly the most famous was my Guy Fawkes Night project at Kelston when I got my 5th form to draw up a plan to blow up the school! Had to be realistic (no hidden nuclear bombs), during the day but no students or passers- by to be hurt, and no teachers except four which they could choose (a good way of finding out who the kids hated!) All went well until a friend of a parent saw one of the students doing my project and objected. Got in touch with the headmaster (so far so good) but also told the Press. Without giving any names, the article appeared on Page 3 of the NZ equivalent of The Sun, questions were asked in Parliament by Helen Clarke, then spokesperson for Education, and it was on talk-back radio with the Minister for two nights! Fortunately, I had collected in all the projects, refused to show them to anybody and told the headmaster I would destroy them. (I kept some of the best!) The whole thing blew over and my 'career' was not affected as I went on to teach as HOD at Rosmini College in Takapuna on Auckland's very wealthy North Shore.

A great school under a great Principal - Tom Gerrard, NZ's longest serving Principal - I spent 27 happy years at Rosmini and only retired four years ago at the age of 78! Rosmini had a very

good academic and sporting record producing top sportspeople from a very small base (less than 500 boys in the secondary dept) like NZ Cricketers Martin Snedden & Derek Pringle and All Blacks like Liam Barry & Craig Dowd, and the AB's doctor Doc Mayhew. On the staff was Kevin Barry, a member of the great AB teams of the sixties, who became a close friend of mine.

My years at Rosmini (1987 to 2016) proved very eventful in my life and convinced me that I was born under a lucky star.

Driving to choir practice one night in my Ford Fairmont 4.2L. I left the road and the ground at about 120kmh (my fault) vaulted a small pond and hit a tree. My only injury a bruise where the seat belt buckle had dug in.

I won a gold medal the first time Judo was included in the World Masters Games (1994). Immediately afterwards at my annual medical, I was diagnosed with a malignant tumour of the prostate. NB I was very fit and had no symptoms. No blockage, no blood, no pain. I seriously considered not going for my annual medical but, a week after the Games I went anyway. Had I not gone, I would have died. I'm now a missionary for all males over 50 to have an annual medical.

Convalescing in hospital after the op, my heart was attacked by a virus, and I now have a damaged left ventricle. I'd been NZ Judo Champion in my age and weight categories for about 8 years and this put paid to my competitive judo (and to changing car tyres, moving pianos, lifting heavy weights etc)

I said earlier that Judo changed my life and it is true. I became Director of Coaching for NZ etc. The sport has taken me all over the world and got me as Manager or Coach to many International tournaments including 5 World Championships, the Commonwealth Games (Auckland 1990) and Olympics (Barcelona 1992) where I also met the USA Dream Team – Michael Jordan etc. I don't go round boasting of my 'achievements' – I owe too much to other people – and I rarely wear any memorabilia (blazers, badges etc) It's still not quite 'done' in NZ although that's changing a bit now.

What have I enjoyed about NZ – hard to know where to begin! Many other countries have thermal areas, mountains, great beaches etc - NZ has them all but you don't have to travel far to experience them. You can literally have a beach to yourself. There are facilities for every sport everywhere without great cost (I'd never stepped into a rowing shell until Wairoa) Society is far less hidebound than in UK, although that's changing a bit with the gap between rich and poor getting wider. This is more noticeable in

the big cities than in the country and I'm glad that my first four years here was spent in Wairoa. I learnt a lot about rural NZ and not to judge a book by its cover. One of the guys who drank in the Workingmen's club straight off the farm in his 'Swanee' and his gumboots I later discovered he was a multi-millionaire! It's also still very much an open society – the politicians are far more accessible, ditto top sports people. They do literally mix with the people. A friend of mine recently stood next to Jacinda Ardern in a coffee-bar queue in West Auckland. An extreme case perhaps and I'm sure the security men were close by, but that's typical of this country. Zealanders are warm-hearted, friendly, inventive, practical people who let their deeds rather than their words speak for themselves and I still feel privileged to have been accepted here for the last 50 years.

Ray Roberts, (Stitt) Auckland, 2020

An email from Wendy Wood

Concerning her Uncle Herbert Lansbury Ward (1929/1934)

Grandad's old metal war trunk lived in my grandparent's attic. As a child, I often played with its contents; war items; uniform, tin helmet, gas mask, and other things. I dressed in the uniform, parading myself in the rust mottled mirror. I'd march up and down, inspecting my dolls and teddies, saluting them. It was a magical trunk, full of treasures.

After my mother died 10 years ago, I inherited Grandad's old trunk. It is well-travelled, the military green paint scraped, with large rusty patches. A large indentation in the lid, holes where the lock had been, although the handles were still attached.

Now it was mine. Yet, despite happy childhood memories, it sat unopened in a dark recess of my hallway. For years, an invisible wall stopped me acknowledging it. It had been in the shadows so long. In truth, I was afraid to open this Pandora's box. I knew the battered trunk held much of my family history, their secrets, happiness, and sorrows. Once opened, it would bring the past into the present.

One morning, the sun shone through the porch window into the hallway, and penetrated the dark corner, lighting up the trunk. I looked at it, then carried on with my chores. However, I couldn't shake off the vision of the sunlit trunk. It caught my attention. The paintwork seemed brighter. It didn't look so imposing. I wondered what had made me so hesitant. *Ok, I thought, it's time to open the old war chest.*

Cup of tea in hand, I sat on the floor next to the trunk. Thoughts tumbled around my head. I took a large breath and opened the lid. It creaked like a prop from a horror movie. Age-old dust particles rose into the air, dancing in the sunlight. The musty smell and shimmering dust hit the back of my throat, making me cough. The smell took me back to my grandparent's attic. *How old was the dust I'd swallowed?* I gulped my tea, burning my tongue. *Perhaps this wasn't such a good idea.* Clearing my throat, I thought, *don't be so silly.*

Tentatively, I peered inside. The trunk was full of things. Some wrapped in old, yellowed newspapers. There were books, journals, photographs, cardboard boxes, personal items, and envelopes of different sizes. Decades of memorabilia. My family's treasures.

One large, brown, dog-eared, well-thumbed envelope stood out. It read; 'ON HER MAJESTY'S SERVICE PLEASE DO NOT BEND'. Curious, I lifted it out. Dated 20 November 1953, it was addressed to my grandfather. Inside were 2 books, war medals, cap badges, letters, and telegrams. Leaving the other items in the envelope, I took the correspondence out, and arranged them by date stamp.

I settled down to read each one. The contents were a mixture of humour, birthday or Christmas greetings, information, or just heart-breaking. Correspondence between members of my family, from the War Office, to and from different people, etc. As I read, I either laughed or cried. I tried to imagine how they felt reading these. When I recognised some of the handwriting, I didn't know whether to feel happy or sad. *Bittersweet* comes to mind.

The final envelope was addressed to my grandparents, marked 'ON HIS MAJESTY'S SERVICE', sent by Registered Mail. The date stamp was obscured, it had numbered stickers, and a purple stamp depicting King George VI's head. Stomach churning, I knew instinctively what it was. *The Telegram*. It was in the trunk all this time, as if waiting for me to find it.

I read the words '*Killed in Action*'. My heart pounded. My head spun. Then, everything hit me. *My poor grandparents.* I knew exactly how they felt, their shock, pain, sorrow, loss and grief.

In the same envelope was a ration book stamped '*deceased*', and an old black and white photograph. In pencil, on the back, it read, '*To Mam. Jnr. NCO Course passed A1 above average 18/10/1940*'. It was Uncle Lans. *I knew*

these items would be some of my saddest and most precious possessions.



Lans in uniform 1

At that moment, I realised I had unknowingly grown up with a share of the family's grief, as yet unreleased. His death impacted the whole family; from me, the youngest, to my great aunts and uncles. With a lump in my throat, I sat beside the trunk clutching the photograph to my chest and sobbed uncontrollably. My shoulders shook, and tears streamed down my cheeks onto my blouse. Through my tears, I saw my uncle looking at me from the photograph. Proud in his uniform, this handsome young man was about to go to war.

I was overwhelmed. I wept for Nan and Grandad, who lost their son; for my mum, Irene, who was so close to him; for my Uncle Tommy, and my aunts, DoDo, (Ethel Dorothy), Peggy and Marjorie, who lost their brother; and for Lans, for what he had suffered. Finally, I wept for myself, the child, and the adult.

My uncle, Herbert Lansbury Ward was born 20 November 1917. Although he died before I was born, I came to know him through the family. I understand he was happy, kind, and cheerful, even when times were rough. He was outgoing, personable, clever, a fashionable dresser, keen sportsman, and family orientated. His photographs show him as an upright handsome man, with, *in my opinion*, an enigmatic smile.

After his Birkenhead Institute education, he became a Local Government Officer in the Education Department. At twenty years old, he became the youngest officiating Registrar, until he joined the Army. Both he and mum were musical and enjoyed trips to the cinema, amateur dramatics and operetta. Mum told me he could dance, and had a good singing voice, as did she.

Both made many stage appearances, especially in Gilbert and Sullivan performances.

Uncle Lans was also a playwright of plays and farces. In Grandad's trunk, I found a script he wrote in 1938, entitled, '*Here and There*', handwritten on musty, sellotaped, foolscap paper. His humorous personality is shown in the first line, as '*the dispenser of trash and baloney*'. His play is set in '*Much Yapping Convalescent Home*'. His six by three-foot Christmas card from the residents seized by Scotland Yard for fingerprinting, after thirty-five windows were broken during the home's Christmas Pantomime, '*Snow White and the Seven Quarts*'. '*Mr. Sealing-Wacks*', the treasurer was recently seen wearing a new overcoat, and '*Percy Wifflesnook*', is progressing well and should be out by Easter. The villains, '*Big-Hearted Archibald*', and his sidekick '*Stinker*', eventually meet their fate. I wept again, this time, with tears of laughter. Yes, Lans had a wicked sense of humour.



Lans on left 1

Grandad's trunk contained photographs he sent home for '*Mam*', and letters to various members of the family, mentioning he will '*buy everyone Christmas presents when he comes home*', and thanks them for their '*gifts of books, socks, and other needful things*'. He hopes '*the family are well*'. Messages from a caring son and brother.

My Grandparents house was the focal point for the family. I lived with them for some considerable time after several hip operations at Leasowe Hospital for Crippled Children. Even as a child, I could tell when they, or any of the family were talking about Lans. Occasionally,

conversations stopped if they thought I was listening.

'Not in front of the child'
or *'don't get upset'*
or *'wait till Wendy goes to bed'*
or *'go and play in your room'*.

So many hushed whispers. Their grief was always there, it was tangible, even if under the surface. Sometimes Nan would cry, or my mum. I didn't understand but I knew they were sad. Mum spoke about him often. Nan and Grandad never mentioned him, to me, anyway. Grandad never spoke about the war either. I wanted to help them, make the pain go away, but I was only a child, so I drew them pictures.

There were family photographs all around the house. Lans's photograph was proudly displayed on Nan's sideboard, next to her crystal vase, which was always full of flowers. I thought, perhaps, they were for him. In this head and shoulders photograph, he was smiling. His eyes followed you. Mum said, '*he was watching over us*', and I believed her. Sometimes I talked to him; well, to his picture, a silent and constant presence. I thought I sensed him occasionally. I felt he was never far away.

Things always became tense around November. It was Remembrance time and his birthday. I was allowed to stay up and watch the Remembrance Service from the Royal Albert Hall on TV. They said it was important to remember. This made me feel grown up and part of it. The grief, the sorrow, I mean. We watched in silence, until the hymn singing, when Nan and I joined in. The following morning, the whole family attended the service in Hamilton Square, where the huge white Cenotaph stands in front of the Town Hall, where Lans had worked.

The year I was nine years old, I wore my favourite dress, and had a poppy on my lapel. The whole square was full of people, jostling to find a space. We stood in a family group. The crowds were so deep, my dad lifted me up so I could see. Suddenly, I heard the BOOM, BOOM, BOOM, of the big drum. Then the trumpets. I strained to see them. The parade marched into the square, all in step. I couldn't be excited as I knew this was a serious occasion. I watched the march-past, and pretended Lans was walking with them, smiling at us.

That year, when the crowds had dispersed, I was given a small wooden cross marked '*HERBERT LANSBURY WARD, KILLED IN BURMA*'. We walked over to the Cenotaph, where I pushed the cross into the grass, in line with the other wooden crosses. I realised that my role was important, and it was an honour to pay tribute to my uncle.

BURMA: SECOND BATTLE OF ARAKAN 1943-1944

Lans enlisted in the Army when World War II broke out in 1939. At 22 years old, he was assigned Company Quartermaster Serjeant, 8th battalion, the York and Lancaster Regiment. After training, his battalion was posted to India.

In December 1941, Japan invaded British territories in Asia, and after several battles in Burma, the Allied forces withdrew into India. Plans were already being made to recapture the plain, harbour and airfield of Akyab Island, on the Mayu Peninsula, a narrow front, bordered by steep jungle-covered mountains of the Mayu Ranges, Arakan State.

Lans's battalion became part of General Slim's 14th Army, India Command, formed for this offensive. Orders were to fight through the monsoon, no stopping, no withdrawal. The 14th Indian Division, each man carrying his heavy kit and weapons, began the long march towards Arakan, facing problems of extreme terrain, severe weather, and disease.

I can only imagine the horrors he faced. Monsoons hampering progress through unmapped, and dangerous, mountainous territory. Men hacking their way through thick jungle, surrounded by dangerous wildlife, unfamiliar sounds, poisonous insects and plants, all hidden in the semi-darkness of overgrown vegetation. Dragging their supplies through fierce heat, torrential rain, muddy quagmires, and swamps, home to malarial mosquitos.

I can almost smell and taste the stench of rotting vegetation, and the wet mud that penetrated everything, and the fate of those who succumbed to tropical diseases. I could only imagine the physical and mental state of the troops, living with the perpetual threat of ambush. Despite these conditions, they reached the Mayu Ranges, where the Japanese had well-established, camouflaged, impenetrable bunkers.

The troops cleared vegetation and *dug-in* to wait for the monsoons to cease, and ready themselves for *The Second Battle of Arakan*. The 14th Army would launch their attack during the dry season, when mud turned to thick red dust, which was just as penetrating. During this time, sounds of explosions, screams, and fighting, pierced the darkness below, while tracer-fire and star-shells illuminated the sky.



Typical jungle troops 1

During the conflict, Lans could only write home sporadically. Censorship meant he could only give glimpses of his experiences in his letters; *'Can't say where I am, so hot in the daytime, so cold at night.... lots of mosquito's... so tired...I have bronchitis now... I don't want to see any more jungle if possible, I've had my share...no comfort, sleep or respite'*.

He also describes eating *'monkey curry, cooked by the Indians, chameleons, wild fruit, silkworms, parrots, and other pretty things'*.

Waiting in the mountains, Orders to advance came unexpectedly. Their mission was to attack *'a Japanese held feature'* and *'cut their lines of communication'*, at dusk, that evening. Lans was *'in charge of handling defence and vital supplies'*. I doubt they would admit to being afraid, but Lans alludes to the men having *'some trepidation'*. At dusk, with weary shoulders, aching legs and blistered feet, the forward parties advanced with *bayonets fixed*.

Lans's group, transporting vital supplies and ammunition, were the last to move. Cloaked in darkness, barely able to see, they stole into the jungle, dragging a 25 pounder by rope up a narrow dusty animal track, towards the Japanese position. The rear guard ready with Bren guns. As they neared the crest, they heard machine-gun fire in front. But, before they could move any further, a Japanese ambush party surrounded them, and opened fire. Nobody survived. The group was *'obliterated'*, killed in a hail of bullets. Lans was dead.

Military records show that his body was recovered, and buried by his comrades the following evening, the Divisional Padre officiating.

He died 24th March 1944. He was just 26 years old and had been a soldier for less than 5 years. This young, dutiful, patriotic, and brave soldier would have been proud to learn that the troops captured their target and succeeded in their mission. His death had not been in vain.

In 1952, he was re-interred in Taukkyan Military Cemetery, near Rangoon, where he lies under Eastern skies for perpetuity.

Chosen by my Grandparents, his gravestone reads, '4198432 C.Q.M.S. H. L. WARD 8th Bn. The York and Lancaster Regt. 24th March 1944. Age 26. In Loving Memory. A corner of a foreign field that is forever England'.

TRIBUTES

'Sir, I have had the honour to command the Company in your son served...his death caused serious upset to myself...we worked side by side ...his work has been invaluable maintaining 100% efficiency. My company was called away at short notice...your son was bringing vital supplies, unfortunately the Japs laid an ambush...your son died as he would have wished...the men of my company wish me to convey to you...we have all lost, myself especially, a great friend'. CPT J Pattison to T H Ward 8 April 1944

'I hesitated before sending this snap...a memorial built and erected by the men as a mark of esteem to Lans...dedicated at a field memorial

service...the place is now a small cemetery...as a mark of my affection for Lans, I decided to send it to you'. Cmd Sgt Mjr John Moore India Command to Mr/Mrs Ward 17 Jan 1945

'I wish to pay tribute to a friend...more like a brother...100% tops...his wise cracks and jolly disposition making light of things made life bearable'. Cmd Sgt Mjr John Moore India Command to Mr/Mrs Ward 18 Feb 1945

Such was the impact of Lans's character, and his untimely death, that I have carried the family's grief throughout my childhood, to the present day. Without fail, wherever I am, each Remembrance Day, I place a small wooden cross, with the same wording, next to the Cenotaph. My Act of Remembrance and personal tribute to him, ensuring he will not be forgotten.

How I wish I had met him.

Annual Dinner 2021

Subject to the Government Rules on the Coronavirus Pandemic, the Annual Reunion Dinner will be held on Friday 1st October 2021 at **Prenton Golf Club**, at 18:30 for 19:30
The last dinner, in 2019, with an attendance of 84, was a huge success, largely down to the increase in Old Boys from the Tollemache Road years.

So, as the last few years the theme is **Bring a Friend**.

If you'd like to go to the dinner, but perhaps feel that you wouldn't know anyone there, then the answer would be to bring all your (ex-school) mates with you. Over the last few years, several groups of members organised their own tables, which made it much easier for me, and was very successful. Ideally tables will sit 8 to 10 people, if you can't make 8 or 10, then try a 4 or 5 half table, I'll put another small group with you.

As usual, you can pay by bank transfer, or send me a cheque. Just let me know who is part of your group.

If the Coronavirus restrictions mean that the dinner must be cancelled, then all money will be refunded.

APPLICATION FORM FOR THE ANNUAL DINNER

If you wish to attend, then please apply and pay online, we have managed to keep the **same price** as 2019

See

https://www.birkenheadinstitute.co.uk/BIOB_Annual_Dinner.html

or return the completed form to: -

Keith Dutton

11 Fininstall Road

Wirral

CH63 9YW



I will be attending the Dinner at Prenton Golf Club on Friday October 1st, 2021

Time 6.30pm for 7.30pm.

Dress: - Jacket and tie or Lounge suit and tie.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

E-mail ADDRESS.....

TELEPHONE NUMBER..... (Including dial code)

SCHOOL YEARS AT B.I (To arrange SEATING Plan)

Any Special Dietary Requirements.....

Any Special Seating Requirements.....

Please enclose a cheque for £35.00 made out to BIOB or transfer £35.00 to Sort Code = **30-15-52**
Account = **03162233** Account Name = **Birkenhead Institute Old Boys** remember to include your name
in order to identify the payment.

If paying by Bank Transfer, please send an e-mail confirmation after doing the transfer to
webmaster@BIOB.co.uk - Donations for the draw will be most welcome.