

RCEL – NAGALAND

This was the first visit to Nagaland by RCEL staff. HRH The Duke of York, our Grand President, visited in 2012. The Private Secretary to HRH The Duke of York put RCEL in contact with the Kohima Education Society (KES) which is based in Kohima. KES is linked to and part funded by the Kohima Education Trust (KET) in the UK, formed in 2005 by British Burma Star holders and particularly those who had fought at Kohima/Imphal. The aim of KET/KES is to support with education sponsorship Naga children, many who are descendants of those who fought for the XIVth Army. Charles Chasie, a Naga from Kohima and President of KES hosted the Secretary General's visit.



Secretary General Wearing Nagaland tie, meets the Governor of Nagaland with Charles Chasie (L)

Most of the veterans and widows live outside Kohima. Those who were met in Dimapur gathered in the offices of the Rajya Sainik Board, near an Assam Regiment Barracks. The aim of the visit was to establish the situation on the ground in Nagaland. The office had received conflicting reports of those Nagas who should be in receipt of a RCEL grant. Meeting veterans and widows was a crucial part of achieving the aim.



Secretary General with Naga veterans in Dimapur

IESL Delhi had provided a list of 40 veterans who they believed to be in receipt of RCEL grants. These are veterans registered with the Government of India Rajya Sainik Board as eligible for an Indian Pension as a WWII veteran or widow. The Rajya Sainik Board is responsible for the verification and ongoing assessment of eligible beneficiaries. By spending some time talking with the veterans and widows who were present, the Secretary General was able to establish that of the 40 only one veteran and 3 widows were still alive. Most had recently died as very old age and a harsh environment catches up with those in their 90s. The photograph to the right shows the



Grandson of Sovehu Nienu who died a few months before the visit



Charles Chasie had arranged for the Secretary General to present each veteran and widow in Dimapur a blanket and small food parcel (photograph to the left). All were extremely grateful to receive the donations and the blankets were of good quality and particularly appreciated as the nights are cold at 6,000ft.

After meeting with the veterans and widows in Dimapur, a full day was spent visiting veterans and widows in remote villages. Some were easier to find than others and the accompanying security officer proved invaluable on a number of occasions. The villages all had a number of Churches, some Catholic but mostly Baptist Revivalist as the Nagas are deeply religious, Christian people with strong faith. Nagaland is officially a dry State and the Church is the most important element in most Naga lives.

The veterans and widows that the Secretary General met had their Rajya Sainik Board pension books but for them the issue was having to travel to an office and prove they were still alive. This is extremely difficult for them as they are, mostly, too old and frail to leave their villages even if they could afford to do so.

To the right is Sepoy Penthungo Egung who is aged 95. He fought the Japanese from Kohima into Burma. Sadly, his wife died in January 2017 after a 69 year marriage.





In discussion with the veterans and widows, through Charles Chasie, the Secretary General managed to establish with a high degree of certainty who was still alive. By the end of this day there was a list of 22 veterans and 8 widows who were alive and in need of support.

One of those 22 veterans was Sepoy Khakhu Khing (to the left) of the 2nd Assam Regiment who fought at the Battle of Kohima and pushed the Japanese back to Mandalay. Now aged 106, he could still remember his Army service number. One of the widows, Lhosheli Semsá (to

the right), whose husband Khongo Sema died in 2015, was a very sad case, she is suffering with dementia and requires full time care.

It was clear that the Rajya Sainik Board would not venture to the villages. Therefore, an alternative way of getting RCEL grants to those who were eligible needed to be found.

After discussion with Charles Chasie, the KES Committee agreed to support RCEL as long as KET in UK were content and that any funds were sent via KET and not direct to KES. Subsequently, KET approved this arrangement enabling RCEL to get support to those in desperate need in Nagaland.

