

Dinkum Aliens

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DINKUM ALIENS: Chinese New Zealanders in World War II

Dr Manying Ip

Dinkum Aliens :They also served

In spite of their early arrival the the Chinese remained sojourners in New Zealand. From 1881 onwards, the Chinese were singled out as undesirable aliens and subjected to various discriminatory laws, regulations and administrative measures aimed at limiting their number. Among these were the poll-tax, tonnage ratio, thumb-printing and the literacy test.

Very few Chinese women were allowed to come, and accordingly there were few local-born Chinese babies. The Chinese were barred from naturalisation from 1908 until 1952.

In spite of their marginalised status, the hostile social climate, and their very small number (2,943 in the 1936 census), patriotic Chinese New Zealanders, mostly local-born, served in the Air Force, Army and the Home Guard.

Story of the Bowls

The 'Generation bowls' of the Young Ñi Family illustrate the long history of the Chinese in New Zealand. The first Young Family pioneer arrived in Otago in the 1860s. Each generation had its 'generation name' marked on the bowls.

The oldest bowl bears 4 'generation names'. Two others bear 3 .

Since the last marking, 2 more generations of the Young family have been born. Family members now live mainly in Auckland, Wellington, as well as Sydney and Singapore.

The Ah-Chee Ceremonial Banner (no date)

'May you enjoy the Three Abundance' (Abundant fortune, abundant longevity and abundant male descendants). The intricately-embroidered banner was presented to the Ah-Chee Family which settled in Auckland in the 1870s.

[CABINET ONE] New Zealand is Home

'A place is home when you are prepared to lay your life on the line to defend it.'

Chinese men and women served in both World Wars, showing their ultimate allegiance to New Zealand. Their loyalty and commitment were particularly remarkable because the Chinese, including the local born, suffered from the racist legislation of the time.

Chinese who served in World War I

Clarence Eric Kee (Canterbury Infantry Regiment 1917-1918)

William Shack Horne (Third Reinforcements, served in France)

Wilfred Chong, Gerald Chong (Served in France)

(The last two were the sons of Chew Chong of Taranaki.)

World War II Veterans

Alec Ah-Chee RNZAF

Alec Ah-Chee was second-generation Chinese New Zealander. His father William (1889-1929) and uncles Clement (1892-1961) and Arthur (1894-?) were also local-born.

Alex Ah-Chee served as a pilot of the RNZAF from 1942 onwards.

Teresa and Eileen Fore WAAFs

'Yes, I volunteered, so did my sister Eileen. We were very patriotic….

We drove trucks for the Air Force. Our brother Jimmy was in the Wanganui Home Guard.'-- Teresa Fore

Willie Lee RNZAF

'My brother Willie was determined to join the air force…He actually had his initial pilot training in China-- to him the hardest part was learning Chinese (language)first. Then he returned to NZ and joined the RNZAF.'-- Dan Chan Lee.

Willie Lee's plane crashed in Cheshire, England in xxxxxx . His grave can be found in a Shropshire cemetery today. His name is listed on the Roll of Honour in the Hall of Memory here in Auckland Museum,

Dan Chan Lee Army, 7RMT

Daniel Chan Lee served in the Royal Military Transport.

Charles Yin Army, N-Force

'Charles would have been so proud to know that his [army]services are recognised. It really makes me mad when people say: the Chinese never fought for New Zealand!' --Piha Yin, widow of Charles Yin.

George Chan RNZAF

George Chan was a Sergeant in the No. 4 Fighter Maintenance Unit. His team assembled Kittyhawk and Avenger fighters.

George S. Long RNZAF

George went from Territorials to Army for training and then transferred to RNZAF. He was transferred to the USA during the war and was there when the War ended.

[CABINET 2]

Welcome at Last: Valiant Allies

World War II marked the crucial turning point of the Chinese community in New Zealand. China had been at war with Japan since 1937. The families of long-time Chinese residents in New Zealand were allowed in temporarily as war refugees on humanitarian grounds in 1939. When Japan bombed Pearl Harbour in 1941, New Zealand and China became allies against a common enemy.

The status of the Chinese in New Zealand rose markedly. Chinese market-gardeners were classified as essential industry workers, their patriotic fund-raising efforts within New Zealand and the valiant war of resistance back in China were praised and acknowledged. When the Chinese women and children finally gained the right to stay in New Zealand in 1947, it had been a hard-earned welcome.

Chinese Commercial Growers Federation

Market gardening was classified as an 'essential industry' during World War II. The Growers Federation was formed at the request of the then PM Peter Fraser, specifically to organise efficient production in order to honour New Zealand's obligation to provide produce for the entire American fleet.

The Yin brothers, Arthur and Douglas, for example, served as inspectors of produce for the US Naval Supplies.

"The type of work which Arthur was engaged in required a most trustworthy individual. He was in charge of approximately \$300,000 worth of accountable stores."---R.L. Larsen, Officer-in-Charge, US Naval Supply Facility.

Patriotic Fund-raising

The Chinese community organised its own highly successful nation-wide fund-raising efforts throughout the long years of war.

The Donation Book exhibited belonged to the Canterbury Branch of the NZ Chinese Association. The total amount recorded in this book came to 10,897 pounds, ten shillings and seven pence in the years 1937-42.

The compulsory weekly donation was supplemented by raffles, liberty bonds, charity dances, and patriotic drama. Most of the money was sent to China for the anti-Japanese war.

Refugee Families

When Japan overran coastal China, the New Zealand government allowed the wives and children of Chinese residents to come temporarily as war refugees.

Piha Yin (nee Wong-Doe) came as a little 5-year old.

'I cried and cried for my teapot. Grandma said: you are only going for two years, no need to take too many things…'

Piha's mother brought the little girl's favourite teapot, and her own water-pipe made in their ancestral village, complete with silk casing. She also brought other daily essentials like scales, chopsticks and a little ratten chair.

Ken Choy came to join his father Joe-Lai Choy in Wellington in 1940.

'I was very patriotic and idealistic. I had just travelled round the [Chinese]countryside and visited the soldiers on the front line. They were anti-Japanese heroes!'

Having graduated from the Lingnan Middle School, Ken went by junk and overcrowded trucks to visit Chinese troops in southern China and met Rewi Alley by chance. He decided to study agriculture and wrote his Masters thesis on Jersey cows at Massey University.

Gallant Allies

When Japan bombed Pearl Harbour in 1941, New Zealand and China became allies against a common enemy. Attitudes towards the Chinese softened. The poll-tax, the most blatantly discriminatory legislation, was abolished in 1944. In 1947, the New Zealand government rescinded its original intention of repatriating the refugee Chinese women and children.

The Dunedin Presbytery, which pleaded the case for the Chinese, earned the profound gratitude of the community. The scroll thanked Rev. Walsh for "…petitioning on behalf of the women and children…enabling them to settle in this land of peace..."

Victory and Sinking roots

VJ Day in 1945 was a double celebration for Chinese New Zealanders. It marked the end of the Pacific War which directly threatened New Zealand and also the end to the eight years of Japanese occupation of their homeland in China.

Chinese Aucklanders celebrated Japan's defeat with floats and jubilant parades, complete with gongs and drums.

The end of the Second World War finally afforded the Chinese the chance to sink roots in New Zealand. In 1952, the Chinese were allowed to apply for naturalisation to become citizens of their adopted land.