

Derbyshire Kwai war hero gets resting place he deserves'



STANDING TALL: The restored gravestone of Lt Col Harold Lilly, pictured right, in Spondon Cemetery, which will be rededicated tomorrow. Inset, our front page from September 20.

Damaged grave of colonel repaired and restored at Spondon

BY CLAIRE DUFFIN

cduffin@derbytelegraph.co.uk

A DECORATED war hero has finally got the resting place he deserves following a campaign to restore his damaged grave.

Lieutenant Colonel Harold Lilly's grave has been repaired and re-erected at Spondon Cemetery after Midlands Co-op stepped in and offered to do the work.

A rededication ceremony will now be taking place involving members of his old regiment.

Lt Col Lilly was awarded an OBE in recognition of his gallantry while a Second World War prisoner of war working on the Burma Railway.

He saved the lives of hundreds of his men through courageous negotiation with their captors, and went on to become the inspiration behind Sir Alec Guinness's character in the classic film, *The Bridge On The River Kwai*.

Relatives of men who served with Lt Col Lilly have said that they are delighted his grave has been restored.

Janet Jacobs' father, John Hamilton Wadge, worked on the railway in Burma with Lt Col Lilly.

The 52-year-old from Cambridge said her father had told her that Lt Col Lilly had stood up to the Japanese.

Mrs Jacobs said: "He cared about his men and did all he could to help them.

"He told me about how, one day, a high-ranking Japanese officer asked Lt Col Lilly why so many of the men working on the railway were dying.

"He replied that they were dying through malnutrition and that they needed more meat. He said the railway would not be finished if the men kept dying. It was then that the men got their first meat, some water buffalo."

Beryl Maddocks, who used to own Spondon Supplies, was a friend of Lt Col Lilly.

The 79-year-old, of Moor Street, Spondon, said she had very fond memories of him.

She said: "I am so pleased about his grave. It's only what he deserves. He was a lovely man, very friendly and was very well respected in Spondon."

Lt Col Lilly's grave at Spondon Cemetery was damaged and had to be propped up by Derby City Council workers after no-one could be found to take over its maintenance.

The council, which owns the cemetery, said it could not pay the estimated £750 cost to repair the damaged gravestone because it was out of its jurisdiction.

Co-op Funeral Services offered to repair it following an appeal in the Telegraph.

The headstone was removed from the cemetery and taken to Loughborough, where two men from the company spent three days cleaning it.

Stonemasons then re-engraved workers Lt Col Lilly's name before putting the headstone back.

Members of Lt Col Lilly's old regiment, the 5th Battalion Sherwood Foresters, now the 2nd Mercian Regiment, will take part in the rededication ceremony at the cemetery tomorrow, at about 3pm.

Members of the regimental association will also be present. All are welcome.

Regimental historian Cliff Housley said the rank of Lieutenant Colonel was not on the headstone "because Colonel is what his family would have put on the original grave, as their abbreviated form of address for him."

