

## Chittagong war cemetery

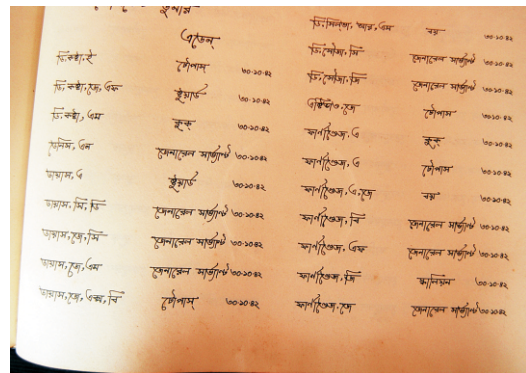
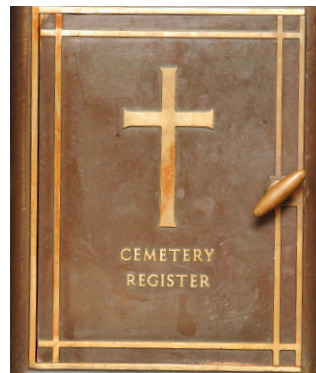
# Memories of a stranger's service ...

**E**ARTH'S soil is a graveyard for bones and bark, rocks and feathers, stems and leaves and petals, old logs and grasses, animal skin and fur, foliage and underbrush, and creaturely bodies of all sorts.

And thus did the earth invite the bodies of many brave soldiers who died in honour serving for their country, protecting it from the hands of enemy, buried in the Chittagong War Cemetery.

This cemetery is located on the Basha Mia Road, and lies 22 kilometres north of the airport and eight kilometres from the port on a vast area of land -- formerly paddy fields -- but has now been developed.

It is near the Arts College near Chatteshanry Road a road that leads to the Hindu Kali Bari Mandir (temple). Being in close proximity to the Finlay's Guest



chapels.

Chittagong, a port on the Bay of Bengal, has a long history. A stronghold of pirates in the 15th century, today is an important trading centre and the terminus of the Assam-Bengal Railway.

It is the nearest port to Northern

cranes taken away in 1942 had been replaced.

After the retreat from Burma in 1942 the area was used as a training centre, by the end of 1943 Chittagong became an advanced base for the Fourteenth Army, which, at that time was operating on the Arakan front.

It was also a hospital centre, and the 152<sup>nd</sup> British General Hospital was at Chittagong from December 1944 until October 1945, before it was moved to Rangoon.

Created by the army, the well preserved Chittagong War Memorial a quiet and picturesque place lie buried in eternal peace, 755 soldiers from Britain, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, India, Myanmar, East and West Africa, The Netherlands and Japan, who laid down their lives on the Myanmar front during the World War II.

The Imperial War Graves Commission maintains the cemetery and is kept open to the public from 7.00 to 12 noon and 2.00 to 5.00 pm.

Black or white, no one but their own can distinguish the colour of these soldiers. They all lie, immaterial of their ranks, in these cold tombs, making true James Shirley's words: 'Death lays its icy hands on Kings: Sceptre and crown must tumble down and in the dust be equal made with the poor crooked scythe and spade'.

Originally containing about 400 burials, graves were transferred to the 1939-1945 War Cemetery from the Lushai Hills (Assam) and other isolated sites, and from Chittagong Civil Cemetery; Chandragona Baptist Mission Cemetery; Chiringa Military

Cemetery; Cox's Bazar New Military and Civil (Muhammadian) Cemeteries; Chittagong (Panchalaish) Burial Ground; Dacca Military Cemetery; Demagiri Cemetery; Dhuapolong Muslim Burial Ground; Dhuapolong Christian Military Cemetery; Dohazari Military and R.A.F. Cemeteries; Jessore Protestant Cemetery; Khulna Cemetery; Khurushkul Island Christian and Muhammadian Cemeteries; Lungleh Cemetery (Assam); Nawapara Cemetery (Assam); Patiya Military Cemetery; Rangamati Cemetery; Tezgaon Roman Catholic Cemetery; Tumru Ghat Military Cemetery and Tumru M.D.S. Hospital Cemetery.

A well maintained Cemetery Register with a brown cover fringed with a bronze border carries details and traces of those buried here.

A cross standing tall is seen as one enters the metal gates, although it is different to the position of the cross at the Mayanmati War Memorial, this too boldly radiates the light of bravery shown by the fallen soldiers.

The site upon which this cemetery lies includes on the southeastern side a horseshoe shaped hill, which forms a natural amphitheatre. Evergreen and flowering shrubs clothe this and do the bronze plaques mounted on low pedestals mark a charming background to the lawn-like plots of graves.

Each tombstone of marble and mosaic carries the name of the deceased and some information about the origin of the person and the regiment he belonged to.

In some cases, the names of the parents are carved on the stone with grief-filled epitaphs conveying the pain and sorrow parents and kin bore losing their loved ones.

The two non-war graves are those of seamen of the British Merchant Navy whose death was not due to war service.

Within this cemetery will also be found the Chittagong Memorial, together with the Bombay 1939-1945 War Memorial which commemorates over 400 sailors of the former Indian Navy and nearly 6,000 sailors of the former Indian Merchant Navy who were lost at sea during the war years. Each memorial takes the form of a finely bound volume containing the names of the dead.

The volume is preserved in a little glass cubicle titled 'Memorial Register' and engraved beneath the stone in English and Bangla, it reads:

"1939 1945. This book contains the names of 6,500 sailors and merchant seamen who died in the service of their motherland and have no grave but the sea"

Yet it seems that these souls cry out '...Make My Death a Canticle for Peace...'

Story: SILVERINE SHRIKANTHAN  
Photo: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN



House, the burial area lies at the bottom of a slope behind the guest house and is lined, fringed and surrounded by a variety of jungle, fruit and flowering trees.

The cemetery is a quarter of a mile from the main road and turning off the main road, it is reached by a narrow carpeted lane, which leads on from the entrance gate to another metal gate flanked by two small brick

Burma and in May 1942, when a Japanese attack seemed probable, the port was closed and much of the equipment removed; but when the danger of the invasion of India receded the port was reopened, and was later developed to meet operational needs in Burma. By November 1943 additional moorings for deep-sea ships had been obtained from Calcutta, and most

