**THE REVEREND JOHN THIRWELL WANLESS RAFVR (1904 -1945)**

John Wanless was born on 13 December 1904 into a poor coal mining family at Crawcook, Ryton-on-Tyne, Co Durham, the fourth in a family of ten children.

He was ordained into Methodist ministry in 1932 and was commissioned into the RAFVR as a Free Church Chaplain on 1 February 1940.

At some time over the next few months he was posted to the Far East and, when Singapore fell to the Japanese, he was evacuated from there to Java. He was taken prisoner at Tasik Malaje, Java on 8 March 1942. 4 other RAF Chaplains were also taken prisoner in Java, they all survived, only John died. What is known is that these Chaplains continued as far as they were able to minister to those among whom they lived, taking services, giving sermons and marking significant occasions such as Christmas, Easter and Armistice Day.

John Wanless was part of the group of POWs who made the “Death March” from Sandakhan to Ranau in Borneo in the spring of 1945. This march took almost 2500 prisoners to their deaths of whom 641 were British, John Wanless being one of them. The other prisoners were Australian, 6 of whom were able to escape and were the only survivors. Those who managed to complete the march found themselves at Ranau, where they died from illness, exhaustion and starvation. The very few who survived were executed just before the end of the war. Padre John Wanless managed to make the march, carrying baggage like a mule and with no food. He died of Acute Enteritus, according to the Japanese authorities, but it is now known that this was added to starvation, sickness and savage treatment, in Jungle Camp No 2 at Ranau which is near Sabah in what is now East Malaysia, on 30 June 1945. He has no known grave and his name can be found on the Singapore memorial and on the Roll of Honour of the former Ryton Urban District Council area (the villages of **Clara Vale, Crawcrook**, Greenside, Ryton, Stargate and Addison) in Co Durham.

Padre John Wanless was mentioned in a Dispatch for Distinguished Service in October 1946.

(Compiled by Stephen Ware with material mostly provided by Eleanor Rance)