

# Ethnic Karen minority remember World War II hero

By Denis D. Gray  
The Associated Press

**Y**ANGON, Myanmar — A group of World War II veterans from Myanmar's ethnic Karen minority, most in their 90s, prayed and sang a poignant hymn at the graveside of a legendary British officer who sacrificed his life for an ethnic group for whom the war's end 70 years ago led to the world's longest-running insurgency.

The gathering of the old warriors at the grave of Maj. Hugh Paul Seagrim — who the Karen call "Grandfather Longlegs" — was part of a ceremony to mark Victory over Japan Day, which ended the global conflict and savage combat that devastated Burma, as the country was then known.

"He loved the Karen people. He gave his life (for us)," 92-year-old Saw Berny said of Seagrim, who led a highly effective Karen guerrilla force deep behind Japanese lines.

When Japan began to torture and kill Karen civilians and threatened more retribution if Seagrim did not surrender, he gave himself up to be executed with seven of his Karen comrades.

While fighting with the Karen, many of them Christians, the towering British officer — regarded as a maverick but outstanding guerrilla chief — wore their native dress, shared their food, and helped till their fields.

Meeting at Yangon's Commonwealth War Cemetery were also Chin, Kachin, and members of other ethnic minorities who fought bravely alongside Allied forces against the Japanese. After Burma's independence from Britain in 1948, hoping for greater autonomy from the central



government, a welter of ethnic insurgent groups rose up in rebellion.

Sporadic fighting continues in some parts of the country, but Myanmar's military-backed government is attempting to forge a comprehensive peace agreement with the Kachin, Karen, and others before general elections later this year.

The Karen insurgency has seen killings, torture, and rape of civilians by Myanmar's military. Aid agencies say some 400,000 Karen have been driven from their homes while more than 120,000 refugees, most of them Karen, are sheltered in camps along the Thai-Myanmar border. About 60,000 now live in the United States.

Some believe that if Seagrim, who vowed to return to Myanmar after the war, had survived, he would have helped the cause of the Karen, who the British government

had promised to support after the war but then abandoned after independence was granted.

"He would have been a great force for good, politically and otherwise," Sally McLean, a British humanitarian aid worker, said at Seagrim's grave.

McLean founded Help 4 Forgotten Allies, which provides 120 British pounds (\$187) each year to more than 250 Karen veterans or their widows. The Karen soldiers were not recognized as being officially part of the British army and therefore never received pensions or other benefits despite what historians say was their great contribution to the victory.

"He was clearly an inspiration to the Karen. Seagrim's influence runs on till the present day," said Duncan Gilmour, whose grandfather, Lt. Col. Edgar Peacock, played a key role in the guerrilla campaign

**GRANDFATHER LONGLEGS REMEMBERED.** World War II veteran Saw Berny, who is ethnic Karen, looks at a gravestone while attending a ceremony to mark the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II at Hanthawaddy War Cemetery in Yangon, Myanmar. Karen fought courageously behind Japanese lines with Maj. Hugh Paul Seagrim, an exceptional guerrilla leader. (AP Photo/Khin Maung Win) after Seagrim's death when the Karen were unleashed against the retreating Japanese, killing thousands.

The Burma campaign, waged away from the world's spotlight by what have been called "forgotten armies," was one of the most brutal of the war for both the Allies and the Japanese, who invaded the country in 1942. Thousands succumbed in jungles and mountains not only to sometimes hand-to-hand combat, but also to cholera, dysentery, scrub typhus, and other rampant tropical diseases.

British diplomats, military attachés of former Allied powers, senior Burmese officers, and others also attended the ceremony, held near a simple white cross rising above the gravestones of some 1,300 soldiers.

The Karen fulfilled Seagrim's last request before his execution: that his Karen comrades sing the hymn "Oh Christ the Solid Rock I Stand" for him.

The elderly war veterans and others rendered it effortlessly in part-harmony and their own language.

Saw Berny sat in a wheelchair near the simple gravestones of Seagrim and his executed companions, explaining that what he had on — black pants, white shirt, red Karen blouse, and a shoulder bag with a bible inside — was the same that "Grandfather Longlegs" wore when he surrendered to the Japanese seven decades ago.

## A meal and webcam form unlikely recipe for South Korean fame

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they can interact with broadcasters," said Ahn, the company executive. He believes television in the long run will be completely replaced by such apps.

Cho Young-min, a 12-year-old who has watched an online game show on Afreeca TV since he was a third-grader, aspires to have his own show on Afreeca TV, not on the television in the living room.

Ahn Won-jun, a 17-year-old high school student, said he prefers to eat dinner in his room to watch Kim's Meok Bang, rather than dining with his parents.

Kim isn't a particularly polite virtual dinner guest. He burps loudly before his audiences and sometimes walks off abruptly, announcing with some specificity that he needs to use the bathroom. He usually leaves his fans with a mission during his absence, promising a prize to the person who last clicks the "like" button when he is back.

Hardcore Afreeca TV viewers are drawn to hosts like Kim because they can interact with them, unlike more distant TV stars. Fans say they feel their blood rush and heart flutter when a host reacts to their comments, singling them out in the stream of hundreds of live chat messages.

"I was so moved," said Lee Yeon-joo, a 15-year-old recalling the moment when a 26-year-old man read her message in the middle of his live show. "You cannot really approach celebrities."

Afreeca TV users can get broadcasters' attention by giving them "star balloons," which cost them about 10 cents apiece. The show hosts keep part of that money, though Afreeca TV takes a cut of up to 40

percent.

Most broadcasters, including Kim, are reluctant to reveal how much money they make. Afreeca TV said out of some 300,000 broadcasters who air their show at least once a month, the top 500 make more than what one would normally make by working full time, but the company declined to be more specific. In 2013, a South Korea television network, TV Chosun, cited a lawmaker's office that the top Afreeca TV host earned 298 million won (\$250,000) a year.

Live-streaming videos are going mainstream, both in South Korea and overseas.

In Asia, services such as YYTV in China have been in use by tens of millions of users for years, and also have developed ways for broadcasters to generate income.

Meerkat and Periscope from Twitter, two livestreaming apps in the U.S., were launched in March. Facebook is launching its own livestreaming service called Live, although it will be only available for famous people.

South Korean search giant Naver rushed to launch a real-time video service where K-pop stars can livestream their behind-the-scenes lives. One of the most talked-about TV shows on a South Korean TV network this year was "My Little Television," which adopted similar features to Afreeca TV, such as the format of one person broadcasting a show live while responding to comments from viewers.

Afreeca TV's model may not translate across borders, however. The company's efforts to make inroads in Japan, Taiwan, and the U.S. have met with little response.

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