

‘One of the most popular figures of old China days’

The story of ‘Bill’ Arthur Jack William Evans

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The story of 'Bill' Arthur Jack William Evans

Early Days



Arthur Jack William Evans, 'Bill' to his friends was born in West Bridgford, south of Nottingham, on 6 April 1902 to Welsh parents Arthur 'Taff' Parsonage Evans and his wife Annie Elizabeth nee Williams, who was more widely known as Nancy.¹ By April 1911, the family had moved back to Wales, living at 43 Plasturton Ave, Cardiff, a twenty minute walk from Cardiff Arms Park where the Welsh rugby team had famously beaten the All Blacks six years earlier.

The family were comfortably middle class. 'Taff', hailing from Wrexham, was an insurance manager. In their household, as well as 'Nancy', there was 'Bill's younger brother Edward Percy Evans aged three, Annie's elder spinster sister Mary Jane Williams, a lodger and a sixteen year old servant named Sarah Lewis.

Tragedy hit the family with the death of Bill's mother from cancer in 1914 aged 40. Bill was aged twelve and his brother Ted aged just seven. The family then lived happily with various members of the Williams family until his father re-married Winifred Lucy Vellacott in 1918.²

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all biographical information is sourced from www.ancestry.co.uk

² Source from email correspondence with David Evans, nephew of Bill Evans, and his wife Diana, 25 February 2019

A family photo shows that in 1917, Bill was attending Bristol Grammar School and was a member of the school's first XV.³ After leaving Bristol Grammar School, Bill first joined the staff of the Royal Exchange Assurance Co., before joining the large cigarette conglomerate British-American Tobacco [BAT]. During his time in Bristol he was a member of the Schoolmaster's Cricket Club and Bristol Rugby Club.⁴ While training with BAT in Liverpool he played rugby for the city's famous Waterloo Rugby Club.⁵

A Short History of British-American Tobacco

In October 1901, the American Tobacco Company purchased the British cigarette manufacturer Ogdens Limited based in Liverpool, England. The purchase was tactical, enabling the American Tobacco Company to gain access to the protected British market for manufactured tobacco products.⁶ This provoked an immediate response by the British tobacco industry which resulted in 13 British firms amalgamating under the banner of the Imperial Tobacco Company. By the time this tobacco war was resolved about one year later, the changes wrought served to 'shape the future of the international tobacco industry throughout the remainder of the twentieth century.'⁷ The two rival conglomerates agreed that they would trade exclusively in their own domestic markets and reached an agreement about trading throughout the rest of the world. This arrangement resulted in the two companies forming a joint venture by the creation of the British-American Tobacco Company – an early example of a multinational enterprise.⁸ Thus the company was formed where Bill would spend almost all of his working life.

During the decade following its creation, events conspired to leave Britain as the most influential party both in their shareholding and company directors of BAT. By the end of WW1,

³ Source from family records held by Richard King, nephew of A J W Evans, copy held by author. Hereafter referred to as 'The King Collection'

⁴ Source from copy of Bristol Newspaper clipping 1943, The King Collection

⁵ Source from email correspondence with David and Diana Evans, 25 February 2019

⁶ Howard Cox, *The Global Cigarette: Origins and Evolution of British American Tobacco, 1880-1945*, Oxford, 2000, 19

⁷ Cox, *Global Cigarette*, 21

⁸ Cox, *Global Cigarette*, 76-77

the London based directors were able to exert control over the management of BAT as well. ‘From this point onwards the company functioned unambiguously as a British-based multinational’.⁹

From Liverpool to Shanghai

After his training in Liverpool, Bill travelled to Shanghai in the early 1920s, probably the summer of 1922, one of many young men who committed themselves to four years away from England and to not getting married during their first, or sometimes second contract, a normal practice of large companies at that time.

On his arrival, he quickly entered into the city’s social and sporting life. The first recorded rugby game he played was 17 November 1922. His early performances earned his subsequent representative recognition. Despite narrowly missing out on selection for the Shanghai Interport team in February 1923, he did make the Easter trip to Tientsin in the north of China, where a year earlier, the BAT cigarette manufacturing facility had been set up.



⁹ Cox, *Global Cigarette*, 116

In late January 1925, he travelled to Hankow on the *S. S. Loongwo* during the Chinese New Year holidays to play rugby.¹⁰ The interport team photo above shows Bill marked as number 1. Accompanying him on that trip were two players who would attend Evans wedding some seven years later, Edward ‘Ted’ McLaren (2) and John Crisford Stewart (3).

Also on the journey was his friend John Edmund Jupp (4); more than seventeen years later, in October 1942, Evans and ‘Juppo’ would embark on an altogether different journey by boat. Years later, Evans wrote to Jupp’s father about their early life together.

I have known Edmund for many years, meeting him when he first came to Shanghai about 1924, in fact, we lived together for a little while and played rugger, cricket and rode quite a bit together. Incidentally, it would probably interest you to know that I married Irene LeBas, to whom Edmund was once engaged.¹¹

After four years of service, Bill returned to England in May 1926, marking his intended residence with his father in Bristol. He was back in Shanghai by the end of November 1926, listed as playing rugby in one of the season’s warm up matches.

Evans’ final season playing rugby in Shanghai was also his most successful. By the time the 1927-28 season came round, largely thanks to the arrival of more than 20,000 soldiers sent to defend Shanghai and multinational companies such as BAT from the Chinese Nationalist threat, rugby in Shanghai had grown considerably. In that season he played against the visiting Japanese champions Meiji University, which resulted in a heavy defeat although, one report noted that, ‘Evans played his usual cool and heady game’,¹² while another stated that Evans ‘at stand-off half, was excellent and played the most finished football, selling the dummy on more than one occasion with complete success.’¹³

¹⁰ *North China Daily News (NCDN)*, 23 January 1925, 17

¹¹ Letter written by Evans to J A Jupp 10 May 1943 regarding his son Edmond Jupp, The Jupp Collection

¹² *NCDN*, 27 December 1927, 14

¹³ *NCDN*, 29 December 1927, 16

Next up for Evans that season was Shanghai's arch rivals Hong Kong. A few weeks later, Evans poignantly turned out against the Welsh Regiment who overwhelmed Shanghai 30:0. Next came the eagerly anticipated series of games against the US 6th Marines who were visiting from Tientsin. Evans played in two matches in the three match series, both victories. In his first match, 'The finest individual effort came from Evans, whose spectacular try later on was a sheer delight: it was a relief to see that he did not come to grief when he sold the final dummy to a player over the line.'¹⁴

Onto Hankow

Sometime after his final game in April 1928, he received news of his second posting – to Hankow, a city on the Yangtze River in the heart of China. He was issued a passport there in March 1929.

After a second four years with BAT, Bill once again had earned a furlough. Passengers lists show that in April 1930 he departed Yokokama bound for San Francisco, presumably to see his mother's relatives who were living on the West Coast. A month later he travelled from New York to Liverpool, allowing time to visit his family in Bristol before heading back to Japan and then back to Hankow from London in August of that year.

With his rugby playing days in the past, Evans was still a formidable cricket player. In September 1932 opening the batting and scoring 63 and 23 not out, he helped Hankow beat Shanghai by 10 wickets, taking 3 wickets for good measure. His soon to be brother in law, the ex-Scottish rugby international Edward 'Ted' McLaren did not fare so well, picking up two 'ducks'.¹⁵

¹⁴ *NCDN*, 20 March 1928, 17

¹⁵ *China Press (CP)*, 19 Sep 1932, 6

A Change in Circumstances

Bill's life changed in Hankow when he went to the theatre. Irene's account of what happened was told by her to Bill's niece by marriage,

Bill went to see an amateur dramatic play in which Irene took a major part and took a liking to her. He then wrote 2 letters: one to Irene saying how wonderful she was and how dreadful the other female star was: and the other to the other female star saying how wonderful she was and how dreadful Irene was. He then purposefully put the letters each in the wrong envelopes, posted them and waited for results! Irene rose to the bait and they never looked back.¹⁶

After their engagement in June 1932,¹⁷ Bill and Irene were married in Hankow on 5 October 1932. Irene Le Bas or Lebas depending on who was using or writing the family name,¹⁸ was born on the island of Santuao, Fujian on China's south-east coast.¹⁹ The port had been declared as open by Imperial Decree on 5 April 1898. Irene's father, Monsieur Edmond Georges Lebas had joined the Chinese Maritime Customs in 1897 and was posted firstly to Canton and later to Santuao where Irene was born on 17 November 1905.²⁰ Her mother was Guinivere Bidwell, part of the Bidwell dynasty, several of whom were prominent Shanghai rugby players.²¹ Prior to returning to China, Irene had attended finishing school in Paris with Daphne Du Maurier in 1922 (sic: more likely 1925), Daphne was particularly friendly with Irene's brothers, Maurice and Cyril, referring to them, and Irene, in her autobiography, they remained lifelong friends.²²

¹⁶ Email to author from David & Diana Evans, 23 March 2019

¹⁷ *North China Herald (NCH)*, 6 Jul 1932, 39

¹⁸ Irene Le Bas attended finishing school in Paris with Daphne Du Maurier in 1922 (sic: more likely 1925) and remained friends thereafter. Source email correspondence with Richard King, 25 March 2019

¹⁹ For a brief history of the Island see Robert Nield, *China's Foreign Places: The Foreign Presence in China in the Treaty Port Era, 1840-1943*, Hong Kong, 2015, 195-6

²⁰ *NCH*, 19 October 1932, 81

²¹ For a detailed account of the Bidwells in China see Simon Drakeford, *It's a Rough Game But Good Sport: The Life, Times and Personalities of the Shanghai Rugby Football Club*, Hong Kong, 2014, 125-143

²² Daphne Du Maurier, *Myself When Young*, London, 2004, 85

Also attending the wedding was his work mate J C Stewart and soon to be brother in law the ex-Scottish rugby international Edward ‘Ted’ McLaren who would soon marry Joan Bidwell, Guinivere’s niece.²³

The new couple settled down to life together in China. Bill was entitled to another furlough in 1934. An unpublished part biographical, part fictional account of Bill’s life written by his cousin Eileen De Crespo suggested that when they returned to England, Bill was forced to spend time resting, recovering from a gastric ulcer.²⁴

In a letter written to his parents in March 1935, which provided a very detailed itinerary for his parents proposed tour of the UK. Two comments squeezed onto the page offer a glimpse of Bill’s humour and the loving relationship he shared with his wife, ‘After reading this over Irene has just said that I haven’t said anything about ourselves. All I can say is that I am getting more handsome than ever, and followed by everyone – dogs as well! My nagging wife insists that I say she has a stiff neck, but otherwise is just as uninteresting as ever!.. Bill’ To which Irene noted, ‘It isn’t true, I’m not uninteresting am I? But I really have got a stiff neck. Love Irene.’²⁵

In September 1936, on the occasion of the 14th interport cricket match between Hankow and Shanghai, Shanghai won the match but Evans was perhaps the man of the match, across the four innings he took 8 Shanghai wickets and scored 142 runs!²⁶

In mid-May 1937, Bill and Irene returned to England, Bill’s fourth furlough, via the Trans-Siberian Express. The trip was taken to help Bill recover from a recurrence of his ulcer.²⁷ On their return to China, they spent a week or so in Shanghai before being posted to the far North of China,

²³ Ted won five international caps for Scotland and scored three tries. He played alongside Olympian Eric Henry Liddell. They were friends in Tientsin in the 1930s and both imprisoned in Weihsien Camp in March 1943. Unfortunately Liddell did not survive the War. He died 21 February 1945 of a brain tumour

²⁴ E. M De Crespo, *Anatomy of a Story*, unpublished manuscript written by A J W Evans’ cousin, 4-5. Copy held by author

²⁵ Letter from Bill Evans to his parents dated 21 March 1935. The King Collection

²⁶ *NCH*, 23 Sep 1936, 541

²⁷ De Crespo, *Anatomy*, 96-99

to Mukden, since 1932 part of the Japanese controlled puppet state of Manchukuo, the puppet was Puyi, the last Chinese emperor.

In June 1938, sad news reached 'Bill'. His father died in Scarborough Hospital after being taken ill while visiting Ted, his younger son. The following December, Evans hosted a party in his Mukden home for Jacqueline Lebas on the occasion of his sister in law's 21st Birthday.²⁸

Safety and Danger

In November 1939, Bill was told that he was to be posted to Hong Kong²⁹ and that his wife had been booked on the *Empress of Russia*, to the United States leaving Shanghai on 1 December. The couple left their northern home and spent their last days together in Shanghai. De Crespo takes up the story,

The final parting had been upsetting. He had been given permission to stay in Shanghai with Irene until her boat sailed. Most of the American ladies she knew had left some weeks earlier and she was not looking forward to the prospects of a rather lonely voyage. Then came the news that the "Empress of Russia" had been withdrawn for war work and that passage had been booked for her on a Japanese liner sailing on the 13th of the month.³⁰

The boat, the *Tatsuta Maru* did indeed sail on 13 December, arriving in San Francisco on New Year's Day 1941. During the WWII, the *Tatsuta Maru* was used by the Japanese navy to transport the third contingent of prisoners of war from Hong Kong to Japan.³¹ As we shall see, four months before, Bill was a member of the second contingent, travelling on the *Lisbon Maru*. Each of these vessels were in their own way 'Hell Ships' but the two journeys had very different endings.

²⁸ NCH, 4 Jan 1939, 41

²⁹ The posting to Hong Kong was confirmed by letter written by Evans to J A Jupp 10 May 1943 regarding his son Edmond Jupp who had been on the *Lisbon Maru*. Letter in the hands of Jupp family relatives. Copy held by author. Hereafter referred to as 'The Jupp Collection'

³⁰ De Crespo, *Anatomy*, 114

³¹ Tony Banham, *We Shall Suffer There: Hong Kong's Defenders Imprisoned, 1942—45*, Hong Kong, 2009, 110-14

The Japanese invaded Hong Kong on 6 December 1941, curtailing Evans' plans to go on leave and see his wife after one year apart. Despite being a civilian, he did not hesitate to do his bit,

When hostilities broke out in Hong Kong I was a civilian doing A R P work, but two days before Hong Kong surrendered I got tangled up with the Navy and met Edmund [Jupp] at the Aberdeen Industrial School, where he and the other members of the Mine Watching Branch of the H.K.R.M.V.R., [sic] were stationed as they were fighting on land in the hills around Aberdeen.³²

After the surrender of Hong Kong on Christmas Day 1941, Edmund and Bill stayed together. They spent the first month in the Japanese POW camp at Shamshuipo, a camp specifically for military personal which had previously been the barracks of the Middlesex Regiment and an Indian Battalion and was therefore well suited to its new role housing military POWs.³³ The next three months were spent in North Point with the captured Canadian soldiers. Of his time in the POW camp he recalled that, 'The Japs weren't brutal – they simply didn't care. Once we had only rice for 39 consecutive meals... They gave us nothing, not even medical supplies.'³⁴ On 18 April 1942, Evans and Jupp were transferred back to Shamshuipo remaining there until 25 September. From this time, there was a general deterioration in the health of the 'inmates'. Ebbage estimated that between May and December 1942 the number of deaths in camp was 'probably of the order of 200'.³⁵

³² Letter written by Evans to J A Jupp 10 May 1943 regarding his son Edmond Jupp, The Jupp Collection

³³ Major Victor Stanley Ebbage MBE BEM, *The Hard Way: Surviving Shamshuipo POW Camp 1941-45*, Stroud, 2011, 84

³⁴ *Seattle Times*, 8 August 1943, 1

³⁵ Ebbage, *The Hard Way*, 135-37

News from Camp

It was from there that they were sent onboard the *Lisbon Maru* with more than 1,800 fellow inmates for a sea voyage to Japan.³⁶ Two days before, Bill was allowed to send news from the camp to his wife.

IRENE MY DARLING,

MY SECOND LETTER TO YOU BRINGS YOU NEWS THAT I AM EXTREMELY FIT, BUT THAT I EXPECT TO BE LEAVING HONG KONG SHORTLY FOR AN UNKNOWN DESTINATION... NO NEWS AT ALL YET FROM SHANGHAI BUT EVERYONE THERE SHOULD BE SAFE AND COMFORTABLE. AND YOU, MY DARLING. SOMETHING TELLS ME YOU ARE SAFE AND HEALTHY... NO LETTER FROM YOU OR ANY NEWS – THAT IS THE HARDEST THING TO BEAR [SIC]... I LOVE YOU SO VERY MUCH, MY OWNEST AND WANT YOU TERRIBLY... GOD BLESS YOU ALL MY LOVE, IRENE DARLING.³⁷

There is a another undated letter, also referred to by Bill as his second letter. Based on its contents, I assume that it was written after the above letter because it refers to news from Shanghai.

IRENE, MY DARLING,

MY SECOND LETTER, WRITING WHENEVER ALLOWED...THE TWO NEVILLES LEFT WITH REPATRIATED AMERICANS, ARRIVED MOZAMBIQUE, PROBABLY NOW WITH LOVED ONES. LUCKY DOGS, HOW I ENVIED THEM, HOW MY LONGING FOR YOU WAS INTENSIFIED... PRAY NEVILLE TELLS YOU WHERE I AM, THAT AM BEING VERY WELL TREATED. SOME MEN HERE HEARD FROM SHANGHAI RELATIVES. ALL SEEMS WELL, EVERYONE LIVING IN OWN HOMES. SO YOUR FAMILY SHOULD BE ALRIGHT³⁸... READ PSALM 37. A GREAT TONIC IF DEPRESSED. AT SEVEN EVERY MORNING I PRAY FOR AND

³⁶ Letter to Evans to Jupp 10 May 1943, The Jupp Collection

³⁷ The King Collection

³⁸ Irene's French family in Shanghai were not interned by the Japanese because they were considered allies by virtue of the French in Shanghai being controlled by Vichy France

TO YOU IN OUR CAMP CHAPEL. IT BRINGS YOU VERY NEAR TO ME. CRICKET, BRIDGE,
FRENCH, READING, POKER KEEP ME OCCUPIED... GOD BELSS YOU

BILL.³⁹

The Nightmare Ship

About the journey onboard the *Lisbon Maru*, Evans recalled that,

We were on board two days before we sailed and on the mornings of the 26th and 27th diphtheria suspects were being sent off the ship back to the camp. Directly we arrived onboard, the dysentery cases and other sick men needed segregation and the only thing to do was to put them on the steel decks, in any space that could be found between the various hatches, etc., and there they laid on their blankets with a tarpaulin to cover them when it rained.⁴⁰

When they finally set sail on 27 September, ‘Edmund lay down next to me- we had no beds, simply a straw mat on the steel deck of the hold and we did everything on board, as we did in camp.’ They were holed up with 400 men in their hold, one of three which were intended for the transport of cargo rather than humans.

At 07:00 on the morning of 1 October, unaware that the ship was transporting POW’s, the US submarine *Grouper* torpedoed the *Lisbon Maru*. The Japanese battened down the hatches enclosing the men in the hold. Evans recalled that,

The men in the hold then got a little excited when they realised what had happened and [Pollock] then got up and addressed everybody and told them to lie quietly. Smoking and talking were forbidden to conserve any fresh air that might be in the hold.⁴¹

Evans described the conditions in graphic detail,

‘... our sole sanitary facilities down in the hold were two or three buckets, I leave it to your imagination to realize what happened when these buckets were filled, as out of the 400 men in our hold

³⁹ The King Collection

⁴⁰ Tony Banham, *The Sinking of the Lisbon Maru: Britain’s Forgotten Wartime Tragedy*, Hong Kong, 2006, 43

⁴¹ Banham, *Sinking of the Lisbon Maru*, 74

there were about 20 with dysentery... We were battened down all night in complete darkness and without any air and I can assure you that the conditions were absolutely unbelievable and during the night Edmund left my side... to try to find one of the buckets.⁴²

Evans continued to describe the dramatic moments later that morning,

the ship gave a terrific lurch to port and it was then the men managed by sheer brute force to force open the wooden hatch boards and get out onto deck. I managed to get myself, say about 3 or 4 minutes after the first people were out, ... as we arrived on deck the ship from the bridge to the stern was completely submerged and the bows were sticking right out of the water... I made my way to the bows of the ship, as did many hundreds of others, and it was when I had been on deck for a few minutes I thought of Juppo – as I used to call him – and shouted for him.⁴³

There was no response. Evans stayed on board the ship for the next 45 minutes before it finally sank, and had a clear view of what happened next.

By the time the first naval contingent had scrambled out onto the deck, it was seen that the military from Nos. 2 and 3 holds were already out of their holds, and hundreds of men were already in the sea swimming in the direction of five or six Japanese auxiliary craft which were cruising slowly between the ship and land which could be faintly seen in the distance. When the naval men got out of the hold some jumped over immediately into the sea, and some of these were shot at by the Japanese, while others crowded together with some of the military men on the bows of the ship.

By this time, the sea was covered in bodies, wreckage and men desperately trying to stay afloat.⁴⁴ As the tide started to bring this detritus closer to land, seeing that a maritime disaster had occurred Chinese fisherman set out to try to rescue survivors. Evans was one of the fortunate men picked up by the Chinese fishermen. Realising that many men had escaped, the Japanese made

⁴² Letter written by Evans to J A Jupp 10 May 1943, The Jupp Collection.

⁴³ Letter written by Evans to J A Jupp 10 May 1943, The Jupp Collection.

⁴⁴ The narrative of the escape from the sinking Lisbon Maru to arrival in Baltimore has been summarised from the book translated from the Chinese by Major (Ret'd) Brian Finch MCIL, *A Faithful Record of the Lisbon Maru Incident*, Hong Kong, 2017. The first-hand account by Evans (pp185-188) has been used as the main timeline but differs in some respect to the narrative elsewhere in the book

haste to try to recapture as many men as possible. They landed ashore and started violent and intimidating house to house searches rounding up nearly all the prisoners.

A Miraculous Escape

In the end only three men remained free. Evans, William. C. Johnstone and James C. Fallace. They were concealed on Qingbang island in a sea cave called 'Child Cave'. Only one person could get through the entrance at a time but the space behind was big enough to conceal ten men. At high tide the entrance was entirely hidden. They stayed there for six days, all the time with Japanese war ships cruising the area looking for more survivors.

On 8 October, the escapees were taken by sampan to another island, and after a short midnight meal left on a larger junk headed for the island of Wooloo [Hulu] arriving there early in the morning. While there, Bill wrote a hastily compiled note to two senior BAT officials in Shanghai urgently requesting money. The tone of the letter offering clues as to his mental state.⁴⁵

My dear Tiencken or Savage,⁴⁶

I am in desperate straits, require money urgently. It is a matter of life & death, so please let bearer have at least five thousand dollars. I have escaped ~~from~~, & am trying to make my way to Chungking, so every dollar you can let me have will help me to get away & save my life. I have most important news for our government. Cannot explain more fully but bearer knows all.

For gawd sake do all you can.

Escorted by Chinese guerillas, they made their way overland to a Chinese junk. After a four or five hour journey, narrowly escaping a Japanese destroyer, the travelers docked and again trekked across land arriving at the guerilla's main camp of Kuochu in the evening of 9 October. They

⁴⁵ The King Collection.

⁴⁶ This is most likely Ernest Sherwood Savage an American department head in BAT Manufacturing and Leaf department and Henry Victor Tienken, a British Company Director of BAT. Both were interned in Pootung POW Camp in Shanghai in February 1943. Source, Greg Leck, *Captives of Empire: The Japanese Internment of Allied Civilians in China 1941 – 1945*, San Fransisco, 2006, 608 and 610

rested for three days, the men were able to have a hot bath -their first in 10 months- clean clothes and food. After their short recuperation, now wearing Chinese clothes, they set off again, guarded by the guerillas, by now trekking in mountainous terrain. After a final journey by junk up an estuary they arrived at a small town named Changste, under the control of the Chinese National Army. By 16 October, two weeks after they had been torpedoed, they arrived by chair transport at Lian Wang and were able to send a cable to the British Embassy making them aware of their escape and requesting funds and instructions for their trip to China's war time capital in Chungking [Chongqing].

The capital was still an arduous journey away but they were travelling in free China along a route that many before them had followed to freedom. The path took the men to China Inland Missions run by foreign missionaries who were able to attend to their various medical needs, and through numerous towns and cities under the care of courageous Chinese civilians.

They arrived at the large city of Kunming on 16 December. It was here that they were interrogated by American Bomber Command Officers and other intelligence officers who were keen to find out as much as possible about their journey. At this point Fallace and Johnstone headed to India while Evans, under instructions, was ordered to fly into Chungking arriving there on 22 December, 81 days after being rescued.

A clipping from a Bristol newspaper from August 1943 which had interviewed Bill's brother adds more detail with a distinctly local flavour;

My brother eventually arrived at Chungking and was put up in the Embassy quarters, where, to his astonishment, he met two old Bristolians – T. J. Fisher (an attaché at the Embassy) and Professor Gordon King (who escaped from Hong Kong in March 1942)... On Christmas night in Chungking the three toasted Bristol and roared out "Sumus Bristolenses" the school song!⁴⁷ After briefing the British Embassy, and spending Christmas Day in Chungking, Evans flew to Calcutta on Boxing Day.

⁴⁷ The King Collection

From India to America

From Calcutta, Bill travelled by train to New Delhi where on 10 January 1943 he wrote a very long letter to his anxious wife.

Irene, my own precious darling,

Here I am at New Delhi staying with a delightful family named Storey. He is the Inspector at Tobacco Co no.1. here and lives in a lovely bungalow with a huge garden and his family consist of his wife Jean (8) Carol (6) and Elizabeth (10 months)... When I arrived at the bungalow I was greeted by Carol leading a huge Arndale named Scruffy and she said 'This is Scruffy – but she has a fever!' When I met Mrs Storey, I said I was sorry that Scruffy was sick. She said 'She's not sick – she's on heat!!...

I'll now give you details of what has happened to me since Chungking. I left there on 26th at 10.30 A.M., by plane and was in Calcutta by 10 P.M. at night! Marvelous isn't it!... Stops – one at Kunming for ½ hr and the other at Dinjan in Assam for ½ hr and the scenery was magnificent.⁴⁸ ...When I arrived there, I was met by Mr Baker's car – he is the chairman of The I.T. Co. [Imperial Tobacco Company] and driven to his house – still in my Chinese long gown!... the next morning Mrs Baker asked me if I had a relative in Bristol who used to live in Somerville road named Arthur! I said yes my Father... Well I left Calcutta 30th by train and arrived at New Delhi 1st Jan where I had been told to report at General Headquarters... I told them I wanted a thorough medical examination' so I went into hospital for 4 days and had a complete rest and examination. Heart, lungs all o.k. But am under par due to the privations I have been through. I had my eyes tested by ... the best eye man in India and he tells me that I have Retro Bulbar Neuritis⁴⁹ and need rest and building up... I cannot focus to read ordinary size point like books and newspapers and glasses are no use... All I want, I know, my precious, is to be under your care to see I get the right food and loving attention... Otherwise I feel well, and it's such a mental relief to be out of China and the possibility of recapture by the Japs and also to have relief from air raids... I have heard this afternoon that I cannot get a plane trip to the States! I am so disappointed as I hoped the Americans could possibly wangle me across but in spite of pulling all sorts of strings and seeing General Stilwell himself it can't be done... As soon as permission arrives I will be off to you by first possible boat... I have only

⁴⁸ Note: Dinjan became prominent during WW2 when its airfield was used by transport planes to fly over the infamous 'Hump', i.e. the Himalayas, the only way to supply much needed goods into China

⁴⁹ Note: An inflammation of the optic nerve

received one letter from you which arrived in Chungking on 23rd Dec. What a lovely Xmas present!!!!... I have met so many wives here – ex Malaya, Burma, China, etc. who know nothing about their loved ones. So we must count ourselves lucky, my truest. It was a miracle I escaped, and something Divine really guided my footsteps. As I went off to hide, I hesitated, but something just seemed to push me in the back as I halted. It was all so risky and uncertain but god showed me the way- of that I am sure!!... Keep smiling Cuddles, your own Bill⁵⁰

Bill's optimism about how quickly he would see his 'Cuddles' was misplaced. After leaving New Delhi, he travelled to Cairo by air where the local head of BAT, yet another Bristolian, named Mr. Chate, entertained him. He then flew to Lagos where once again, he was hosted by an 'Old Cliftonian, but, nevertheless a Bristolian'.⁵¹ Somehow he travelled across the Atlantic to Trinidad and Bermuda and from there, on 11 March he flew to Baltimore with British Overseas Airways Corporation arriving on 12 March 1943.

Together Again

The Evans' family still have a note scrawled on a scrap of paper dated 13 March 1943, he wrote, 'It's been a long swim to the most beautiful face in all the world!!! For our second honeymoon with all my love, Cuddles love Bill.'⁵² After his arrival, he first stayed on the Vancouver Island, Canada at 1484 Beach Drive (he sent a cable from there on 1 May 1943 to Edmund's father J A Jupp), overlooking the harbor. At the end of July he was on the move again, via Vancouver, to Seattle, the home of his cousin F. M. Williams.

Desperate Pleas for News

While living at Beach Drive he received many letters from anxious friends and relatives desperately seeking news about what had happened to the men on the *Lisbon Maru*. Understandably in times of war there was confusion about the details. All that was known about the sinking had

⁵⁰The King Collection. Note: Clifton is located on the outskirts of Bristol

⁵¹ The King Collection

⁵² The King Collection

come from press reports based on the information that Evans had given the authorities in Chungking.

Increasingly frustrated by the lack of news and conflicting information that the relatives of men on the *Lisbon Maru* were getting from the authorities, Evans wrote to the Colonial Office, Casualties Department seeking some official line on what was now known.

I should appreciate it very much if you would furnish me with the correct and latest information on the subject of the missing or survivors of the *Lisbon Maru*. I should also like to suggest that it would ease the worries of many, if a public statement was made in the Press or Radio as to exactly what information the Government has received, for as things now stand relatives are completely mystified as to the actual fate of their dear ones.⁵³

Evans' letter was from the heart – now in safety, he was receiving a continual reminder of other's suffering as they pleaded him for news of their loved ones.

Good News, Bad News

News received in early July would have raised his spirits. A letter from the High Commissioner in Ottawa informed him that 'His Majesty The King has been pleased to approve the award of a Commendation in recognition of your services during your escape from Hong Kong.'⁵⁴

Finally, he received some news about his friend Jupp, but it wasn't good. On 18 October 1943, one year and 16 days since the sinking of the *Lisbon Maru*, Evans wrote a heart breaking letter to Edmund's father,

Dear Mr Jupp, Futile as letter writing is in these circumstances, I feel I must write to express my deepest sympathy over the news of Edmund's death in Japan after all the anxiety,

⁵³ Letter written by Evans to The Colonial Office 23 June 1943. The Jupp Collection

⁵⁴ The King Collection

first the good news of his safety in Japan and finally his death, it all seems so awful, and I find it difficult realise he has now gone.⁵⁵

Edmund had been recaptured after surviving the sinking. He was sent to Japan arriving in Moji in the evening of 10 October. With other survivors he boarded a train which travelled firstly to Kokura, thence to Hiroshima, and on to Kobe. At Kobe, a group of about 350 men including Jupp left the train and were marched to Osaka #2 Branch Camp (Kobe) arriving around 13:30 on the eleventh. He died during the night of 12 October 1942, the first of many to die in that camp.⁵⁶

Starting Again in South East Asia

After the War, Bill recuperated in Canada and then travelled back to the Far East after first visiting England in November 1945. When he returned to Hong Kong, he was a prosecution witness in the trial of the ‘Military Court for the Trial of War Criminals No. 5’ of Kyoda Shigeru, the civilian master of the *Lisbon Maru*. Shigeru was accused of committing a war crime by closing the hatches of the holds of the vessel when it was sinking. For his part, Bill described the situation from the viewpoint of the naval personnel in hold number one. The trial ran from 23 October 1946 until 29 November, the accused was found guilty and imprisoned for 7 years.⁵⁷

After the trial, Bill and Irene returned to somewhere in China, the passenger manifests of their home journey in the summer of 1949 records them as having been living there. On that trip they embarked on a long holiday, taking leave as China erupted, the Communists sweeping all before them, capturing Shanghai even as the Evans’ were leaving Kobe on 24 May 1949, arriving in New York 19 days later. On 10 August, they travelled from New York to England, and on to Scarborough, to visit Bill’s younger brother Ted.

⁵⁵ Letter written by Evans to J A Jupp, 18 October 1943. The Jupp Collection

⁵⁶ Banham, *Sinking of the Lisbon Maru*, Chapter 12 and 139

⁵⁷ Banham, *Sinking of the Lisbon Maru*, Appendix 1

South East Asia

Returning from their holiday, in January 1950, Bill, now 47, and his wife, embarked on a new adventure with BAT in South East Asia. His role as an Inspector required a lot of travel. The King family archive contains letters from this period, recording their day to day lives. Sometimes mundane, but always showing great affection. In a letter from Bill to Irene dated 12 April 1950, he referred to an earlier telephone conversation,

It was lovely to get your letter, darling, but not as lovely as to hear your voice over the 'phone. Don't be in such a hurry to ring off when the operator says the three minutes is up. I'll tell you when to ring off. But it is marvelous to be able to talk to you over the phone and if you want talk to me, phone me up here at lunch-time -about 1.30 will be sure to get me... put thro' a personal call in my name, and if I am not in, you don't get charged!⁵⁸

In the same letter Bill commented on the untimely death of Ted McLaren,

It really is awfully sad about Ted McLaren, only 47!! And he looked so well when we saw him last. Poor dear Joan, - as you say she will feel completely lost. It's a funny thing, but when he and I went out to have a "Pee" at Gerard's Cross, he said to me "you know Bill, we've both been damned lucky in the wives we've got! I was rather surprised at him saying this as Scots don't generally share their feelings. Of course, I had to agree with him!!

A few days later on 14 April, in a letter discussing his flight details for his onward journey to Jakarta thoughts turned to the future,

I won't stay a moment longer in Java than I have to, you can bet your boots on that – I'll try and do a good job, race all I have to see and then make tracks for S'pore and you, my Cuddles. When I'm there I will write to [??] and find out what plans for the future he has for me.

Three days later Bill wrote to Irene after arriving in Java on a Constellation aircraft, he excitedly reported that it, 'only took 2 ½ hours at the most. It seated over 40 people, and is very

⁵⁸ The King Collection

good. I think it does over 300 miles an hour.’ After a long delay in immigration, the hotel arrangements were unsatisfactory.

Accommodation here is an awful problem and the first night I shared a small room with two Dutchmen – one of them B.A.T. It was not very nice but on Sunday I was moved to another room, where I share with an American. ... nobody in the ruddy hotel speaks English. I mean the boys, only Dutch and Javanese and to get anything done is a bit of a pantomime. But I’m getting on. Yesterday I ran into Dutch habits. Sat on the throne – no paper! Only bottles of water!

Bill was writing every few days. On the 19th, he reported news of a sty in his eye and then on 25 April, further insights into the life of a travelling tobacco manager in the early 1950s. Bill celebrated St. George’s day on the Saturday night (22nd) at a ball at the local club and then went with the Hargoods to a buffet supper hosted by somebody from G.E.C., before heading onto the Club, noting that after having plenty to drink, ‘Fortunately they have a curfew here, dancing stopped at 11:45.’ On the Sunday, Bill managed to squeeze in 18 holes of golf with his work colleague Knight, teeing off at 8:45, in hot and humid weather which was enjoyable, ‘in spite of a lousy exhibition of Golf.’ After tiffin with Knight, and a good ‘shut-eye’, Bill went to church and was joined by the young padre at the Hargoods’ house for supper.

On the Monday night, Bill hosted a group of six for dinner at a local café. On the Tuesday, he had been invited to another party, but feeling the effects his very active social life, politely declined claiming that he had another engagement!

Bills travels continued around the islands of Indonesia with his colleague Knight. His letter turned to events of the day, particularly the aftermath of the successful communist takeover of China the previous year,

I see Hainan has fallen and the capital taken without firing a shot. They are awful. And there is news of British firms packing up if the communists go doesn’t [?] more reasonably. The article said that it cost British firms GBP350,000 pounds in one month to keep things going. That is hopeless and firms just can’t and won’t stand for it. I wrote to Potter yesterday to ask if he had any news of what I should do after

Java other than returning to Indo-China, so hope to get his reply within 2 weeks and before I leave here...

The China business is really depressing and I hope and pray I don't have to go back there. I think you feel the same don't you. If you really feel you definitely don't want to go, then say so frankly and I'll see what can be done about it. This country is no picnic, believe me, but China must be awful.⁵⁹

A Change of Plan

In his letter to Irene of 4 May 1950, he let her know there had been a sudden change of events. In the first instance she was to travel to Singapore as quickly as possible where Bill hoped they might be able to meet. But it wasn't that straight forward. The BAT man in Saigon, a Mr. Rose, was being 'being allowed to resign' and Bill was asked to cover the vacancy until a new man arrived. The problem was that, 'until they know they can get him his passage, they are not telling him that they are getting rid of him. (All this very very confidential. Don't tell a soul!!!!).'⁶⁰

Bill's hope was that Mr. Rose would be booked on the 17 May boat. If he was, Bill would be able to leave Java and meet Irene in Singapore before he went onto Saigon. If not, the next available boat for Mr. Rose wasn't until June 18th. Bill told Irene,

Now comes the part that you won't like. If he goes on the June boat, I am not to return to Saigon till early June, which means that I won't leave Java until late May and then have a few days in Singapore before going to Saigon. I shall have to carry on with my Java trip.

Bill had also received news from his boss that looked like they 'can rely on being somewhere in South East Asia until August at least. After that I cannot tell you where you will be sent, but you can be quite sure that you have no need to worry about your future.'

⁵⁹ Letter from Bill to Irene 25 April 1950. The King Collection

⁶⁰ Letter from Bill to Irene 4 May 1950. The King Collection

Luck was with Bill, he was able to leave Java a few days later and finally see his wife again after a month away, all the time yearning to be reunited. He eventually arrived in Saigon sometime in mid-May 1950.⁶¹

Tragedy

Bill's good fortune soon turned into horrific bad luck. A few weeks later on 8 June, while travelling in Saigon with his brother in law Maurice Lebas, who also worked for BAT, they were driving from the factory in Cholon, on the southern outskirts of Saigon [Ho Chi Minh] on the Rue Legrand de la Liraze. A witness reported that Mr Lebas and his guest Mr. Evans and all the staff of the Directorate left around 18.00 PM.⁶² As they drove away, they were stopped by a group of four Vietnamese Communist terrorists disguised as policemen, with no chance to react, the terrorists opened fire with automatic pistols. Evans was shot through the head and died instantly, his brother in law was more fortunate, he was able to get out of the car and run towards the following cars. Despite leaving the car unharmed, while fleeing, he was wounded twice in the arms and taken immediately to the Grall Hospital.⁶³ Twelve days later, it was reported that the Police had arrested and charged four Vietnamese with Evans' murder.⁶⁴

An old work colleague of Evans summed him up in a few words eight years later in his own memoir, 'We lost not only a sportsman whose prowess on the Welsh rugger field was at one time famous, but one of the most popular figures of old China days.'⁶⁵

A few weeks after the murder it was reported that a clue to Evans' murder had been found during a Police raid intended to foil a terrorist plot. They seized the Ford car used by Evans' murderers and held more than 45 leaders of the Viet-Minh insurrectionary movement, captured

⁶¹ *Liverpool Echo*, 9 June 1950, 7

⁶² Witness statement dated 27 January 1969 of Truong-Van-Sau and Tran-Van-Thau, following in car behind Evans. The King Collection

⁶³ *Liverpool Echo*, 9 June 1950, 7

⁶⁴ *China Mail*, 20 June 1950

⁶⁵ John Stericker, *A Tear for the Dragon*, London, 1958, 176

asleep next to their loaded pistols by the police commandos. The police found photographs which showed that Viet-Minh agents had intended to shoot Bao Dai, his Prime Minister, Tran Van Huu, all the Cabinet, and senior Government officials.⁶⁶

Aftermath

Bill's cousin recorded her memories,

The whole unpleasant and tragic incident left the problem of Arthur's [i.e. Bill's] burial. Many times throughout his long stay he had been so near to death that it would have been inevitable that his body would remain in China. Now it seemed fitting that it should be returned to England; that his Far Eastern adventure should complete the cycle, and his body be found room in some quiet spot in the West Country from whence he had started out.

So it was arranged. Weeks passed in complying with regulations and obtaining clearance, but eventually the great lead coffin was placed aboard the S.S. Eumaeus and commenced its journey of several thousands of miles to the Port of Avonmouth. It was a long drawn out and sad business but finally it was accomplished.

Bill was laid to rest at Greenbank Cemetery, Bristol.⁶⁷

On 4 September 1950 Irene wrote to her brother, Maurice still recovering from the ordeal which had killed her husband,

I do hope your operation is over with and that this time it will be very satisfactory. Poor you. I have been thinking about you so much and praying all is well. I realise you cannot write yet but a post-card from Mimi just telling us how you are progressing would relieve our minds a great deal.⁶⁸

After the funeral, Irene visited Bill's family,

...had two nights in Scarborough with Teds and Margaret but that set me back again and I have decided, come what may, I shall not return there for at least a year. He is so like Bill that even Jakes

⁶⁶ *Belfast News-Letter*, 13 July 1950, 4

⁶⁷ Email to author from Diana and David Evans, 25 March 2019. Grave number 195PPTT

⁶⁸ Letter from Irene to Maurice Lebas, 4 September 1950. The King Collection

nearly broke down and said she didn't know how I could stand it for an hour so you see, it is not just me making a fuss about nothing.⁶⁹

Life Continues

In a passenger manifest dated 16 April 1954, Irene travelled first class from Hong Kong to London where she was now living in Earl's Court, London. Under the column 'Profession Occupation or Calling of Passengers', she recorded herself as 'Independent' - a show of defiance and strength in adversity. In the early 1960's, Irene moved to Melbourne, Australia, to be near her younger sister Jakes.⁷⁰

Reunited

Their longest separation in all of Bill's travels ended on 29 June 1989, when Irene died in Melbourne, 39 years after his violent death, hopeful no doubt of a final reunion.

⁶⁹ Letter from Irene to Maurice Lebas, 4 September 1950. The King Collection

⁷⁰ Email to author from David & Diana Evans, 23 March 2019