

## 11

## The Auxiliary Labour Corps and End of Occupation



Labour booklet issued during Japanese Occupation, 1942-1945. Source: Chew Chang Lang Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image no: 19980005535 – 0107)

### Auxiliary Labour Corps of the SSA

Members of the Syonan Sports Association (SSA) discovered that sport was not going to be their only endeavour. At least 400 men formed the Auxiliary Labour Corps and were detailed to make 25,000 flags for the New Malai celebration.

Subsequently, requirements expanded to more trying and demoralising duties such as clearing up the debris and removing the dead after a bombing raid by the Allies.

The advance notice and reports of the various games provided one of the few sources of enjoyment and a distraction from the horrors of occupation.

### Sportsmen Contributing to Defence Tasks

The steady decline of SSA operations came after the group was instructed to reallocate the members to passive defence tasks. The conflict was moving dramatically in the favour of the allies.

Air raids were causing considerable damage and the young men of the SSA were required to remove debris, and help with the thankless task of restoring basic amenities during

emergencies and building public air raid shelters. Shinozaki, the honorary adviser to the SSA, was the Commandant of this task force.

### Creating a Positive False Front

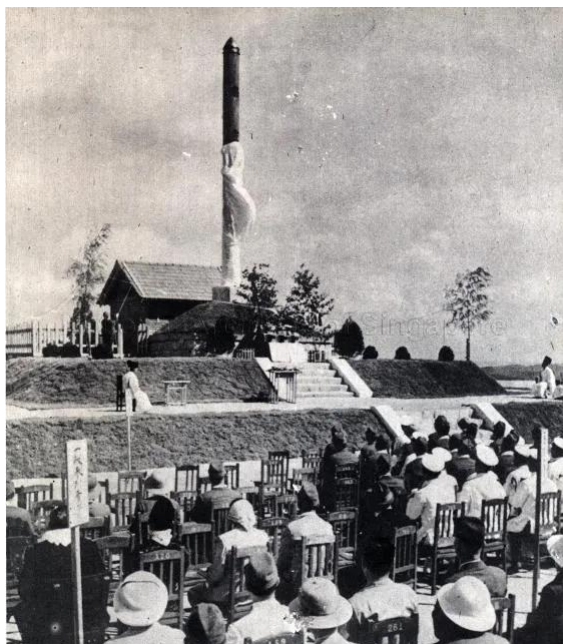
Marking important dates in the Japanese calendar remained a priority, though there were changes. Instead of a run, there was a cycle race from the Padang to the Chureito Memorial planned for October the 8th.

An extensive Syonan Sports Programme for Meiji Setu to be staged in November was announced. The claim was that these celebrations would be held on an unprecedented scale. Part of the Padang was still useable for a Mayor's Cup soccer match, and tennis could take place at the Tokubetu-si Sports Club (YMCA) grounds at Bras Basah.

For the Japanese, the main objective was to rally as many of the people as possible to create a positive, though misguided, impression that the war was proceeding well.



Labour booklet issued during Japanese Occupation, 1942-1945. Source: Chew Chang Lang Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No: 19980005535 – 0104)



Syonan Chureito (Japanese Memorial Shrine) at Bukit Batok hilltop. Two memorials were built during the Japanese Occupation to honour the dead soldiers of the Japanese and Allied forces. Syonan Chureito was destroyed by the Japanese after the war for fear of desecration. The Allied Memorial Cross was removed later. 1942. Source: From Shashin Shuho, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media Image Number 20050000124 – 0002)



Junction of Prinsep Street with Bras Basah Road. On the right is the former Ladies Lawn Tennis Club premises which had been acquired by Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in 1932 after the club's closure. In the background is the Raffles Museum and Library. 1930s. Source: Lim Kheng Chye Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No: 19980005881 – 0091)

### From Tennis Courts to Trenches

The SSA membership numbers continued to grow and by early January 1945, the Syonan Shimbun reported a total of 3,287 members. Not all were necessarily active members, for

one incentive for joining was the possibility of receiving additional rice to stave off hunger.

Activities of the SSA focused largely on passive defence, and the work of the Special Forward Service Corps in dealing with air raid damage and digging shelters. The former YMCA tennis courts on Bras Basah Road were converted to trenches for defensive positions.

Page | 2

### Soccer Must Go On - Okamoto Challenge Cup

Reporting soccer matches became infrequent as the programme became more fitful. There was one highlight early in 1945, but an anticipated close contest proved to be disappointing. The Okamoto Challenge Cup soccer final between Pasir Panjang Rovers and Syonan Jovials was played at the Jalan Besar Stadium, resulting in a one-sided victory for the Rovers by seven goals to nil.

### Sportswomen Joining Special Forward Service Corps

At the beginning of April, SSA membership reached 3,649. Apparently 62 out of the 162 new applicants were women. They were not yet able to enjoy the Association's amenities, but were advised that they would soon become eligible to join the Special Forward Service Corps.

The insistence on ritual and obedience continued, even if the sporting programme was flagging badly. On the third anniversary of the occupation, the Special Forward Service Corps was ordered to march to Churieto Memorial on Bukit Batok Hill.

### Goodwill Tour – Fostering Friendship and Sport for Entertainment in New Malai

The idea of a goodwill tour to peninsula Malaya was revived with a dual purpose. First, to further foster friendship with up-country sportsmen, and second, to provide entertainment for the 10,000 former residents of Syonan who were farming in the agricultural settlements of New Syonan (Endau) and Fuji Village (Bahau).

A team of footballers, amateur musicians and actors from the SSA departed on 20th May for a two-week tour of southern and central Malai.

The party's itinerary included stops at Seremban, Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh and Penang to play seven games. Three of the games were won. These games represented the final gesture of sporting harmony in the region during the occupation.

During the tour the positive tone back in Syonan was one of denial.

*“Life in Syonan is characterised by hard work on the one hand, the aim being to win the war, counter balanced, on the other hand, by no lack of entertainment and recreation.”*

- Syonan Shimbun, 1945

### **Boosting Morale – Boxing is the Chief Attraction in Malai and Syonan**

It was a time for brave faces confronted by hardship and declining fortunes. Boosting morale was becoming a regular occurrence.

*“Syonan’s busy public – pre-occupied with overtime work, spare-time employment and Grow-More-Food schemes – still snatch time for relaxation in the field of sport, those vigorous and competent enough taking an active part, while others, although in a passive role, lend moral support by going to witness games. Undoubtedly, Boxing is the chief attraction throughout Malai and in Syonan in particular. This is amply demonstrated by the crowds that flock to the boxing arena, be it the New World or Great World parks, where Bell’s Sports enterprise stage a programme invariably every Saturday.”*

- Syonan Shimbun, 1945

### **Call to Arms - Final Membership of the SSA**

Increasing demands on the male membership of the SSA Special Forward Service Corps prompted a simultaneous call to arms from the female population.

In June alone the number of young women joining the Corps helped to increase total numbers from 3,749 to 3,846. There were now 100 women members in all.

There was a Forward Service Corps' Inter Chutai (inter-group) soccer competition and the ever-present boxing promotions under Bell's Sports Enterprises, which featured Battling Khoon vs Tiny Severo. However, it was soon to be curtain call for the SSA.

### **A Shocking End**

On 6 August 1945, the first atomic bomb was released over Hiroshima and three days later a second fell on Nagasaki. The Japanese Occupation of Singapore would end. The concluding blows were shocking and horrifying in the extreme.

Syonan returned to being Singapore with the surrender.

**All Rights Reserved ©2022 Sport Singapore Acknowledgement:** Images courtesy of National Archives Singapore, Sport Singapore, and Dr Nick Aplin | Text extracted from 'Sport in Singapore: The Colonial Legacy' published by Straits Times Press (2019) | Author: Dr Nick Aplin | Curator: Teresa Teo Guttensohn | The responsibility for facts and opinions rests exclusively with the author and his views and interpretations do not necessarily reflect the views or policy of the publisher.

Visit the [Singapore Sports Museum](#) to discover Singapore's sporting heritage and the Hall of Fame (HOF), which honours more than 50 sporting legends. The Hall of Fame was created in 1985 by the Singapore Sports Council (now Sport Singapore) to recognise and celebrate the achievements of Singapore's top athletes.