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SYBIL KATHIGASU

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We know little of local heroes

JUNE 12 was exactly 65 years since Sybil Kathigasu, the freedom fighter, died. In the book, *No Dram of Mercy* (2006), a memoir of Sybil's memoirs, the author gave an account of a woman (Sybil Kathigasu) of great courage, who should be regarded as a beacon and role model to all Malaysians.

Between the late 1920s and early 1940s, Sybil and her husband, Dr Abdon Clement Kathigasu, operated a clinic in Brewster Road, now known as Jalan Sultan Idris Shah, in Ipoh.

Sybil's warmth, readiness to help and fluency in Cantonese made her popular with the Chinese.

In 1941, the Japanese army bombed Ipoh, forcing Sybil and her family to move to Papan, a town near Ipoh.

It was here that Sybil ran a free clinic, dispensing medicine to locals and fighters of the Malayan

People's Anti-Japanese Army.

She kept a radio so she could listen to the British Broadcasting Corporation for news and pass on information.

When the Japanese army knew about her subversive activities, she was arrested and tortured. Her fingers were ripped off with pliers and her legs scalded with iron rods.

She was forced to drink large quantities of water before the Japanese military police stepped on her bloated stomach. She suffered damage to the spine and skull after being beaten by bamboo stick.

After Malaya's liberation from the Japanese in 1945, Sybil was flown to England for medical treatment. In 1948, she became the only Malayan woman to receive the George Medal for Gallantry, a high civilian honour given by King George VI.

Several months later, she died from an old wound at the jaw, sus-

tained from the kick of a Japanese boot that had brought on a fatal bout of septicaemia. Her body was buried at St Michael's Church in Ipoh.

Sybil's life is perhaps the best example of unity: a Penangite of Eurasian descent who sacrificed her life for the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army.

In Fair Park, Ipoh, a road is named after her to commemorate her bravery, but the sad truth is, she has never been mentioned in any Malaysian history book.

Our education system places little emphasis on this subject.

Little is known to schoolchildren about heroes like Sgt Hassan, Lieutenant Adnan, Iban hero Kanang and Sybil. Can the Education Ministry include chapters on local fighters, like Sybil, in history books?

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