

Tributes to Dr George Blair MBE by Friends of Millbank

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George Blair, to whom an annual Memorial Prize and Lecture at the Royal Army Medical College are dedicated, was born on 6 December 1916 in London.

He was educated at Dundee High School and qualified as a doctor at St Andrews University in 1940. He played golf for his university, and was awarded Colours.

At the outbreak of WWII, he enlisted in the Royal Army Medical Corps and was posted to the 10th Indian Division as Regimental Medical Officer to 5 Field Regiment, Royal Artillery serving on the North-West frontier of India. With the threat of imminent Japanese invasion, the regiment was moved to the Malayan peninsula, where he was involved in the disastrous retreat of 1941.

As an instance of his outstanding courage and devotion to duty in these difficult conditions, he descended a steep embankment to administer medical aid to the wounded survivors in an army ambulance, which had tumbled from the roadway hotly pursued by the enemy.

Taken prisoner by the Japs in the fall of Singapore Island in February 1942, he was incarcerated firstly in Changi prison and later moved to forced labour in copper mines at Taihoku, Formosa, where the Japanese used to hose down the prisoners when they emerged exhausted from working in the mines below.

After his untimely death at the age of 62, an appreciation of his services to his fellow prisoners of war (POWs) appeared in issue Number 104, THE GUNNER, in July 1979. This was written by a patient of Dr Blair's in general practice in Dishforth, North Yorkshire, who had been a fellow POW of the Japs.

(Dr Blair had joined this family practice shortly after the end of the war). The writer commented on his compassion and care for his fellow POWs, for which he was awarded the MBE after the war. (Indeed there is anecdotal evidence that Dr Blair deserved an even higher award). One prisoner said of him: "Did you know that Dr Blair nearly died but I am sure that God kept him alive to look after us."

Sadly his health gradually failed, possibly related to his privations as a Jap POW, and he died in 1979 after just under forty noble years devoted to the medical profession.

¹ This tribute was originally published by Robin Agnew as 'Tribute to Dr George Blair MBE' in *The Medic (The Royal Army Medical Corps Magazine)*, June 2013; 3:11-12.

² Robin A L Agnew was joint winner (with Lt Col Mark S Bailey) of the George Blair Memorial Prize 2012 for his paper 'The Capture of Guadeloupe in 1815 – the role of John Forbes (1787-1861)'. Robin graduated as a doctor in Dublin in 1950 and for a while served as a medical specialist in the Royal Navy before he retired in the rank of Surgeon Lieutenant Commander in 1960. He then specialised in chest medicine and was appointed consultant chest physician in Liverpool in 1970. He retired from the NHS in 1990, thereafter being appointed as Emeritus Consultant Chest Physician. He has a keen interest in medical history and is the author of several publications, including *The life of Sir John Forbes (1787-1861)* and *Lightfoot Winds* <http://www.sirjohnforbesbooks.webeden.co.uk/>