MEDIA RELEASE

PERSONAL STORIES OF THOSE WHO FOUGHT AND DIED IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA DURING THE WORLD WARS TO BE SHARED BY COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION

Fresh insights into the people who fought and died in South-East Asia during the two world wars are being revealed with the unveiling of interactive visitor information panels in Kranji, Singapore (October 3) and Kanchanaburi, Thailand (October 8).

Digital artefacts and stories of the prisoners-of-war who died building the Thai-Burma railway for the Japanese – after being captured in Singapore – will be made available by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) to smartphones users at the two cemeteries.

Visitors can use their phones to scan a code that navigates to a website revealing the backstories of those who died from sickness, malnutrition and exhaustion in the process of building the notorious Thai-Burma railway.

One example is that of Captain Oliver Bellingham-Smith, a former racing car mechanic who died serving with the Federated Malay States Volunteer Force in the Second World War, having emigrated to South East Asia from Europe in the 1920s.

Click here to learn more about Bellingham-Smith via the microsite that will be accessed by those using the interactive panels at CWGC Kanchanaburi War Cemetery.

The panel unveilings in Kanchanaburi and at CWGC Kranji War Cemetery will be made by CWGC Vice Chairman Sir Joe French. A third panel is also being installed at Chungkai War Cemetery, Chungkai, Thailand this month.

In Thailand – and Burma – it is possible to visit the graves and memorials commemorating the lives of 10,000 British, Dutch, Australian and New Zealand soldiers held prisoner by the Japanese during the Second World War.

Barry Murphy, CWGC Director, Africa and Asia Pacific Area, said: “The CWGC is pleased to be able to preserve the memory of the Commonwealth servicemen who lost their lives in South East Asia during both wars through the installation of interactive visitors panels. We hope those visiting either the River Kwai or the business hub that is Singapore will be able to visit the nearby cemeteries to pay their respects and learn more about the protagonists of the conflicts.”

Ends.
For more information, contact: Peter Francis on +44(0)1628 507163 or +44(0)7766 255884 or by email peter.francis@cwgc.org

Notes for editors:

1) The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (www.cwgc.org)

The CWGC maintains the graves of the 1.7 million Commonwealth servicemen and women who died during the two world wars. It also holds and updates an extensive and accessible records archive.

The CWGC operates in over 23,000 locations in 153 countries across all continents except for Antarctica.

14-18: A series of high-profile worldwide events will take place to mark the centenary of the First World War, many of which will take place at Commission sites. The Commission will ensure that these sites are maintained to the highest standard and is installing information panels at over 500 sites to enhance the visitor experience. Smartphone users will also be able to access additional information, including the personal stories of some of those buried at the site.

The CWGC provides teachers and youth workers with a comprehensive range of educational resources and support materials so that future generations remain engaged in the work of the CWGC and continue to remember those who died in the two world wars.

2) War burials in Thailand

In Thailand – and Burma – it is possible to visit the graves and memorials commemorating the lives of 10,000 British, Dutch, Australian and New Zealand soldiers held prisoner by the Japanese during the Second World War.

Many of the soldiers died from sickness, malnutrition and exhaustion in the process of building the notorious Thai-Burma railway; it has been calculated that one man died for every single sleeper that was laid.

Japan’s decision to build the railway was provoked by the need to improve communications to maintain the large Japanese army in Burma. They utilised a labour force comprised of prisoners of war taken in the campaigns in South-East Asia and the Pacific, along with forced labour brought from Malaya (Malaysia/Singapore) and the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) or conscripted in Thailand and Burma.

3) War burials in Singapore

At Kranji War Cemetery, in the north of Singapore, just 14 miles from Singapore City, it’s possible to visit the graves and memorials commemorating Commonwealth forces who lost their lives fighting in Singapore, Malaysia and Vietnam. This occurred primarily during the Second World War but also in World War One.

Kranji War Cemetery is one of the most important and evocative landmarks on the island of Singapore. It was designed by the esteemed Scottish architect Colin St Clair Oakes but it was begun by Commonwealth prisoners of war held by the Japanese in Kranji.
Above: Kanchanaburi War Cemetery, Thailand

Leaflet guides to Thailand and Singapore World War Commemorations:

http://issuu.com/wargravescommission/docs/thailand_guide_for_web

http://issuu.com/wargravescommission/docs/kranji_leaflet_dl_a4_without_crop_m_e09b3baa2ef376