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Factsheet – Total Defence Day 2002: Opening of Reflections at Bukit Chandu, a WWII Interpretative Centre at 31K Pepys Road

BACKGROUND

How valuable is this land, where we build our homes and raise our family, to us? It is an immensely difficult question to answer… an answer that may only be obtained with in-depth thought. It is in search of this answer that the new WWII Interpretative Centre at 31K Pepys Road, named Reflections at Bukit Chandu, was set up.

As part of the government's effort to preserve the heritage and war memories of the various communities, 31K Pepys Road was developed into a WWII Interpretative Centre. In April 2001, approval for funding was given to the National Archives of Singapore (NAS), an institution under National Heritage Board (NHB), to execute the project and establish linkage to two historic parks nearby, namely Kent Ridge Park and Labrador Park. Together, the three facilities would form the larger Pasir Panjang Historic District.

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ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Centre will tell the story of the WWII battles in Singapore with special reference to one of the last battles fought on Pasir Panjang Ridge (the present Kent Ridge), which is within close vicinity to the 31K Pepys Road site. The objective of this project is to educate Singaporeans and tourists about WWII battles that took place in Singapore some 60 years ago, and to remember the gallantry of the Malay Regiment and their men who took their last stand at Pasir Panjang Ridge. In addition, the Centre serves to evoke contemplation and thoughts about national worth and rootedness.

ABOUT THE DISPLAYS

Care was taken to ensure that the bungalow is restored to its original colonial flavour. The exterior colour has been refurbished and repainted to its original pale beige on plaster of paris, with sienna-red tiling for the shingles of the roof. Exceptional features like curled cast-iron ornaments, which adorn the side tips of the roof, have also been painstakingly restored. The windows have been refurbished and repainted, and effort has been made to replace the same pattern of textured plush-green glass for the missing panes. In addition, effort has been taken to use chang-ai wood – the original material used – for the floor.

Much of the information and displays found in and around the Centre and the various galleries will be showcased on glass/acrylic panels. The glass used is tempered, so as to keep to the sepia tones of the building, and will utilise naturally reflected light from the surrounding park for illumination. One of the external panels will showcase a replica (etched into the tempered glass) of the famous oil painting by Mr Hossein Enas. A poem entitled Adnan & Comrades at Bukit Chandu composed by Professor Edwin Thumboo will also be etched into one of the external glass panels. The rest of the external panels will list the names of members of the Malay Regiment.

In line with the theme of reflection, a shallow pool with an eternal flame lit in the middle has been built to further facilitate contemplation. A circular directional mosaic linking the Centre to Kent Ridge Park and Labrador Park is located in the garden. The garden of the bungalow has been landscaped to accommodate plants that evoke memories of WWII days, like tapioca plants and lallang. There is also the intention to keep the food sold in the canteen in line with the theme of war. As such, even a break at the canteen can be used by tourists or teachers with their students to enter into a reflective discussion.

Gallery I

Gallery I contains a series of exhibits (including artefacts) that highlights the following:

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- Historical context of the Battle of Pasir Panjang in relation to other battles fought in Singapore during 1942;
- The Malay Regiment: Its traditions and its role during WWII.

An audio guide (available at the reception counter in English, Mandarin, Malay and Japanese) is provided to enhance the visitor's experience.

Gallery II

Gallery II contains the Battle of Singapore exhibit. The interplay of graphics and visuals on a specially-made glass pane, set against a miniature model of Singapore island in 1942, subtly immerses the visitor in a more reflective mode as it presents information about the various battles fought. A touch-screen computer also allows for interactivity between displays and visitors.

Gallery III
Gallery III is designed as a replica of a battle pillbox. A multi-media show (using Pepper's Ghost effect) about the Battle of Pasir Panjang will be the key feature in this gallery.

The staircase leading to the second floor will showcase a three-wall mural of about 4m in height by Mr Valeriu Sepi. The theme of the painting (The Sacrificing Tree) is nature and war.

Gallery IV
Gallery IV is known as the Windows of Memories. The gallery will highlight the following:

- The stories of people living around the Bukit Chandu area at the time of the battle;
- The heroism of the likes of Lieutenant Adnan, Lieutenant Ibrahim bin Sidek, and their comrades in putting up a defence against the advancing Japanese forces;
- The memories of living relatives of the Malay Regiment soldiers who fought at the Battle of Pasir Panjang.

The information is set on glass panels and illuminated by trail lighting and natural light.

Gallery V
Gallery V is known as the Well of Reflections. Set up like a well, the display requires viewers to look down into the well to reflect on the information contained within. This action of looking down enhances the feeling of the fall, and encourages empathy.

Gallery VI
In addition to the five galleries, the Centre also features a Bukit Chandu Theatre and a Learning Room.

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The Bukit Chandu Theatre is designed to handle a 'sound spectacular' called Sounds of Battle. Set up to look like a kampong house, the soundproof room has seats in the shape of WWII ammunition boxes, with attached earphones for visitors. The 'sound spectacular' allows participants to experience the sounds and trauma of the Battle of Bukit Chandu.

In the Learning Room, visitors to the Centre will have the opportunity to handle various artefacts that were either utilised by the Malay Regiment soldiers or the Japanese Imperial Army. The tactile quality of the room serves to further enhance the reflective experience as visitors get to touch items that were once owned by soldiers involved in the battles.

OTHER DETAILS

The Centre will be open to the public from 17 Feb 2002. The details of admission are as follows:

Opening hours: 9am to 5pm
Tuesday to Sunday (closed on Mondays)

Entrance fee: Free admission for the first month
Subsequent charges will be announced at a later date.

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