AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A P.W.(J.)

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GIFTED TO PETER WINSTANLEY
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("P.W.(J.)" is the Military abbreviation for
Prisoner of War of the Japanese)

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CHAPTER I

15th February to 3rd April 1942

The silence was intense, almost frightening. The first official timing for the surrender was 1830 hours, but this was subsequently put back to 2030 hours. There had, however, been no action after 1830, and now at 2031 hours, the silence was complete. No longer did the Zeros zoom over A.I.F. Headquarters at Tanglin Barracks, machine-gunning and dropping their fire-crackers; the Mitsubishis with their bomb loads had gone from the skies, and the enemy artillery was silent. So too, were the guns of the Australian battery astride the Tanglin Road. Even the normally chattering morse keys in the Signal office were quiet, the weary duty operators resting their tired heads on stilled hands. Those not on duty were fast asleep, exhausted after seven days of ceaseless activity.

From the time the Japanese landed on Singapore Island at 2000 hours on Sunday night, 8th February, I'd not even had the opportunity to change my socks. When the Japs landed, Divisional Headquarters (and its Signals office) was established on the Jurong Road, near Bukit Timah. Less than 24 hours later, at 1900 hours on 9th February, we retired to a new Headquarters on Holland Road and a new Signals office was established. It didn't take the Nip bombers long to locate us there, and next morning they dropped a packet on us while General Wavell was at our Headquarters conferring with General Percival and General Bennett. You had to hand it to the Jap's fifth column - it was really good. I wouldn't be surprised if they knew Fred Stahl was the Sigmaster there! The aim of the Jap bombers was very good but they were a bit unlucky, because one of their 500 pound bombs landed outside the room in which the Generals were conferring, curved under the room, but obligingly didn't go off. I say obligingly because I was in the next room, and in the pressure of the times I'd neglected to order either a halo or an asbestos suit. It was from this meeting with the Force Commanders that General Wavell issued his famous message that there must be no thought of surrender and that officers must fight with and die with their men. Having issued this inspiring message he then flew away. We were not impressed!

The bombing continued through the day and the enemy artillery also lent a hand and tried to pick us off. During the night the Nip infantry got close enough to lob some mortar bombs on us, and at 0630 hours on 11th February we took off again - this time to Tanglin Barracks. Here we set up our last Signals office, for we had finally run out of land. From here we just had nowhere to go.

Despite General Wavell's mention of surrender no-one had really given the possibility a thought and the first intimation, early in the

afternoon of 15th February, came literally like a bolt from the blue. Initial disbelief was followed by slow acceptance as confirming messages came in. It was incredible, but true. The British Force had surrendered to the Imperial Japanese Army. The bastion had been breached and Singapore was literally in ruins. Our cup of bitterness was complete - or so we thought.

And now the silence. The all-pervading, engulfing silence. As the day died, and Singapore died, it seemed that we too, were sinking into everlasting oblivion.

However that didn't prove to be the case, although we did go into the limbo for the next 3½ years. In the story that follows I'll try to set out the happenings of those 3½ years as they affected me personally ....

Early next morning, after the first real sleep in over a week, I received orders to close the Signal office and rejoin the main body of the Unit in the Botanical Gardens. I was glad to see my friends Ben Barnett and Jimmie Hardacre safe and sound. They had an interesting story to tell. For the previous five days the major portion of the Unit had been organised into a fighting battalion - 'The Snake Gully Rifles', the C.O. called them - and they had conducted themselves with considerable credit on patrol and defensive work. There had been a good deal of sniper fire in the Gardens - the thickly foliaged trees offered excellent cover - and Ben and Jim were highly critical of the behaviour of some officers, including one quite senior, who took off their badges of rank because of the propensity of the snipers for picking-off officers. The rank and file of the Unit hadn't missed this either, and some pretty hard words were spoken. I was interested to note later on that, in the main, the officers who had removed their rank badges gave a poor performance as Prisoners-of-War also. As I shall explain later, the reverse wasn't always the case. Some officers who had been fearless in battle, and who showed outstanding leadership at the time, were hopeless in dealing with the Nips as P.O.W.

Shortly after returning to the Gardens I was talking to Reg Bridgland, our much respected 2 i/c. when the sound of rifle shots came from over a slight rise a hundred yards or so away. Reg took off at a gallop, and I trailed along beside him. As we breasted the rise we saw not what I think we both feared - some of our boys in strife with the Japs - but a small ammunition dump which had been set on fire. There were boxes of small arms ammunition and also hand grenades. What we had taken for shots were the sounds of .303 rifle ammunition exploding. Reg and I set

to work to drag the boxes away from the fire and had moved quite a few when a hand grenade went up. "Take cover" shouted Reg, but he need not have bothered, for I was way ahead of him. I hit the bottom of a nearby slit trench at least half a second before he did.

I mention this particular happening because it brought home to me - not for the first time and certainly not for the last - how some journalists exaggerate. I remember when an ammunition factory had caught fire in Melbourne not long before the war, an over-zealous reporter had described how "bullets were whizzing up the street, endangering onlookers hundreds of yards away". Our experience was that the cartridge of the heated .303 bullets burst and threw the bullet only a yard or so. Reg and I suffered many tiny nicks on legs and arms, but we were never in risk of serious injury until the hand grenades exploded. Even then the power of the explosion was slight compared with the normal burst of a grenade.

While we were sheltering in the slit-trench Reg said, "I'd give anything for this not to have happened" fearing, of course, that the sounds of the explosions would bring the Japs. Had they turned up we would have been in real strife, for they had already made it clear that destruction of weapons or ammunition would be summarily dealt with. (It went against the grain to hand my weapons over, but I was lucky. I discovered quite a deep well in the Gardens and down it I dropped my service revolver, an automatic I'd taken from Australia, and a beautiful "peep-sight" rifle I'd picked up in Johore on the run down the mainland. My conscience was clear - I hadn't "destroyed" them.)

We waited in the slit-trench until the explosions of the grenades stopped, then scrambled out and managed to put out the fire without having any unwelcome visitors. I was amazed at the absence of Japanese soldiers. Later that day an officer, resplendant in a clean white open-necked shirt and trailing his sword, strolled through our lines but he was interested only in taking photos.

When Reg and I returned to our Unit H.Q. we found that orders had been issued for the concentration of all British and Australian P.O.W.s at Changi, at the eastern end of Singapore Island. Method of movement was by Shanks' pony, the only vehicles allowed being one water-cart per Unit. We could take with us only what we could carry, and what food we could load on the water-cart.

There was plenty of tinned food in our Unit supplies, but as we could take the barest minimum with us Jimmie Jacobs, Jim Hardacre, Ben Barnett and I decided we would have a really good, slap-up, many course meal that day. Jim Jacobs had a magnificent dinner set he had purloined from a deserted home

on the run down the mainland and he made this available for our feast. Jim's effort in appropriating the dinner set was nothing compared with the exploit of an English half-Colonel commanding the Indian light Ack Ack battery operating at Labis, which was the furthest north the A.I.F. Div. H.Q. had gone. I was O.C. the Div. Sig. office at Labis, and with two other Aussie officers I shared a house with the English officers from the Ack Ack regiment. The owners had long since fled the house, but had left behind a magnificent grand piano. The English O.C. coveted this beautiful instrument, but faced a problem. The piano had obviously been assembled inside the house and could not be taken out, either by door or window. He appealed to me for help, but I was even less of a piano mechanic than he, and that wasn't saying much. I went on duty early on the morning of Tuesday, 13th January, leaving him still wrestling with his problem.

About midday the air-raid alarm sounded, and almost immediately the sound of aircraft was heard. I had sited our Sig. office in a garage attached to the house in which our Div. H.Q. was located. There was an inspection pit in the garage and I had used this to protect our switchboard. When the alarm sounded I tumbled the morse operators in the pit, around and on top of the switchboard operator. I had hoped to get in myself, but already legs and arms were over-flowing. The best cover I could find was at the base of a nearby big tree, and there it was that I experienced my first air-raid. I was scared stiff. Ten bombs were dropped, in two sticks of five, and each one of the ten seemed to be coming closer to me. The Jap planes flew directly overhead. But there were only two of them and they had bombed the Ack Ack battery protecting the road bridge over the railway about a quarter of a mile away. They scored direct hits on the guns too. It is probable that none of the bombs landed closer to me than 400 yards, but I was more scared by that two plane raid than I ever was by the 27 plane pattern-bombing which became part of the way of life in later days.

I was relieved at four in the afternoon and returned to the cottage we shared with the English officers. When I reached it I was aghast. Although I had heard no bomb-bursts in that direction the whole of the front of the house had been demolished. I should have worried! Following the damage to their guns the Ack Ack battery had been ordered back, and the English half-Colonel had solved the problem of his grand piano by hooking a 3-ton truck to the wooden front of the house and simply tearing it off. Appropriation of the piano had then been easy. I often wondered where that piano finally rested.

In comparison with this episode Jim Jacob's filching of the dinner set was a mere trifle and we were determined to enjoy what might be our last really good meal for some time. I can't remember of what the various courses consisted, but I do know that there were seven of them, and at the end of each

course we nonchalently threw the crockery we had used straight over our shoulder into a nearby slit-trench. I still remember that meal with great pleasure.

Next morning I packed my haversack with as much in the way of tinned food that I felt I could carry over the 17 mile march to Changi. In my blanket roll I carried a spare pair of boots, two shirts, two shorts and some socks and handkerchiefs. I still had with me my down sleeping bag which I had carefully nursed from the days at Liverpool camp in N.S.W. It seemed unlikely that I would need it in that steamy tropical climate, but I decided against discarding it, and was often grateful for its warmth in later times.

After waiting around in the Gardens until about midday we finally received the order to march and set off on our way to Changi. We were all pretty fit, and with two good sleeps since the end of hostilities the distance didn't present much of a problem. Once again I was amazed at the absence of Japanese soldiers. With the exception of a solitary sentry at each road junction there were none to be seen. The Japs were supremely confident that we wouldn't go away, and how right they were. Where could we go?

I've said the distance was no real problem, but the length of the marching column was. From the air it must have looked like a great caterpillar as the various marching parties marched, stopped, started again and then repeated the process over and over again. I don't know how many tens of thousands of marchers there were in the column, but I do know we didn't reach Selarang barracks, near Changi village until about 9.30 p.m. that night.

Good old Jim Hardacre, who had preceded us with the water cart, had hot tea waiting for us, and following this we just lay on the ground right where we had stopped, and went to sleep.

We were awakened by the sun next morning and all were interested in taking stock of the situation in which we found ourselves. Signals had been allotted a block of two-storeyed houses in the married quarters area of Selarang Barracks, which was at the western end of the Changi military compound. The area had been the scene of heavy fighting and none of the houses was intact. Some had been completely destroyed by bomb or shell hits, others had been partially demolished, and the remainder were all damaged to a lesser degree. A typical married quarters consisted of a two-storeyed semi-detached house or flat with living room, dining room, and kitchen on the ground floor, and three bedrooms with a bathroom upstairs. The laundry was detached at the rear. The total usable area available

allowed an allocation of about two sq. yards of floor space per man. I was fortunate in that Ben Barnett and Jim Hardacre were included among the five other officers who shared the room to which I was allocated.

There were many urgent tasks to be done to make the area habitable, and the C.O. directed me to assist the Adjutant (my friend, Ben) in administrative work. There was no water service, many pipes having been broken by bombing or shelling. For the same reason the sewage system was inoperative. There was no electricity for lighting or cooking and no firewood either. The most urgent task was the provision of latrines, for the medical officers were insistent that if an efficient system was not provided quickly an outbreak of dysentry in the near future was inevitable. Reg Bridgland located suitable areas and the whole Unit, with the exception of cooks and a few administrative personnel, went to work digging latrines to a depth of 12 feet and more in that hard Changi soil. Later Reg acquired from God only knows where several 18 inch earth augurs and these enabled us to go to much greater depths more quickly and much more easily even though the motive power was still the muscles of our Sigs. boys. These "boreholes" as they became known, were also much more easily sealed against flies. They also became famous as the centres where rumours either began or were passed on. I started a "Rumour Diary". The first entry, on Tuesday, 24th February 1942 read, "Russians fighting on German soil. Big Jap-Yank naval battle."

Our only source of water in those early days at Selarang was Jim Hardacre's water cart. The Nips allowed it to be filled once per day at the watering point in Changi village. After satisfying cooking needs this permitted an issue of one pint per man per day for all purposes. Storage of this issue was a problem but I was fortunate enough to find a chamberpot in one of the bombed houses and this served Ben, Jimmy and me for several months.

Jim Hardacre solved the firewood problem by appropriating wood from the bomb-damaged buildings and so saw the Unit through until the Japanese made firewood available by having us cut down rubber trees from the plantation running from opposite the camp to the Changi beach. The ration allowed was 1½ lbs. per man per day.

Two important directives came through from the Japanese on our first day at Selarang. The first was that "Nippon Time" would forthwith be adopted for all purposes. As Japanese time was one and a half hours ahead of local Malayan time this meant, in effect, ninety minutes of daylight-saving. This was no great hardship, and in fact in those early days was something of an advantage, for with no lighting provided by the Japs we were relying on home-made oil lamps for light after dark. Oil

was not easy to come by, so the additional hour and a half of daylight at the end of the day was quite useful.

The second directive gave us no cause for rejoicing. The Nips informed us that we would receive no food issues before 26th February and in the meantime must rely for rations on supplies carried into camp on 17th February. As a result we had to live on half rations for those nine days. The Japanese advised also that the daily ration per man per day from 26th February would be:

Rice	17.6 ozs.	Veges.	3.52 ozs.
Meat	1.76 ozs.	Milk	.528 ozs.
Sugar	.704 ozs.	Frying Oil	.176 ozs.
Salt	.176 ozs.		
Tea	.176 ozs.	Cigarettes,	40 per month
Flour	1.76 ozs.	Toilet paper,	3 sheets per day

Seventeen ozs. of dry rice is quite a goodly amount and it was decided to withhold a few ounces each day of each man's rations, and so build up a reserve against possible contingencies. How wise this decision was was demonstrated before many months passed.

In those early days we saw, with the exception of what we came to call "Gloat Parades", very little of the Japanese, and only H.Q. Staff had much in the way of actual contact with them. Some of the A.I.F. were engaged in ringing the compound with barbed wire, and there was a Nip guard-house at the entrance to the Selarang section, but apart from the Japanese manning this post we saw little of our captors. The first of the "Gloat Parades" was on Wednesday, 25th February 1942 when General Yamashita, Commander in Chief of the Japanese land forces in the area, inspected his captives. We were all lined up along the main Changi Road with Jap soldiers, with bayonets fixed, facing us at intervals of about 3 paces. From the moment of our capture we had been required to salute all Japanese, even the lowliest private soldier. This irked me considerably at the time and although as the months and years passed I became resigned to it, I never ceased to resent it. I obtained ultimate satisfaction in a way that I shall mention later, but in the meantime there were occasions when I managed to derive some pleasure from the act. One of these was when General Yamashita's car moved slowly by, the great man eyeing us with satisfaction as he passed. At this moment we were each required to give him a "smart salute". I brought my arm up smartly, touched the brim of my hat with my forefinger, but at the same time managed to rest the tip of my thumb on the end of my nose. Instead of resting my second, third and fourth fingers together with my index finger I had them all outstretched. The result was a very rude, but to me very pleasing, gesture which in my school days had caused me many a bloody nose

when directed to some better fighter than I. A childish reaction, you may say, but I assure you it gave me considerable satisfaction. Fortunately, too, the Japanese soldier facing me was unaware of its significance or I would have been on the receiving end of a rifle butt earlier than ultimately proved to be the case. In the next few weeks we were also inspected by the Japanese Naval Commander-in-Chief, and by another high-ranking General, and on both these occasions I obtained the same sort of satisfaction. I rather fancy, though, that General Yamashita had the last laugh, even though unwittingly. On 4th March 1942 he issued an order that all P.O.W. officers were to remove the badges of rank from their shoulders. Henceforth all officers would be distinguished by a single star worn on the left breast. Reaction among the Aussie officers varied from outraged dignity to quiet amusement. One rather pompous Major said, "It makes me feel like a second Lieutenant", to which Jimmy Thyer, a full blooded Colonel, replied "It makes me feel I've been given the order of a second left teat".

Jim Thyer, our first C.O., but since July 1941 General Staff Officer I to General Gordon Bennett, was a good soldier, and he had his feet on the ground. We officers in Signals had been discussing the probable length of the war and decided to run a lottery on the date of our release. The earliest date nominated was 31 March 1942, about 4 weeks away, and the latest 30 April 1943. A day or so later Ben and I were discussing this with Jim Thyer. His comment was "Make no mistake about it boys. We are in for a long and difficult period of hardship. Only the fit will survive". Jim may not remember saying this, but he did, and how right he proved to be.

It was from Jim Thyer that I learned the story of the "Changi Tree". About a mile or so to the east of our area - on the way to Roberts Barracks at the point of the Island - we could see the remains of what must have been a great tree. There still stood at least fifty feet of the trunk of the tree, but with not a bough to be seen. An artillery shell had registered a direct hit and cleanly taken off the top of the tree which must have been over a hundred feet high. Colonel Thyer told us how, for well over a century, the "Changi Tree" had dominated the landscape. It was revered by the natives who had a legend which said that "When the Changi tree falls, Singapore will fall too".

There was a great deal of discussion in those days as to the merit or otherwise of General Gordon Bennett's escape from captivity. I felt then, and still do, that he did the right thing. He had every right to believe that, on surrender, officers would be separated from their men. Hitherto, this had always been the case. That the Japanese did not immediately do so was only one of the many unusual and unorthodox moves they made. "Ginger" Bennett was entitled to believe too, as he did, that he had information about the Japanese Army and its methods which was vital to the

safety and security of Australia. I was supported in my opinion by the majority of the members of the Eighth Division, as was apparent from the rousing reception the survivors gave to General Bennett in later days, but Jim Thyer did not agree. It was one of the saddest facts of the Malayan campaign to me, their Divisional Sigmaster for the whole of the action, that these two fine soldiers were so basically opposed. Both brave men, both determined men, both outspoken men, both loyal men, but with diametrically opposed backgrounds. Bennett, the brilliant civilian soldier, with an outstanding record in World War I. In civil life an Accountant he had an ordered mind and a capacity for analytical probing. Red-headed, and with plenty of the fire usually associated with this, he saw his solutions to the problems facing him as the right solutions and it is not surprising that his solutions were not always accepted without argument by Jim Thyer. For Thyer was Duntroon trained and an ingrained professional soldier. He had trained hard and well in the period between the wars, had studied, among many other problems, the tactics to be adopted in the event of an enemy thrust at Singapore via Malaya. A tough disciplinarian, he had his effigy burned by some members of the Unit who considered him too hard a taskmaster when he was C.O. Sigs, and on another occasion he had formally reported to the Divisional Commander (none other than Ginger Bennett) that he had a mutiny on his hands when some members of the Unit refused duty on the grounds that Signals were getting less leave than other Units in camp at Bathurst at the same time. "A prophet is not without honour save in his own country". So it was with Jim Thyer. It was not until he left the Unit, and experience in actual combat proved the value of his early training that the boys in Sigs. recognised his true worth. He then became affectionately known as "Sig-Toc". (In those days 'T' in the communications alphabet was TOC).

On Thursday, 26th February 1942, the official Japanese rice-based diet commenced, and well I remember my first rice meal. As a naughty young boy I had decided, without even sampling it, that I did not like rice. On one occasion my Mother, having made a rice custard, decided I would eat some - or else! It turned out to be "or else". My poor Mother, having forced a spoonful of the custard down my unwilling throat was, within a fraction of a second, the recipient of that same mouthful, returned with unerring accuracy before it could even reach my stomach. Unfortunately this episode was accepted as definite proof that I didn't like rice, and from that day in 1915 until 26th February 1942 not one grain of rice passed my lips. (As by then I was 32 years old it will be evident that I had convinced myself that I didn't like rice). Our first meal of the new ration issue consisted of half a dixie of boiled rice and one half of a tinned herring. I manoeuvred a tiny piece of herring on to a spoonful of rice. With some trepidation, and after warning Ben Barnett to stand clear, I gingerly swallowed the spoonful. To my surprise, nothing untoward happened.

The rice hit my tum which, apparently accepting the offering without demur, immediately and conscientiously started on the job of digestion. When the rest of the dish had followed without difficulty I came to the conclusion that I could eat rice after all. This was just as well, because over the next 3½ years, had I but known it, I was to eat well over a quarter of a ton of that basic food. My weight at this time was 9 st. 10 lbs.

Within the camp area the Japanese provided us with absolutely no form of transport. Everything that had to be moved had to be done by man-power, and this led to the famous "trailer-parties". Scattered round the area were the battered remains of many vehicles, damaged and made useless during the fighting. From these remains were built many contraptions which were euphemistically called trailers. Basically they consisted of 4 wheels - two front and two rear with an axle between each set. On this was built a tray from whatever material could be scrounged and the vehicle was complete. Motive power came from the muscles of the P.O.W. who pulled and pushed these unlovely but most useful vehicles which carried stores and food within the camp boundary, firewood from the rubber plantation and sea-water, in which the rice was cooked, from the beach to camp. They were, in fact, our lifeline.

Apart from the "Gloat Parades" life in those early weeks was much the same from day to day. Digging latrines, clearing up the camp area, and trailer parties were, in the main, the lot of the men. The Japanese had made no move to separate the officers from the men and so our organisation was still that of Unit Headquarters and four companies. The Company officers carried out administration in their own areas and at Unit H.Q. we were kept busy compiling information required by the Japanese, completing our War Diary and on Unit administration generally. Thus life went on in a generally routine way, but two incidents remain clear in my mind.

The C.O. had organised a Senior Officers' Mess in the small ground-floor room of the building in which I was quartered. There were about ten of us included. A rough table had been constructed and a form either side provided the seating. Cooking was done in what had been the laundry at the back of our house. When "Cookhouse" was sounded the officers would file along each side of the table, standing until the C.O. sat. A reference to the ration scale mentioned earlier will show that the salt issue was rather minute, and totalled a little over 1¾ ozs. per day for 10 officers, and this small amount was placed in the middle of the table for our evening meal. It soon became evident that a certain officer - I'll call him "Barnacle Bill" - always headed the line of officers and as he passed up the table he grabbed the salt and helped himself to it in liberal manner, leaving very little for the other nine. One evening, after going through his usual performance, Barnacle Bill was seen to take one or two mouthfuls of food and then

push his plate away. In answer to a query from the C.O. he said he wasn't hungry, but it wasn't long afterwards that we learned that Fred Cann, our cook, had noticed Barnacle Bill's predilection for helping himself to the salt at the expense of the remaining officers, and had determined to do something about it. On the night in question he had already over-salted Barnacle Bill's ration so that, after B.B. further liberally sprinkled it, it was quite uneatable. The lesson was not lost on B.B. and thenceforth the salt ration was shared equitably.

The other incident concerned Signalman Harold Moverley. Our C.O. had decided that one of the methods to be adopted to maintain the morale of the men was to continue training, as well as we could in the circumstances, so that we would be as fit as possible to take up the fight again when we were released. I was explaining the C.O.'s instruction to a group which included Hal. Moverley. "The C.O." I said, "wants us to be completely fit, and ready to fight the Nips again at any time." Quick as a flash Moverley said, "Sir, I hope that my next fight is with the Missus."!

Optimism about an early release was fairly general and it's worthwhile recording my "Rumour Diary" for March.

Friday, 6th March 1942:	"Wyndham and Broome bombed. English paratroops in France."
Saturday, 7th March:	"Italy surrenders - world wide peace talks."
Sunday, 8th March:	"Germany surrendered. Japan fighting on. Chinese pushing into Thailand. Turkey in war against the Axis. Naval Battle Java."
Tuesday, 10th March:	"Germans fighting desperately, but have not surrendered. Turkey not in war. Darwin, Wyndham, Broome, bombed."
Wednesday, 11th March:	"Java taken by Japanese. Australia urged to accept Japanese terms."
Thursday, 12th March:	"Chinese advancing from northern Thailand - Americans from Rangoon."
Monday, 16th March:	"Russians pushing on to Berlin. Japanese have not taken Java. Americans, Chinese and British advancing down Malaya."
Tuesday, 17th March:	"Germany capitulates."
Friday, 20th March:	"Many American soldiers in Australia."
Monday, 23rd March:	"1,000,000 Chinese advancing across Burma and Indo China."

Tuesday, 24th March:	"Wavell commands troops in Northern Malaya. Java still holding but only just. Phillipines well held by Yanks. Russians doing well."
Thursday, 26th March:	"Many Japanese wounded reaching Singapore from the North."
Friday, 27th March:	"Chinese troops in Kelantan. Kuala Lumpur bombed. Unrest in Germany. Casey in British War Cabinet."
Saturday, 28th March:	"Yanks and Aussies land in Java and Sumatra."
Sunday, 29th March:	"Further landings Java and Sumatra. Allies attacking from north in 4-prong move."
Monday, 30th March:	"Germany capitulates, also Thailand."

Wild as they were in the main, these were the types of rumours which swept through the Camp and engendered such false optimism in those early days. Most of them turned out to be true, but not until 3 years and more had elapsed, and by that time large numbers of those who had passed on the rumours had themselves passed on.

CHAPTER II

ADAM PARK

4th April 1942 to 10th June 1942

I have said previously that in those early weeks at Selarang I had very little contact with the Japanese, but that was to change quickly and with a vengeance.

On 1st April (a good day!) the C.O. told me a working party of P.O.W. was required by the Japanese for work in Singapore, and he had decided to place me in charge of the Signals component of this workforce.

The party initially comprised 3,000 Australians, and early on the morning of 4th April we lined up on the Barrack Square at Selarang, each man complete with one day's ration. I've mentioned before that the Japanese provided no transport within the Camp, and we soon found out that they had no intention of providing it to get us into Singapore. It was to be Shanks' pony for us, and the only consolation we had was that the Jap guards had to walk also and they had to carry their rifles as well. Early in the march we passed the Changi Gaol, and there we had our first glimpse of civilian internees. From every barred window women and men waved and shouted to us and gave the "thumbs-up" sign, and we replied in like fashion, with the added accompaniment of many wolf whistles. The Nip guards didn't seem to like this and went to work with their rifle butts. There were, however, comparatively few guards, (where could we go if we did try to escape into a population in which a white man stood out like the proverbial country loo?) and those of the P.O.W. who had to nurse a few bruises reckoned they had been earned in a good cause.

About two miles past the Gaol a Nip truck roared up to the head of our column and a Jap officer told our temporary C.O., Major Jack Parry, to halt the march and assemble all officers at the head of the marching men. This done, Major Parry was told to place the senior Warrant Officer in charge of the march, and all officers were to board the truck. This was the first experience we had of how the Japs used their transport. There were at least sixty officers and we were all crammed aboard a 30-cwt. truck. How we did it I still don't know.

The truck turned and laboured slowly back to the Gaol. Immediately some of the more imaginative among us decided we were being taken back to be punished for allowing our troops to greet the civilians in the way they had. I pondered this possibility but decided that if that was the object we would not have been provided with transport. Arriving at the Gaol we were assembled in a room in a building outside the walls - a room not much bigger than the truck - and were then addressed by a Jap Lieut. Colonel. He spoke good English and told us we were going to Adam Park, an area about 5-6 miles north of Singapore, where our troops would be quartered in houses which were previously the homes of some of the elite of Singapore's prewar European population. Initially the area would not be wired and we officers would be held personally responsible if any troops were found outside the camp boundaries other than on work for the Imperial Japanese Army. The work on which our men would be engaged would be building a road across the Golf Links. Japanese engineers would direct the work but our officers were expected to see that it was properly carried out. We were then packed into the truck again and driven to Adam Park so that allocation of houses could be made to the various working companies prior to arrival of the men that night.

Major Parry decided to make me Camp Adjutant, and so started my active contact with the Japanese - a contact which continued, though in varying degrees, until the end of my P.O.W. days.

Adam Park camp was under the command of Lieutenant Saito, but he was responsible for several other camps also, and we saw little of him. The active command of the camp devolved on Sjt. Sano, who was about 5'2" high and carried a Samurai sword nearly as big as himself. In the next two weeks I was to get to know Sano very well. His 2 i/c was Cpl. Shiosaki, of whom more anon.

As Adjutant I became the contact man between our own C.O. and Sjt. Sano. For the first six days we had no interpreter and my early conversations with Sano must have been as good as a pantomime to an onlooker. Sano's knowledge of English was the same as mine was of Japanese - nil. At first our only means of communication was a common scanty knowledge of Malay, which was supplemented by gestures, a liberal supply of which were sprinkled through all our talks. To say that communication was difficult in those early days was putting it mildly and it says quite a bit for Sano's forbearance that I came through them unscathed. Nevertheless each conversation took a long time before we finally got our messages across. The situation eased as I quite quickly picked up some Japanese words and phrases, and Sano equally quickly, acquired some English. I remember distinctly that his most used expression was "No bloody good".

On 10th April there arrived in Camp a British Corporal officially described as an Interpreter. His knowledge of Japanese was a great deal better than the small amount I had by then acquired, but Sano spoke far too fast for him and his assistance was minimal. In the main I continued bi-lateral conversations with Sano until 1st May, when Padre Andrews, who had lived many years in Japan and was a fluent speaker of Japanese, arrived to replace the British Corporal who returned to Changi. From then on my conversations with Sano were easy, but not nearly so exciting.

My first instruction from Sano was that the C.O., Adjutant, Quarter-Master, and all Company Commanders, were to live in one house, for ease of contact, and that this was to be known as "Captains' House". Our accommodation at Adam Park was much superior to that at Selarang. The degree of overcrowding was much the same, but we had both showers and sewerage, amenities which we greatly appreciated. In addition, electricity was restored on 9th April and from the point of view of services life was almost civilised. At Sano's direction we installed a direct telephone service between "Captains' House" and the Nip guard-house. This further evidence of civilisation was not greatly appreciated by me as it enabled the Nips to call me out at any time of the night, which they did with rare

abandon.

One such occasion occurred on the very night the 'phone was installed, when I received a call from the Jap guard-house at about two in the morning. The camp was still not wired at this stage and despite the risk involved a number of our troops went into Singapore, or into the Chinese villages, each night. Many were picked up by the Japanese and only that day Sano had instructed me to see that all men were warned that henceforth any man found out of bounds would be shot. Accordingly I had asked all Company Commanders to make certain that all men were so informed.

Nevertheless when I arrived at the guard-house Sano had two of our men who had been taken by Jap patrols in Singapore. Then began a pantomime between Sano and me which lasted literally for hours, but which I'll condense to the essentials. Sano started by asking me whether all men had been warned of the penalty for breaking camp. I told him that the Company Commanders had assured me that this was so. He instructed me to ask the two men whether they had been warned. They agreed that they had. Sano then said that in that case they had no excuse and he had no option but to have them shot. The situation looked a bit grim, so I remonstrated with Sano, telling him that if he carried out his threat I would report him to the Australian Government when the war was over and then he would be shot. He laughed at this and said that the war would last 100 years and that neither he nor I would survive to tell the story. I countered by saying to him that his statement that the war would last 100 years was ludicrous, that the Japanese had made the biggest possible blunder in attacking Pearl Harbour, and so bringing America into the war, that the might of the U.S.A., once it recovered from the initial shock of the Japanese treachery would soon prevail and he, Sjt. Sano, would have to answer for his acts against Allied P.O.W. Sano professed to laugh at me, but I could see he was a bit shaken, and finally he said to me "Why did the men go out of camp?" I turned to the two men, who were a bit scared by this time, and said "He wants to know why you went out of camp, and you'd better think up something pretty good, otherwise we are all in a spot."

Quick as a wink came the reply from one, "Tell him we were hungry and we went out looking for bread." This was really laughable, because at Adam Park in those early days we were issued with more rice than we could eat, and in addition we had been permitted to start a canteen in which were sold bread rolls, sweets, etc. However, the finding of a face-saving formula for Sano was essential, so I explained to him that the men said they hadn't been getting enough to eat, and had gone out looking for bread. Without giving him a chance to say anything I went on to suggest to him that it wouldn't look very good if the Japanese Army

executed prisoners-of-war who were not being given enough food by the Japanese and in consequence had broken camp to try to get bread, and that perhaps, in the circumstances, he might be satisfied if I told the men that he was extremely angry with them for disobeying his orders, but that because he was a kind-hearted man he had decided to allow them to go free on this occasion although his heart would turn to stone if there was any repetition of such behaviour.

To my extreme relief he seized the opportunity and agreed. I immediately turned to the men and, raising my voice, told them I was going to roar like Hell at them, that I had no idea what I was going to say, but they must look scared. I then started to yell the first thing that came into my mind, which was the nursery rhyme "Little Boy Blue". As my voice got louder and louder (I had already learned that the Nips were impressed by noise), the two men started to cringe, and put on a really good show. I had finished "Little Boy Blue" and was part way through "Mary, Mary Quite Contrary", my voice now at shouting pitch, when suddenly Sano said, "Captain Staru, stop, stop, you are getting <u>too</u> angry." I stopped, and he went on "You say these men went out of camp to get bread?" I nodded and he barked a command to one of the guards, who disappeared at the run. In a few moments he re-appeared carrying two loaves of bread, which Sano immediately gave to the two P.O.W., instructing me to tell them that if they were hungry in future they must not go out of camp in search of bread but to come to Sjt. Sano who would give it to them! I don't know how the two men felt at the end of this session, but I do know that the Corporal Interpreter and I were both mighty glad it was over.

On another occasion I was called to the Nip guard-house about midnight. I arrived to find one of our men, stripped naked, tied to a verandah post of the guard-house. He had apparently king-hit a Japanese Warrant-Officer while out on one of the working parties and after being properly worked over by the Japanese on the working party he was handed over to our guards. They had built a fire under the car-port, to one of the posts of which our man was tied, and then proceeded to get thoroughly drunk. When I arrived they were dancing, semi-naked themselves, around their prisoner, jabbing him with their bayonets. They hadn't inflicted any serious injury, but he was bleeding from dozens of little jabs and didn't look a very pretty sight. Sano, although not as drunk as his guards, was not by any means sober, and was belligerent and violent. We had a fairly tough time with him, but finally managed to get his prisoner from him and took him to the camp hospital.

Later in the morning I saw Sano who was by then in the throes

of a terrific hangover, and told him it was necessary to send the wounded man to Changi Hospital if he was to live. Actually he wasn't seriously ill, but he had hit the Nip Warrant-Officer pretty hard and I was fearful of what might happen if he stayed at Adam Park. Fortunately Sano was feeling so sorry for himself that I had no trouble with him and we shot our man back to Changi.

There was a rather interesting postscript to this happening when I made my routine call on Sano that evening to report all working parties back in camp. He was by then fairly well recovered from his carousing, but still looked a bit sheepish. He enquired whether I had had my evening meal, and, learning that I had not, ushered me into an inner room. About a dozen Nip guards were sitting around the table eating a meal of good Australian steaks. At a word from Sano they made room for me at the table, each cut a piece of meat from his steak, and a heaped plate, with vegetables added, was placed in front of me. I was never one to look a gift horse in the mouth, and I couldn't see any sense in rejecting what was obviously a peace offering, so I proceeded to put that steak where it would do me most good, to the evident pleasure of Sano and the other guards. That was one occasion when I didn't mind being on the receiving end of a Japanese "offering".

I mentioned earlier one Cpl. Shiosaki who was Sjt. Sano's 2 i/c. He was a nasty little piece of work, cunning and vindictive. One of my own lads from Signals, who had been a Despatch Rider, was wearing a pair of tan leather boots which were a special issue to D.Rs. They were much lighter than the regulation Army boots, and of quite pleasing appearance. One day Shiosaki saw them, took an immediate fancy to them, and determined to acquire them. First he made an offer to buy them, which was refused. Then he wanted to swap them for his own, but this was knocked back even more quickly. He wasn't game to take them by force because other Nips had done this sort of thing previously, and Sano had responded to my complaints by summoning the offender, giving him a good clout over the ear, and making him return the stolen goods. I don't think Sano liked Shiosaki any more than I did, and I fancy Shiosaki was aware of this and had no desire to be on the receiving end of one of Sano's wallops.

He could, however, and with Sano's approval, bash a P.O.W. who transgressed in any way. I was continually at war with Sano over this practice, but never achieved anything. His stand was "We do it to our own troops who disobey, and we'll do it to yours." So Shiosaki started a systematic scheme of bastardry against our poor D.R. Every time Shiosaki saw him he dreamed up some offence and clocked him. I appealed to Sano, but after he questioned Shiosaki he told me our man was a

persistent wrongdoer who was always sneering at the Japanese and he deserved what he got. The poor lad's life became a misery but he wouldn't give up those boots. Finally we solved the problem by declaring him sick, and, inventing "a serious contagious disease", had him sent off to Changi, still wearing his boots.

Up till this time Sano had accepted figures from check-parades held after the evening meal as evidence that all men were in camp, but at 10.30 p.m. on Thursday 16th April the phone at Captains' House rang and Sano instructed me to have all men on the parade ground in 15 minutes. Theoretically everybody was in bed, even if not asleep, as "Lights Out" was at 10 p.m. Thankful for the fact that all Company Commanders slept at Captains' House I roused them all and off they went to summon their men. Gathering 3,000 men together in 15 minutes on no notice was, I found, impossible and it was nearer to a quarter past than a quarter to eleven when all Companies were on parade. By this time Sano was just about running on the spot as he jumped up and down with impatience, and I was doing some pretty fast footwork myself to keep out of his range.

However, at last all O.C.'s. reported and Sano sent his checkers to each Company and to the Hospital. It was pitch dark, and the only light came from torches carried by the Jap guards. I was to thank my lucky stars for this before too long. To my relief (and surprise) the first three Companies reported all O.K., but it couldn't, and didn't, last. No. 4 Company reported five men short, and Sano went into orbit. After some time I managed to convince him that as he was much better at counting than were his guards, who, after all, were only Privates, he and I should check the Company which was supposed to be short as I was sure it wasn't really so. Fortunately, to facilitate counting - and some of the Nips really were clots at checking - we were required to parade in files of five. When we reached No. 4 Company I asked the O.C. if he was sure he was five men short, and he assured me he was. This is when I became thankful for the dark night. I said to the O.C. "As soon as Sano and I get along 5 or 6 files, tell the first file to double quietly down the back to the other end." This manoeuvre was successfully accomplished, and by the time we arrived at the end of the front line, and multiplied the number of files by 5, we had the correct total. I complimented Sano on his ability, he clouted the Jap who had done the first check, and honour was satisfied. The Goddess of Luck smiled further on us in that the other Companies were reported correct, and the five missing men later got safely back to camp without being picked up. As will be seen, my luck ran out on the next occasion on which we had a surprise check.

The Japs made a great fetish of arm bands, and Sano decided that Don Dyer who was acting as Camp Quartermaster, and I, should both have armbands indicating our position in the Camp organisation. Here I struck real trouble for Padre Andrews had not at that time replaced my Cpl. interpreter, and there were no such words as Quartermaster or Adjutant in Sano's English vocabulary. I tried at length to explain and finally, in desperation I said, "Well, Captain Dyer does everything about the Camp in general and I do my work in the office, you know, where the typewriters are." This seemed to convey something to Sano and we were duly supplied with our armbands. It was not until Padre Andrews arrived on Friday 1st May that we learned that Don Dyer was described as "General" and I was "Captain of the Typewriters". The Padre also told us of one of our boys who found a Nip armband at Changi. Knowing the importance the Japs placed on armbands he thought he would see if the one he had found would get him out of the Changi compound and down to the nearby village. To his delight the guards made no attempt to stop him as he walked out, although he was a bit intrigued by the fact that several of them smiled and sniggered. He went down to the village, made some purchases, and returned. Again he passed through the gates unchallenged, but again there were unmistakable signs of amusement on the faces of the guards. He sought out one of our interpreters and asked what was on the armband. On being told he decided he wouldn't use it again - the inscription on the armband proclaimed "Prostitute - I am a clean woman."

The Jap security officer at Adam Park was a three-star Private named Nishioka. He was continually sniffing round the camp, presumably looking for radios, and spent quite some time at Captains' House, where he could watch the activities of the senior officers. He knew a few words of English and continually tried to talk with us. Like all the other Japs he was always telling us of the great successes of the Imperial Japanese Army - Shiosaki told us on 7th April 1942 that Japanese soldiers were in Java, Sumatra, India, Manilla, New Guinea, Australia and Brazil. On one occasion, talking with a group of us, Nishioka said to Stan Roberts, "In Australia, you live where?" Stan replied, "Brisbane". "Oh", said Nishioka, "No good, no good. Japanese war planes Brisbane, bomb, bomb, bomb." Then he turned to Jack Parry, and repeated the question to him, and when Jack said "Melbourne" Nishioka said, "Ah,warui desu, number 100, Japanese war eagles Melbourne, bomb, bomb, bomb." He gave the same sort of comfort to one of our chaps from Sydney, then it was my turn. "Captain Staru", he said, "In Australia, you live where?" "Timbuktu", I replied. "Ah" he said, "Timbuktu! Timbuktu! Warui desu, number 1,000! Japanese planes, bomb, bomb, bomb, - Timbuktu finish! " We were greatly relieved to have this dismal news.

Claude Pickford, a Sydneysider, had a rather good singing voice,

and Nishioka, during one of his perambulations, had heard Claude in action. Nishioka, too, had a reasonable voice and decided Claude must teach him a song in English. Claude selected "Three Blind Mice" and Nishioka proved to be an apt pupil. On Tuesday, 21 April, Lt. Col. Oakes arrived at Adam Park to take over from our then C.O., Lt. Col. Ramsay. We were in the middle of a handover conference at Captains' House when the phone from the Nip guard-house rang. I answered, and a voice which I recognised as that of Nishioka said "Captain Staru?" I said, "I am Stahl", to which Nishioka replied, "Sing Three Blind Mice". I didn't really fancy performing that item for the benefit not only of Nishioka but also the Officers assembled in conference at my end of the line. So I tried to get across to him that he was a much better singer than I and it would be nicer if he obliged, which he did with gusto. Like all Japanese who hadn't been taught English, Nishioka could not conclude a word with a consonant other than "n" and his "ls" came out as "rs". His rendition of Three Blind Mice was:

Three Brind-oo Mice-oo, Three Brind-oo Mice-oo,
See how they run, see how they run,
They awr-oo ran after-oo the farmers-oo wife-oo,
Who cut-oo off-oo their-oo tayroo-soo with-oo a carving-oo knife-oo
Did-oo you ever-oo see such-oo a thing-oo in your-oo rife-oo,
As-oo Three Brind-oo Mice-oo.

All this time, of course, work on the construction of the road was proceeding. The work parties went out to the road site each morning and returned to camp in the evening. They were supervised on the job by Jap engineers and a group of guards other than those allotted to guard the camp. It was an accepted part of P.O.W. life that one never did any more for the Nips than was essential to escape a beating. There were many adventurous spirits among the P.O.W. and they spent a good deal of each day ranging the area in the vicinity of the Golf Links where the road was being built. They were searching for anything which might be turned into cash through sales to the local Chinese, who were already desperately short of many commodities. The country around the golf course had been the scene of heavy fighting and the remains of some hundreds of bodies were found. There was one instance where the dying soldier had scratched his identity on an empty tin. A proper burial was arranged in every case.

Not all the finds were gruesome, and one group of lads from Sigs. located a dump of petrol in 44 gallon drums. Here was a heaven-sent opportunity, for the local Chinese had the greatest difficulty in obtaining any petrol from the Japs and would gladly pay 5 or 6 local dollars - about 15/- to 18/- in Australian equivalent at that time - for a gallon of petrol. The dump was about half a mile from our Adam Park camp, and transport was a difficulty, for obviously the disposal of the petrol had to be done without

the knowledge of the Japs. The motto of Signals during the Malayan Campaign had been "The difficult can be done at once, the impossible may take a little longer" and the boys of Signals as P.O.W. became even more resourceful than they had been in action, of which Lieut.-General Percival, who commanded all British Forces in Malaya said "The tasks they were allotted were far in excess of what a Divisional Signals Unit is designed to undertake. They demanded great skill, untiring effort, and initiative of the highest order. Fortunately the Unit was richly equipped with these essentials, and right well did it live up to its motto."

It is not surprising, therefore, that before long this particular group had located a Jap Engineers' supply dump from which, although it was always under guard, they soon "borrowed" sufficient half-inch water pipe to construct a pipe-line to the outskirts of Adam Park camp. Then working at night, which of course they had had to do to "acquire" the water pipes, they siphoned the petrol into four gallon cans, also "borrowed" from the Japs, and carried out a highly lucrative business of petrol selling in the nearby villages.

The success of this operation appealed to another Sig., Bob Hughes, a burly West-Australian who was driving a steam-roller on the road-making job, and he dreamed up a plan to enable him to be in the racket too. It must be remembered that a large proportion of Japanese privates were simple, poorly educated men whose main ability was to carry out blindly orders received from their superiors. In the main, they lacked completely any technical knowledge. Bob's plan depended for its success entirely upon the fact that his "overseer", the Nip responsible for Bob's work with the steam-roller, was just such a man - a one-star private. On the morning that he started his plan, Bob, instead of commencing work, just sat in his steam-roller. As he anticipated, it wasn't long before his overseer came rushing up yelling, "Workoo, workoo." Bob got down from his machine and with great pantomime said, "Petrol finish." After a while he got the message through and the Jap said, "How much?" Bob drew on all his reserves of the Japanese language and said "Ichi day, ni cans." The Nip shot off and in no time was back with 2 four-gallon cans of petrol. Bob Hughes thereupon obligingly started his steam-roller, and that night disposed of the petrol to the ever-willing Chinese in a nearby village. Each day from then on until 18th May when the guards were changed, Bob received his ration of eight gallons of petrol, and each night he passed it on, for a satisfactory consideration, to his Chinese friends.

On 28th April Sano told me there would be no work the next day as it was the birthday of the Emperor of Japan. He said that, to mark the occasion, a concert was to be arranged for the evening, with items by our men and which he and his guards would attend. We gave the job of organising the

concert to Claude Pickford (Nishioka's singing teacher) and in the short time available he got together quite an entertaining programme from singers, storytellers and musicians, with full-throated community singing thrown in. The troops sat on the side of a largish hill and the performers used a row of tables set up at the foot of the slope. A good time was had by all, including the Japanese guards, but they might not have been so amused had they understood English, for many of the jokes were at their expense. At the conclusion of the concert Sano presented each artist with a toothbrush and the compliments of his Imperial Japanese Majesty. He then invited himself, Nishioka and Shiosaki to Captains' House for a cup of cha. Nishioka stayed all night, still on the lookout, I guessed, for a secret radio.

Two days later Padre Andrews arrived to take over as Interpreter, and most of the fun went out of my conversations with Sano. Hitherto they had been laborious, often very wearing and always lengthy, but they had invariably been amusing, and often hilarious, as we struggled to make ourselves understood. The Padre started a class in Japanese and I acquired a small but useful, vocabulary of the words most used in P.O.W. camps. I found Japanese to be an expressive sounding language and I hated the sound of "Kura", a word they used in anger when we didn't do exactly as they wished, and that was the rule rather than the exception. At the other end of the scale I found Sayonara (Goodbye) a very pleasant-sounding word.

On 4 May Nishioka was prowling round Captains' House again, and after poking about for quite a while he came to me and presented me with a pack of playing cards. Although he would not have known it, that pack of cards was one of the most useful acquisitions of the whole of my P.O.W. days. They were used continually over a period of 3 years and more, and by the time we were released the spots had almost disappeared. I wondered whether the gift had any significance, and my conjecture was answered two days later when Nishioka told me he was being transferred to other work and he would be replaced by Mr. Ogaichi.

Life was more or less routine for the next few days, but it couldn't last. On Monday 11 May, almost all our guards went off to attend a Conference. I spell it with a capital "C" because that was the impression I got from Sano when he told me (through Padre Andrews) what was doing. It was almost a Gilbertian situation. There were only four guards left in camp, and had we been so inclined we could all have walked out without let or hindrance. But where would we go? Sano returned late in the afternoon and sent for me immediately. I think he must have had a dressing down for he straightaway got stuck into me (through Padre) about the numbers of our sick men. It was always a matter of policy that we did nothing more for the Nips than was necessary to preserve a reasonably peaceful situation, and

we did all we could to limit the number of men available for work. One way to do this was to hospitalise men for slight ailments. On this occasion the burden of Sano's complaint was that after only six weeks in this camp we had 500 men in hospital. (The "Hospital" consisted of a number of houses set aside for the purpose. There were, of course, no beds, and the men merely lay on the floors. They did, however, have the benefit of attention from our own medical officers. The S.M.O. was Major Hugh Rayson, a delightful man with a whimsical sense of humour, who hailed from South West Rocks on the north coast of New South Wales.)

Unfortunately, because of Padre Andrews' complete fluency, Sano was able to make himself only too clear so far as I was concerned. I could see some advantages in not having an Interpreter. When I didn't have one I could at least tell Sano what I thought about him and get away with it, but now I couldn't get the same satisfaction. The conversation went like this:

SANO: "Buggeroo, Buggeroo, no bloody good, 500 men sick no good."
STAHL: "There aren't 500 men sick, there are only 478."
SANO: "Don't split straws - 500 is the same as 478."
STAHL: "No it isn't - 500 grammes of rice is a lot more than 478."
SANO: "We're not talking about rice, we're talking about sick men."
STAHL: "There are only 478."
SANO: "You can't possibly have that many men sick in such a short time."
STAHL: "They're sick all right, or they wouldn't be in hospital."
SANO: "I'm not satisfied that they are all sick - I want to see them and decide for myself."
STAHL: "Don't be silly, how can you tell whether or not a man is sick?"
SANO: "Don't you be silly - my brother-in-law in Tokyo is studying to be a doctor and I'm well qualified to say whether a man is sick or not. All men in hospital will parade at the guard-house at 9 o'clock tomorrow morning and I'll inspect them."

No amount of argument from me moved him one whit from his stand, and finally I had to accept his order.

Naturally some of the men in hospital were really sick - we had two deaths in the next two days - and it was quite impossible for some of them to turn out on parade. In consequence it was quite obvious at 9 o'clock the next morning that there were nowhere near 478 on parade. Sano was dressed to look the part. He had on his best uniform, shining black Jack-boots, what seemed to be a new cap, and his great Samurai sword was slung at his side. He took me up to the roof of the portico of the guard-house and from there he surveyed the scene below, where the sick men had now been fallen in. It didn't need a magician to see that there were far short of 478 men lined up. Sano started to go to town in a big way, and on this occasion I didn't have

Padre Andrews to help me, he being with the parade down below. Sano did a little war dance and, pointing to the parade, said in a voice of derision "478 men, nai, nai." In a voice which I tried to make sound as confident as his was sarcastic I said, "478 men, yes, yes." "Nai, nai," screamed Sano; "Yes, yes," yelled Stahl. At that moment Capt. Stan Roberts of Toowoomba, who had been checking numbers, called up to me through cupped hands, "Fourteen score and nine." I turned to Sano and said, "There you are, Captain Roberts he say 478 men." Sano glared at me, and I stared back at him. There was a silence which lasted for I don't know how long. Ten seconds? Twenty? A minute? I just don't know, but it seemed like Eternity, for I suddenly knew that if my eyes wavered I'd had it, but if I could stare him out I was home. (I learned a lesson from this which stood me in great stead on some later occasions.) Suddenly Sano's eyes dropped and he said, "O.K., O.K., 478 men", and he turned and stumped down the stairs, his sword clanging as it hit each of the treads in turn.

Sano had an armchair placed on the grass in front of the portico and in this he sat himself with arms akimbo and instructed that the men file past him. I stood behind the chair, with Hugh Rayson at my right and Padre Andrews on my left. At first the whole thing looked extremely comical, but I soon realised that there was nothing funny about it. Sano's method of deciding whether a man was sick or not was simple but direct. If a man had an arm in a sling, or walked with a stick, or had any part of his person bandaged, or if there was some visible sign of affliction Sano would say, "Very sick man, back to hospital", but if an individual only had Malaria, or Dysentery, or Beri-Beri, or Dengue Fever, or Bronchitis, or any other illness not immediately obvious, Sano would say, "No sick, no sick, work tomorrow." As he went on dividing the men into these two categories Major Rayson became more and more agitated, and showed all the signs of approaching apoplexy. "Fred", he said, "if these men go out to work tomorrow, many of them will die. Can't you get this ruddy great ape to understand that?" Obviously I had to try, so when all men were through I tackled Sano, with the help of Padre Andrews. I told him what Major Rayson had said would happen to some of the men if they were sent out to work. Sano told me that he and not Major Rayson would decide who went out to work, and who didn't. I came back at him with the statement that Colonel Oakes would certainly not agree to the men going to work when I informed him what Major Rayson had said, but Sano countered this by repeating that he, and not Colonel Oakes, would decide who went to work. I then said that that being so, the decision would be his alone, and responsibility for any deaths would be his alone. He said that was O.K. because his decision would be approved by the Imperial Japanese Army. I told him the I.J.A. wouldn't be able to do anything for him when the war was over and Japan was defeated, as it inevitably would be. Then followed another lengthy argument about the

war going on for 100 years, etc. from Sano, and my retort that the Japs had already made their fatal mistake in bringing in America. I repeated what I had told him on the occasion when he had apprehended our two men who "went out looking for bread". Having the benefit of Padre Andrews as Interpreter proved, I am sure, to be a big advantage in this argument, for I knew the import of what I was saying would be fully understood by Sano.

The argument raged back and forth for quite a while but suddenly, to my relief, Sano said "O.K., O.K. I won't make them go out to work, but from now on nobody who is sick will be allowed to buy anything from the Canteen, and to make sure they don't I'll put a book in the Canteen, and everyone buying must sign the book. And Major Rayson, you will come to the guard-house each night, examine the book, and tell me whether or not any of the names in the book are those of men sick in camp that day." And that's just what he did. The book was put in the Canteen, and everyone making a purchase had to sign. That night Sano sent for Hugh Rayson, showed him the book and said, "Now Major Rayson, are any of the names in the book those of men sick in camp today?" Hugh examined the book carefully and was honestly able to certify that none of the names in the book were those of men sick in camp, and how he kept a straight face I still do not know, for the first name was Ned Kelly, the second Little Boy Blue, the next Georgie Porgy. Billy Hughes, Jack the Ripper and Guy Fawkes also made purchases that day, as did Bony Parts, Plew Toe and Tess Tickle! Every night from then until the camp closed Hugh Rayson was similarly able to certify, quite honestly, that none of the names in the book were those of men sick in camp. The book was carefully preserved for some time but was unfortunately lost a year later when the medico caring for it lost all his belongings on the Burma railway. It's a pity, for it was a priceless relic.

On 14 May Sano surprised me by saying that he and his men were about to be transferred and that we would soon have new guards. Then he really flattened me by asking if I would give him a reference. I thought he must be joking, and said as much to Padre Andrews, but he assured me that Sano was quite serious. Sano's request caused me a deal of soul-searching for how does an officer in the A.I.F. give a reference to an enemy soldier? After a great deal of thought I came up with what I hoped would be an appropriate answer. I wrote:

Prisoner of War Camp,
Adam Park, Singapore.
16 May, 1942.

To the Officer Commanding
Sergeant Sano,
Imperial Japanese Army.

This is to certify that Sergeant Sano has been in charge of Adam Park Prisoner of War Camp since 4 April 1942.

During that time he has done everything that I would expect a Sergeant in the Imperial Japanese Army to do.

I can only hope that in due course he will receive his just desserts.

(Sgd.) F.E. Stahl, Capt.
Adjutant,
Adam Park, P.O.W. Camp.

I hoped that Sano would not be able to read between the lines, but I was not prepared for his reaction when the Padre translated for him. A broad smile spread over his face and he shook my hand until I thought it would fall off. Then, horror of horrors, he told me I was to go to Changi with him the next day and present the reference to his Commanding Officer! I fervently hoped that his C.O. didn't have too good a command of English.

Sure enough Sano sent for me the next morning, 17 May, and sat me in the back of a utility for the trip to Changi. At the Gaol, after a wait of some time, we were shown into an office in which sat a Jap Lieut.-Colonel. Sano conducted a conversation with him in Japanese, and then indicated to me that I should present the reference to the Colonel. This I did, and watched the Jap officer with some little trepidation. Presumably he could read English, for he had no interpreter present. I saw his eyes follow the lines, and his mouth twitched a little at the corners. I gave a silent sigh of relief, and the officer spoke to Sano. At no time did he speak to me. I don't know what he said to Sano, but it must have pleased him because he took me to the local village and bought me a cup of coffee. Then he sat me in the cabin of the ute for the trip back to Adam Park.

The next day the changeover of Jap guards took place, with a Lieut. Ishikawa in overall command, and a Cpl. Zaimon in charge of Adam Park.

Sano, Nishioka, Ogaichi and Shiosaki took their farewells, and I couldn't escape the feeling that they would much rather be staying. From conversations overheard by Padre Andrews it seemed our old guards were joining a force intended for an attack on New Guinea. We conveyed this information to our own H.Q. at Changi, and I was told that an attempt was made to transmit a message by radio to Australia, but I have never been able to ascertain whether it was, in fact, received. I sometimes wonder whether Sano survived the war, but in view of the experiences of the Japanese in New Guinea I guess the odds are that he didn't.

With the departure of our original guards a hiatus seemed to develop in the Japanese administration. Cpl. Zaimon had only half-a-dozen troops in his guard, compared with between 30 and 40 under Sano's command, and for a number of days our men did not go out to work because there were no guards to supervise them. The bush telegraph informed us that the situation was the same in other working camps in the area, and that there were very few Japs even in Singapore itself. Quite a few of the more venturesome of the P.O.W. took advantage of this situation to sample what was left of the delights of Singapore and soon there were hundreds of them roaming the city, selling their personal belongings on the black-market and using the proceeds each according to his own taste. It was said that Lavender Street was always crowded in those days.

But suddenly the honeymoon was over. At 2.30 p.m. on Monday, 25 May, Japanese guards swarmed into Adam Park and an immediate muster parade was called. These Nip soldiers wasted no time and any P.O.W. who didn't move at the double was helped along with the point of a bayonet or a swing from the butt end of a rifle. The Japanese officer who called the parade was a Colonel of the Kempetai - the secret police - and in order to avoid contamination by the P.O.W. he stood on the far side of a 12 foot wide stormwater drain which bounded the parade ground, and talked with me across the drain. He spoke good English. When the number on parade was ascertained I was presented with a man-size problem, for we were 86 men short. I'd bluffed my way out of small discrepancies on several occasions - the night parade on 16 April was a good example - but a shortage of 86 was a different kettle of fish. I reported the parade state to our own C.O., Lt. Col. Oakes, a whimsical and gentle type of man with whom I had, and still have, quite a strong bond of friendship. "Eighty six short, eh Fred," he said, "What do we do now?" He paused, and continued, "Can you bluff this one through?" I felt bound to tell him that I didn't think I could, and suggested that, in all the circumstances, we should come clean. He agreed, so I went to the bank of the drain and spoke across to the Nip Colonel, saying I was sorry, but we were 86 men short. "Ah so," said the Colonel, sucking air in between his teeth, "What camp is this?" "Adam Park" I answered. "Adam Park"

he repeated and took a large sheet of paper out of his breast pocket. "Ah so" he said again. "We have 86 of your men in gaol in Singapore." Once again I thanked my guardian angel as I contemplated what could have happened to me had I reported all men present.

The Jap Colonel then told me that he wished to address the men through me. He would speak to me, and I was to pass the message to those on parade. He said the Imperial Japanese Army was very angry and disappointed with the behaviour of the Prisoners of War. Despite the fact that no Japanese soldier would ever surrender but would die first, the gracious I.J.A. had spared the lives of Australian and British P.O.W. At great trouble to themselves the Japanese had provided the P.O.W. with accommodation and food, and all they asked in return was that the P.O.W. should do the work required of them by the Japanese and observe the regulations laid down by the I.J.A.. And what did the P.O.W. do in return? They did as little work as they could and what they did they did badly, they made insulting remarks and gestures to Japanese soldiers, and they broke out of camp when there was a temporary shortage of Japanese guards. We must remember that as Prisoners of War we had no standing and no rights of any kind and we must obey implicitly all orders received from Japanese soldiers. In future those who did not do so would be severely punished, as the 86 men from our Camp who had been captured that morning and the previous night certainly would be. Work would recommence tomorrow and everyone must work much harder. Having completed his diatribe the Colonel gravely saluted me and departed.

Seventeen of our missing men were returned the next day, and the balance on the Wednesday. All 86 were confined in a tennis court, without any shelter of any kind, and given one meal a day. They were kept there for a week, and then released. Work did not recommence on the Tuesday, as the Kempetai Colonel had said it would, and working parties were turned back by the Guards again on the Wednesday. On the Thursday, however, work resumed and camp life returned to normal.

On Saturday 30 May instructions arrived from Changi that I was to return there to assist my own C.O. in writing up our Unit history. Capt. Norm. Peach of 2/30 Bn. was appointed Camp Adjutant in my place, and I handed over to him on the Sunday. My return to Changi was delayed however, for I woke the next morning feeling feverish and unwell and rapidly got worse during the day. By nightfall I was semi-delirious and I spent the night adding up, in my mind, endless columns of figures. It was a horrible night and I felt dreadful the next morning. I was admitted to Hospital, where Dengue Fever was diagnosed. I was discharged on Friday 5 June with 5 days no duty. After a slight reaction on the Saturday I improved rapidly on the Sunday and spent the Monday compiling a history of

Adam Park camp with Roly Oakes. On Wednesday 10 June I was returned to Changi and my first active association with the Nips came to an end.

At the time we thought that Adam Park had been a pretty tough experience, but in the light of later events I realised that we had had a comparative picnic there. It's true that we suffered beatings from our guards, it's true that one of our men was painfully pricked in numerous places on his body after "clocking" a Nip, and it's true that 86 of our men found life hard to endure for a week after they walked out of camp, but the truth is that Sano and his men were fighting troops who had some admiration for the fighting qualities of Australian troops and our real misery didn't commence until the third-line (non-fighting) Japs and the Koreans took over as guards. But more of this later.

CHAPTER III

SELARANG AND THE BARRACK SQUARE

10 June 1942 to 17 April 1943

The atmosphere at Selarang was much different from that at the working camp at Adam Park. For the men in Adam Park there was an ordered programme - march out to work in the morning, spend the day doing as little work as possible, march back to camp in the evening. Then followed the evening meal and check parade, and free time until "Lights Out". One day was little different from the one before, and the one to follow. Contact with Jap soldiers was continuous.

At Selarang the Japs were seldom seen except by "Trailer parties" who went out of camp for rations, firewood or salt-water when they were, of course, escorted by Nip guards. There was a guard-house at the entrance

to the camp, which by this time was completely wired, but inside the perimeter we saw little of the Japanese. At that stage they didn't even appear on our check parades. The daily routine for the men at Selarang consisted of a work parade after breakfast, at which they were allotted duties for the day - trailer parties, repairs to houses, the roofs of many of which were still badly holed, cook-house fatigues, sanitation duties, and garden work. The gardens were by now starting to contribute to our ration supply, the main vegetables grown being Kang Kong, Sweet Potato, Bayam and Tapioca root. Kang Kong is an edible plant of the Convolvulous variety, Bayam a plant which resembled the leafy portion of our pumpkin plant, except that the stalks were solid, and the tubers of the Tapioca plant, which grew to quite large proportions resembled, when properly cooked, a rather floury potato. The leaves of the Tapioca, although poisonous, could be eaten provided they were boiled for not less than 5 minutes. Two years later, when I returned from the Burma railway, Amaranthus had been added to the list, and boiled Amaranthus leaves often formed part of the ration.

But back to the daily routine at Selarang. The duties having been allotted at the morning parade, the work parties made off. With the exception of skilled workers - carpenters, engineers, and other tradesmen, who were occupied in restoring buildings and services - it was possible to rotate the men among the various tasks. At the end of the day, after the evening meal, there was a check parade following which the men were usually free until "Lights Out".

By this time, mid-June 1942, even the optimists (including me) were beginning to realise - despite the continuous flow of rumours - that there was to be no early end to our captivity. Ben Barnett and I were discussing this aspect one day with our old C.O., Colonel Thyer, who repeated his opinion, that the war would last for a long time, that we, as P.O.W., were in for many hardships, and that only the fit would survive. I pondered over this for some days, wondering what the future held. Thinking about my immediate family - my wife and young son, then aged 21 months - I came to the conclusion that no good purpose could be served in worrying about their future. Financially they were secure - the allotment I had made from my pay ensured that - and I knew they were well and comfortably housed in a loving family atmosphere, my wife having returned to live for the duration of the war with her parents, for whom I had much affection. Having come to this conclusion this left only me, and I determined that all my efforts must be directed to surviving whatever lay ahead. I reasoned that I was powerless to order the events that would befall me - my future, for the present at any rate, would be determined by the Japanese - and I decided that the best plan was to live from day to day, leaving behind me what had happened the day before, and not worrying about

what might happen on the morrow. I believe that I maintained this attitude throughout my period as a P.O.W. and I'm convinced that it enabled me to survive with a minimum of permanent disability either of body or mind. Others were not so fortunate. I know of many who, probably after the same searching thinking as I had done, decided they would not survive. They gave up the ghost, and before long they were dead, and from no obvious cause.

Conditions in Selarang area of Changi compound in those days could not be described as other than reasonable. Sport was permitted on a modified basis - hockey matches for example, were played in two halves of 10 minutes each way - sea bathing was permitted on two occasions each week (our periods were Tuesday morning and Friday afternoons), and on 24th June the A.I.F. Concert Party presented a first-class Revue. The first presentations by this Concert Party were given from a stage erected near the Selarang Barrack Square, and right from the start they were a resounding success. The ingenuity displayed in the making of props. and costumes was quite amazing, especially in those days when we had very little in the way of possessions apart from what we stood up in. The scenery and the dressing had to be seen to be believed, and I still remember with much gratitude the wonderful entertainment the Concert Party provided, not only in those early days in the face of many difficulties, but later in Changi Gaol after I returned from the Burma railway, by which time the performances were of professional standard and the scenery and effects nothing short of miraculous.

It was about this time that the Japanese decided to appear on our evening check parades. I was still acting as O.C. No. 1 Company, and shortly after the Nips started their check I was again in bother over numbers. The practice on these check parades was for me to fall in on the extreme right of the company, in the front rank of No. 1 file. I would number as "one" and then fall out to check numbers with the Jap soldier. In our case the Jap was a Warrant Officer, and on this particular occasion I numbered "One" as usual, then followed him down the line as numbering continued. Unfortunately when numbers were checked we were one man short. I didn't have a clue where he might be - possibly a man sick in lines at the last minute, but where were we to find him among the many houses in which the company was quartered? I decided to try and bluff it out once more and I put a look of great concentration on my face. Then suddenly I let the light break through (or that's what I hoped the Jap would think) and I smiled. I pointed to myself and said "Me - one man." "Ah so" said the Jap, "You - one man," and he went off satisfied - or so I hoped. But thereafter, whilst that same Warrant Officer was doing the check, I did not fall in at the end of the parade and was not included in the number on parade. And every night we then went through the same ritual.

The Jap would say, "One man short." I would frown prodigiously then let the light break through and point to myself and say "Me - one man." Then the Nip would roar with laughter and go off happy. But I was never quite sure that he wasn't laughing at me for thinking I put it over him the first time.

Our diet, though still ample in quantity at this time, was deficient in vitamins, and physical signs of this were now beginning to appear among the troops. A form of neuritic Beri-beri became common, being characterised by pains in the feet. This complaint was quickly dubbed "Happy feet" though those who suffered from it usually felt far from happy. In addition the oedematous type of Beri-Beri, Pellagra, Stomatitis and scrotal dermatitis became prevalent. The latter was a particularly painful condition as I personally discovered. In order to minimise the effects of the vitamin deficiency as far as possible we started the manufacture of yeast, using the skins of potatoes, bananas, pineapples, etc. There was a daily "yeast parade" when a small quantity of the fermented liquid was issued to each man. Severe cases of avitaminosis were treated with "Vegemite" or "Marmite" from our small but precious store of these foods, or, when available, with rice polishings made into a very unpalatable form of uncooked porridge.

On 19 June 1942 everybody was issued by the I.J.A. with a postcard on which a message not exceeding 24 words could be written. One of our lads took the opportunity to say "Dear Mum, guess who's a Prisoner of War." Most of us spent a lot of thought in endeavouring to get as much information as possible into the 24 words. Unfortunately, as the cards were not delivered in Australia until 18 months later they did little to allay anxiety at home. We were allowed a total of three of these cards in the 3½ years we were P.O.W.

Whilst I was at Adam Park, a large working party known as "A" Force had departed from Changi on 14 May for an unknown destination, and 160 of our Signals personnel had been included. Early in July, orders were issued by the Japs requiring the formation of another working party for overseas - this time to Borneo. Known as "B" Force this party included 10 officers and 35 men from Signals. As I could have no knowledge as to what conditions the members of the party might experience I decided to draw lots for those to go from my Company. This resulted in two events I shall never forget. The first concerned Bob Hughes, he of the "petrol for my steamroller" incident at Adam Park and who had subsequently been returned to Changi. Bob was among those who had been drawn to go to Borneo. He came to see me the night the composition of our party for "B" Force was announced and told me that he was determined not to go to Borneo and that unless I took him off the force he would "go through the wire". I explained to Bob the manner in which the composition of our

party had been decided, and why I had done it that way. I also strongly advised against any attempt at escape, pointing out that in an Asian country a white man would stand out like the proverbial country "loo". After a long discussion Bob decided that he would abide by orders. In the event, when the party reached Borneo the officers were separated from other ranks, and the other ranks, after work on constructing an aerodrome, were subjected to the "Sandakan Death March" from which only six survived. Bob Hughes was not one of the six.

I was also approached by "Bluey" Turner, one of our Despatch Riders. He had not been included in the Borneo Party, but a very close friend had. "Bluey's" request was that I should allow him to join the party so that he and his friend would not be separated. I explained to "Bluey", as I had to Bob Hughes, the method of selection, and why I was not prepared to alter it. "Blue" let fly with some very salty and unmilitary language which I chose in the circumstances to ignore, and there, for the time, the matter rested. Years after the war ended I met up with "Bluey" again. By then the fate of the members of "B" Force was well-known, and "Bluey" expressed his grateful thanks that I had refused his request.

How does one measure the rights and wrongs of decisions of this nature? I could have switched "Blue" Turner and Bob Hughes, and both would have been happy - for the time being. I could have refrained from talking Bob out of his escape plan, but had he done so the probability is that he would have been caught and executed in any case. I've debated this question with myself over and over again and the only real conclusion I have reached is that, in wartime, whether in action or as a P.O.W., an officer is charged with responsibility for making decisions which must inevitably affect the welfare of his men, that the consequences of those decisions will not always be what he would wish, but he must live with them nevertheless.

"B" Force left on 8th July 1942, and, as always happened after the departure of a working party, the number of houses allotted for our accommodation was reduced, and we all had to move quarters. We did this on 9th July, and again in mid-August following the departure of "Japan" Force. First notification of this force was received on 16th July and the composition of the party was rather special. In it were to be included all officers of the rank of Colonel and above. In addition, as portion "B" of Japan party, there was to be a small number of Junior officers and other ranks. Signals contribution to this portion was ordered to be one officer and ten men. It will be seen that our Unit was now quite fragmented. Over one thousand all ranks had marched in as P.O.W. but 205 had already gone overseas and nearly 500 were in working

parties near Singapore City. The departure of the senior officers resulted in a considerable readjustment of command within the Australian P.O.W. organisation. Hitherto our Commander had been Maj.-General Callaghan, but now the command devolved upon Lt. Col. F.G. Galleghan. Better known as "Black Jack" he had commanded the 2/30 Battalion during the Malayan campaign and was at the time Japan Force was being formed O.C. of a working party at Thompson Road, Singapore. He was a great soldier, a stickler for discipline and a courageous leader. At Thompson Road camp he inspected the Japanese guard every day, and woe betide any Nip who was improperly dressed. He was immediately sent off parade by B.J. to correct the shortcoming! From our unit we temporarily lost our 2 i/c, Major Bridgland, who, an engineer in civil life, was seconded to A.I.F. Headquarters to take charge of engineering services within the camp. I shall have more to say later concerning his outstanding achievements. The Japan party left on Sunday, 16th August 1942, and simultaneously there was an important change in the Japanese P.O.W. command, Gen. Fukuye taking over. He celebrated by having a "gloat" parade, followed by an address to all P.O.W. which left us in no doubt that of all human life we P.O.W. were most certainly the lowest order. We were to hear more from General Fukuye before long.

In the interim between first advice of the formation of Japan party and its departure, there marched into camp 28 officers and 93 other ranks from Sumatra. The party included Lieut.-Comdr. Clarke (R.N.) and from him I had news of my cousin Husen ("Bill") Christmas. Bill was a Lieutenant in the R.A.N.V.R. and had command of ML311, a patrol vessel of the "Fairmile" class. I was unaware that Bill was in Singapore waters, but on 13th February 1942 whilst I was on duty at the Divisional Signal Office at Tanglin Barracks a personal call came through for me. To my surprise it was Bill Christmas who said he had been trying all over Singapore Island to locate me. He told me that he had been ordered back to Australia, leaving that night and there was a place on his ship for me. He urged me to join him because, he said, "Singapore has had it, the last ships leave tonight and if you don't come you're finished." I thanked him for the offer but made it clear it was quite impossible for me to accept, firstly because I had a Signal Office to operate, and secondly because I was responsible for the welfare of the men under my command. Bill said "You're a bloody fool - you'll never get out alive." We said our goodbyes and I'd heard no more of him until, on 20th July the party from Sumatra arrived. Comdr. Clarke told me that Bill was missing, presumed dead. It was not until long after the war was over that I heard what had happened. ML311 had left Singapore on the night of 13th February, as ordered, but as dawn broke in Banka Straits on 14th February the ship was seen to be in the midst of a Japanese task force. A short and very unequal battle ensued, ending when ML311 suffered a direct hit and was blown to pieces - her commander with her.

Early in August a Red Cross exchange ship carrying repatriated Japanese diplomats and other civilians passed through Singapore from Portugese East Africa en route to Japan, and from it were unloaded supplies of food and clothing from the Red Cross. By this time the food supplied by the Japanese though still reasonable in amount, was very uninteresting and unvarying in content, and we certainly appreciated the bully beef, guava jam and sweets from the Red Cross supplies. It was decided to husband the new supplies so that they would last as long as possible and the opportunity was also taken to build up a small reserve supply of rice. After six months as P.O.W. those who had been smokers were finding it increasingly difficult to satisfy their craving. Bibles were in great demand because the rice paper on which they were printed made a good substitute for cigarette paper. Though the Padres protested and made dire forecasts about those who converted the Bibles into "burnt offerings" the practice in no way abated and literally thousands of Bibles went up in smoke. Substitutes for tobacco also became necessary, for although small supplies of Java tobacco could be obtained through the black market the price rose higher and higher and many of the men were forced to improvise. Some even smoked bark, whilst quite a few manufactured their own "tobacco" from papaya leaves and gula malacca, which resembles a very coarse honey. The mixture of leaves and gula malacca was compressed into a block which, when dry, was shredded and rolled into Bible leaves to form cigarettes. Imagine the pleasure of these devotees when an issue of real cigarettes was made from the Red Cross supplies! Non-smokers like myself traded our cigarette issue for bar chocolate, which was also included in the Red Cross supplies, to the mutual satisfaction of both smoker and non-smoker.

It will be remembered that when Bob Hughes had been ballotted into "B" Force I had strongly counselled him against attempting to escape. This was in the knowledge that there had been several such attempts but also in the knowledge that in every case the escapees had soon been re-captured and, according to the Japanese, executed. Shortly after General Fukuye assumed command of all P.O.W. on Singapore Island four escapees, who had succeeded in getting to one of the islands offshore from Singapore were there recaptured and, sick and exhausted, were admitted to the P.O.W. Hospital. General Fukuye sent for Lt. Col. E.B. Holmes, the British Officer commanding all allied P.O.W. at Changi and, after expressing his dissatisfaction with the attempts of P.O.W. to escape, placed before Col. Holmes a "No Escape" declaration which he not only asked Col. Holmes to sign, but requested him to get all other prisoners to sign. The actual declaration was "I, the undersigned, solemnly swear, on my honour, that I will not, under any circumstances, attempt escape." As one would expect Col. Holmes very properly declined the invitation. The reaction of General Fukuye was immediate and positive. "If the prisoners do not sign the

declaration" he said "it will be necessary for me to order their concentration for the purpose of taking appropriate measures." All P.O.W. were then given the opportunity to sign the "No Escape" declaration, but, to their credit, every individual refused. Col. Holmes then issued a warning order that a concentration was to be expected on the following day.

During the evening of Tuesday, 1st September 1942, advice was received from Jap H.Q. that all personnel in the Changi Camp would probably be required to concentrate in the Selarang Barrack Square the next day. Immediately planning commenced at A.I.F. H.Q. for the move of all Australians, in accordance with orders received from Col. Holmes at Camp H.Q. These plans were completed by first light on Wednesday 2nd September, and runners were sent to all Units with details of the area allocated to each Unit and orders to prepare for the move. Shortly afterwards Jap guards removed the four escapees from the camp hospital and took them to a nearby beach. Here, in the presence of Col. Holmes, "Black-Jack" Galleghan, their own commanding officers and the senior Australian medical officer they were executed by renegade Indian soldiers who had deserted to the Japanese. As only one Indian was allotted to each P.O.W. their deaths were not all, by any means, instantaneous. General Fukuye then issued the order for all P.O.W. to be concentrated in the Barrack Square by 1900 hours that night.

The Selarang Barracks area into which all the P.O.W. were to be concentrated measured about 250 yards by 150 yards. On each of two sides were two barrack buildings each intended to accommodate one company of men - about 150 - and at one end there was a stores building. The other end, which was grassed, fronted on to a road which circumscribed the whole area. Encompassed by the buildings and the grassed eastern area was the sacred Barrack Square. In peace time the Barrack Square was strictly reserved for troops on parade. Woe betide the soldier who set foot on it, at any other time. To get from one side to the other he must go around it - not across it.

Into this 250 x 150 yard area there were to be herded 15,800 P.O.W. At that time there was only one water point, and no latrines. As soon as it became fairly obvious that all the P.O.W. were to be concentrated there the Engineers went to work to install a second water point, and, sacrilege of sacrilege, a commencement was made on digging latrines in the centre of the Barrack Square. Jim Hardacre, who had been appointed messing officer for all A.I.F. P.O.W. supervised the erection of makeshift cookhouses. The Japs set up machine-gun posts at the four corners of the road around the Square, and at the Jap guardhouse which was established in what was known as the Clock-tower building

across the road from the grassed eastern end of the Square. After the concentration was complete renegade Indian troops who had deserted to the Japanese patrolled the road around the Square.

Around one o'clock the official movement to the Square began, and the spectacle had to be seen to be believed. The British troops had the hardest job because they had to come up from Roberts Barracks at the eastern end of Changi compound. All available trailers were pressed into service, and they were loaded to the hilt. Nobody knew how long we would be confined to the Square, or, indeed, whether we would ever come out of it, and everyone took in as much in the way of personal possessions as they could manage. In addition to food and cooking gear (the decision taken earlier to build up a small reserve of food was already justified), the trailers were loaded with home-made beds, chairs, tables, etc., crates of fowls, pets, including the occasional monkey, musical instruments, reading matter and, although carefully hidden from view, several of our secret radios. One group of British soldiers even brought in a goat, struggling hard at the end of a rope. Thanks to the ingenuity of Cpl. Stan Hone, one of our Sigs. boys, I was now the proud owner of a folding camp stretcher, and I carried this in with me in addition to my few other personal belongings.

By about five in the afternoon every square inch of space in the four barrack buildings, including the flat roofs, was occupied, as was every square inch of ground not required for latrines and cookhouses. Little humpies covered the lawn at the eastern end of the Square, and makeshift shelters sprang up in all available areas. Our Unit had been allotted the footpath between one of the buildings on the southern side of the Square and the road which encompassed the whole area. It was about 6 ft. wide and each man was allowed two feet or thereabouts. I know I could only just fit my stretcher into my allotted space. We slept under the stars by night and sweated in the sun by day. It was practically impossible to keep our belongings dry when the daily thunderstorms hit, but we welcomed them nevertheless for available water was sufficient only for cooking and drinking, and the thunderstorms provided us with our daily baths. Late in that afternoon of 2nd September 1942 Colonel Holmes and his senior officers were summoned to a "Conference" at the side of the road opposite the Jap guard-house. It was made clear to Col. Holmes that we were to stay confined in the Square until we signed the "No Escape" forms. Our rations would be severely cut - we had received none at all that day - and if we remained obdurate other forms of punishment would be introduced. Col. Holmes was told to go away and think it over.

One of the most outstanding features of this incarceration must surely have been the amazingly good spirits displayed universally by the

P.O.W. Despite the cramped conditions - one literally had to walk over one's neighbour if it was necessary to move from one's allotted space - despite the reduction in rations, despite the long waits for food or to use the latrines, for both of which purposes long queues were the order of the day, despite the uncertainty about the outcome of the whole situation, it seemed that there was a general determination to "show the bloody Nips where they got off." Unfailing good humour was everywhere in evidence. One soldier is on record as joining a queue and saying to the man in front of him, "Is this the queue for the cookhouse or the latrines?" and being told, "Couldn't say, mate, by the time I get there I'll be ready for either." A member of the Gordon Highlanders, who had occupied the barracks round the Square prior to the Malayan campaign, and who had obviously been thoroughly indoctrinated in those days concerning the sacredness of the Barrack Square, was heard to say as he came away from the latrines, "Mon, I've achieved the ambition of a lifetime - I've shit on the Barrack Square."

There was a general determination not to give in to the Japs, and when Col. Holmes was summoned to another "Conference" on the afternoon of Thursday, 3rd September, he was again able to tell the Japs that no-one would sign the "No Escape" form. He also had to inform them that in the 24 hours since we had been confined to the Square there had been 20 cases of recurrent dysentery and two men had gone down with diphtheria. In turn he was informed by the Nips that they were considering allowing us one-third rations.

The omens on Friday, 4th September, were bad. The latrine diggers were finding it difficult to keep up with the demand, and in the primitive conditions in which we lived the problem of keeping our meagre supply of food free from contamination was proving insoluble. The number of dysentery cases trebled to sixty, diphtheria increased to four, and our medicos became very concerned about the health outlook. It was estimated that in another three days there would be at least 400 further cases of dysentery and it was impossible to calculate what course the diphtheria epidemic might take. At the "Conference" that afternoon Col. Holmes presented these facts to the Japanese. They were sufficiently impressed to want to find a solution to the situation, but the problem was to find a way out which would save "face" for the Japanese - to them this was a matter of paramount importance. Finally, after much discussion, a formula was decided upon. The Japanese substituted for their original "request" that all P.O.W. sign the "No Escape" form a direct order to that effect, backed up by a statement that no food would be issued until all the forms were signed. In these circumstances Col. Holmes was forced to order all under his command to sign the form, but in doing so he made it clear that the duress employed by the enemy absolved those signing from being

bound by the promise. However, to make assurance doubly sure very few P.O.W. signed their own names - for example, I signed mine B.A. Barnett, and Ben signed with an F.E. Stahl that bore no more resemblance to my signature than mine did to his.

And so the great confrontation came to an end. On the Saturday we all returned to our normal quarters and resumed a comparatively peaceful way of life for a while. The only real casualties on our side apart from the execution of the four escapees, were the goat and a large number of chooks, all of which disappeared into the ration pots. On the Japanese side there was only one casualty and that did not occur until after the war ended when Gen. Fukuye, who ordered the execution of the four P.O.W. escapees, was himself executed on the same spot on the same beach, but by a properly constituted firing squad, with the result that his demise was instantaneous and not the lingering death that he imposed on the escapees.

And so, as I say, life returned to what was normal for those days. The time passed relatively uneventfully until 26th September when it was decided to amalgamate what remained of 22 and 27 Brigades. Our own C.O. Lt. Col. Kappe, took command and I was appointed Staff Captain. On Sunday, 27th September, the Nips sprang one of their typical surprises - they notified us that a search of the camp would be made on 30th September. No doubt they were looking for our secret radios, but thanks to their friendly (?) warning none was found. We never allowed the radios to remain in one place for longer than about three weeks. At this time Ben and I were responsible for the care, but not the operation, of one of our sets, and unless they had been informed where the set was located there was only a very minute chance of the Japs finding it. Owing to the heavy tropical downpours the eaves of the houses in which we were quartered were four feet wide and were faced on the underside with asbestos cement. During the bombing and shelling of the area the concussion had broken this asbestos in countless places, although there were, of course, numbers of quite large pieces still intact. The set for which we were responsible was located on one of these intact pieces, outside what had been the bathroom in the upstairs portion of the house in which we lived. Ben and I, and six other officers occupied the adjoining bedroom. The set was completely concealed from both the ground below and the bedroom window. It was permanently tuned to Radio Australia and the headphone leads were brought in through the roof and down what had been the wire to the bathroom light, passing on the way through the wall-switch. The headphones, which were in the custody of the operator for the time being, were doctored so that they could be plugged into the light socket. While the operator was at work Ben and I kept watch upstairs and, as an added precaution a "cockatoo" lounged at what had been the entrance porch to the house. From the bell-push, wires had been run to the set above and

arranged so that a push on the button would automatically disengage the set. If this happened the operator knew that Japs were in the vicinity and disconnected his headphones. In the three weeks that we were responsible for the set there were no alarms and the evening news bulletin from Australia was regularly monitored. Our power came from car batteries and a number of Jap lorry drivers must have scratched their heads over the sudden failure of their batteries as our boys successfully exchanged one of our failing batteries for one of their live ones.

On 5th October the Japs announced a reduced ration scale, but fortunately on 9th October we received some further Red Cross supplies, some of which had come from India. Each man received a once-and-for-all issue of 4 ozs. of jam, and 65 cigarettes and whilst the supply lasted each man was to receive a daily issue of 1 oz. of Dahl, $\frac{1}{3}$ oz. of Ghee, 2 oz. of Atta, 3 oz. of tinned corned beef or meat and vegs., 1 oz. of tinned vegs. or tomatoes, $\frac{3}{4}$ oz. of sugar, 1 oz. milk, plus 4 ozs. of biscuits and 4 ozs. of cocoa per week. It was apparent why the Japs had reduced their ration issue, but by careful husbanding we were able to make the Red Cross supplies last almost to Christmas. Another event which helped to make life a little easier about this time was the completion of repairs to the water and electricity mains within the camp area. The restoration of electricity enabled the pumping of water to be resumed, and soon community shower points were erected. The showers were especially welcomed, for in that hot and sticky climate they helped to make life much more bearable.

In mid-October there was an outbreak of dysentery and diphtheria in the British lines and inevitably it spread to the A.I.F. On Saturday 24th October I went down with dysentery and was sent to hospital, but I soon recovered and was discharged four days later. Several more parties were required for Singapore and by 8th November we were left with only five officers. On the other hand parties of Dutch had been coming into camp from Java and by 13th November there were 1,400 of them in our vicinity. Many of them were Eurasians, and some were suspected of being Japanese plants. On one occasion a party of Nips appeared and went straight to a spot where one of our secret radios had been located. Fortunately they found nothing, the set having been removed only two hours beforehand.

The move of working parties was reversed in early December and numbers of our men marched back into camp during that month. I was still attached to Brigade Headquarters but on 23 December I suggested I should be returned to my own Unit, and on 1 January 1943 I was reposted as Acting C.O. of Signals. In mid-January our ration scale was again revised, the scale being altered to rice 19 ozs., sugar .6 of an oz., tea .176 of an oz., salt .176 of an oz., oil .7 of an oz., vegetables $2\frac{1}{2}$ ozs., and fish

$2\frac{1}{2}$ ozs. At the same time we were told there would be no more issues of toilet paper.

I have referred earlier to the various 'gloat' parades to which we had been subjected, but on Saturday 23 January 1943 we experienced one with a difference. The camp was to be inspected by a Prince of the Royal House of Japan, and as it was desired that the son of the Son of Heaven should not be contaminated by the sight of lowly prisoners of war we were ordered to remain indoors between one and three p.m. "Severe punishment" was promised to anyone who disobeyed the order. Two days after this inspection the Japanese asked for the names of all Signals officers and, as may be imagined, this caused considerable speculation. In the end we never found out why the names were wanted.

On Australia Day - 26 January 1943 - there occurred what must surely have been one of the most unusual celebrations of that day ever recorded. The A.I.F. members of the P.O.W. camp carried out a ceremonial parade on the Barrack Square. With "cockatoos" posted to give adequate warning if any Japanese appeared, all Units assembled on the Square and were inspected by "Black Jack" Galleghan. Although the turn-out was not as spick and span as in happier pre-war days, each man took pride in marking the occasion by having his few articles of clothing in as neat and clean a condition as possible, and in the circumstances the turn-out was quite impressive. After the inspection there was a march past, at which "Black Jack" took the salute. From two of our many hiding places were produced a Union Jack and an Australian flag, and "B.J." took the salute standing in front of these two emblems. The occasion was most impressive and proved once again, as had the "Barrack Square incident" that the morale and spirit of the P.O.W. were being maintained at a very high level. A great deal of the credit for this must go to "B.J." for the personal example he set.

About this time speculation became rife following a decision of the I.J.A. that all prisoners should be inoculated against dysentery. We were given the first injection on Friday 22 January 1943, and the second on Saturday 30 January. On Saturday 13 February there was held another parade, but this one was quite different from our Australia Day parade. This one was held on the orders of the Japanese, so that a movie might be taken. Needless to say no great care was taken with our turn-out, for our assessment of the situation was that this film was probably to be used by the Japs for propaganda purposes to mark the first anniversary of the fall of Singapore and we had no intention of letting it be thought that the Nips were making clothing issues to us when in fact we were still making do with the small supplies each man had carried with him on 17th February 1942. On the other hand we marched with heads

up and chins in, carefully in step and in line, for we were also determined that our bearing would make it clear to all that we were not in any way dejected or broken spirited, and that we were still a disciplined body of men despite the effects of twelve months of imprisonment. The other way the Japs marked the first anniversary of the fall of Singapore didn't appeal to us in the least - they cut our daily ration of rice by 3 ozs. On Saturday 20th February 1943, I suffered what I thought must surely be the lowest degradation to be imposed on me, when I in company with all other P.O.W. was subjected to what the Nips called "a dysentery test". This consisted of bending over with the body at right angles to the legs and then having a glass rod inserted into the anus. Never having been a deviate from normal in the past (nor, I must make it clear - since) I found the experience particularly loathsome. The theory behind the procedure was that material adhering to the glass rod when it was withdrawn was cultured to determine whether any dysenteric bacteria were present. Had the operation been performed by a European it would have been bad enough, but to suffer it at the hands of a bloody Nip was particularly abhorrent. On Friday 5th March 1943 the purpose of the various tests became apparent. The Japs issued a warning order that a large work force would be required to move on 10th March. This party was known as "D" Force, and comprised about 2,500 men, finally departing on 14th and 16th March, but no Sigs. were included. However, shortly afterwards, a further small party, known as "E" Force was required and with this contingent went 25 of our Sigs. boys.

The 8th April 1943 proved to be a fateful day for many prisoners of war. On that day the Japanese issued an order for the formation of a work-force of 7,000 men, of which half were to be Australians. This was the ill-fated "F" Force which left Changi for an unknown destination in the week commencing 18th April 1943.

CHAPTER IV

"F" FORCE AND THE BURMA RAILWAY

19 April 1943 to 30 July 1943

The order from the Japanese requiring the formation of "F" Force stated that as the supplying of food to Singapore Island was becoming more and more difficult, it had been decided to move a party of approximately seven thousand men to another area in pleasant hilly country where conditions would be first-class and there would be plenty of good food. Although the P.O.W. would be required to do some work, the order went on, conditions would be much better than those existing on Singapore Island and for this reason it would be in order to include 30% of "light duty" sick men. No marching would be required of the sick men and, because of the more attractive conditions which would exist, band instruments and any available sports gear should be taken. The alluring picture painted by the Japanese resulted in men clamouring to be included in the party, the old Army adage of "never volunteer for anything" going overboard in the enthusiasm engendered.

On the day that the Japs issued the order it was made clear to me that I would be going with the party. My C.O., Lt. Col. Kappe, had been appointed to command the Australian component and he required me as his Staff Captain (Administration) and Jim Hardacre as his Staff Captain Quartermaster. Ben Barnett was to command the Signals element of 230 men.

On Wednesday, 14th April, we had our first Cholera injection, and the next day were given a first Plague injection and were again "glass-rodded". I.J.A. orders provided for the English half of the Force to move first, with the Australians to follow, but with typical cussedness they decided on 17th April to reverse the order and instructed that the move of the Australians would start the next day. This alteration was to have fatal effects for many, as it meant the Aussies never had the second Cholera and Plague injections.

Col. Kappe, Jim Hardacre and myself were included in the second party to move, and we left Selarang at 0430 hours on Monday 19th April. Ben Barnett, with his Sigs. personnel, had gone the day before. In the pitch darkness we were transported by truck to Singapore

railway station, and on the platform there I had my first encounter with a Korean named Toyama. He was a member of the Japanese guard on the train and was later to become only too well known to many Australians. He had a shocking temper, and usually carried a golf club. His favourite expression was "I am an educated gentleman - I get very angry." He was almost always "angry" and when he was he belaboured the hapless P.O.W. in his vicinity with the golf club. On many occasions I was grateful for the nimble footwork I had acquired in my previous relationship with Sgt. Sano at Adam Park. When I first met Toyama he was jumping up and down with rage on the platform of Singapore station yelling "Baggage nai, men yes." We were to be transported in all-metal enclosed rice trucks, 28 men to a truck. In accordance with Japanese instructions the men had brought with them all their personal belongings, including folding beds and other amenities manufactured or acquired in the previous 12 months, but on Singapore station came the first of many rude awakenings. With 28 men to a truck it was obvious that there was no room for any baggage apart from essential personal belongings. Toyama, who could speak a little English, made it clear to me (in my capacity as Admin. Officer I was again charged with conducting negotiations with the Nips) that there was only one truck for baggage, and that had to accommodate, in addition, three senior Jap guards, Col. Kappe, Jim Hardacre and myself. In the event there was room, as baggage, for only our precious stock of medical supplies and cooking gear and the men had, perforce, to leave many of their prized possessions on the platform. The three guards had one half of our truck and we three shared the other half with the baggage.

The train left Singapore station at 0650 hours, and before long the sun began to beat down upon the all-metal rice trucks. Even with both side doors open the temperature became unbearably hot in our truck which contained in addition to the baggage only six bodies - we three and three Nip guards. The 28 men in each of the other trucks sweltered in most uncomfortable circumstances. Each man had about three square feet for himself and his personal belongings, barely enough to sit down. No toilet accommodation of any kind was provided and stops where the men were allowed out of the trucks were few and far between. Even at these stops it was necessary to use the storm-water ditches at the side of the track. They had already been used for this purpose by the first train load the day before, and their condition may be easily imagined. I shuddered to think of what awaited the following train-loads.

We reached Gemas, about 120 miles from Singapore, in the evening, and here we were provided with our only meal for the day. It consisted of a small amount of watery soup and a mug of boiled rice. The train then went on and as night fell the men in the trucks began to organise themselves for sleep. It was quite impossible for all 28 men to lie down simultaneously, and sleeping had to be done in shifts, about one-third sleeping while

the others stood. As the journey extended over four nights most were suffering badly from lack of sleep when it concluded. We passed through Kuala Lumpur at 0300 hours on 20th April, and there were given rations for that day. Here was a problem - eat the rice then while it was warm and wait till the next day for another meal, or eat it later - cold. I settled for cold rice later. The next meal didn't come until the late afternoon of the next day - Wednesday 21 April - when we reached Haadyi. As usual, it consisted of a little thin soup and some rice. On the fourth day, at Lemah at 1800 hours we were given our fourth meal - recipe same as before - and on Friday 23 April we detrained at Bampong in Thailand at 1400 hours after a journey lasting 105 hours at an average speed, including stops, of a little over 10 miles per hour.

No-one who has not travelled something over 1,000 miles in an over-crowded all-metal rice truck, completely devoid of sanitation, with totally inadequate supplies of food at irregular intervals, without even a wash, let alone a shave, over a period of 4½ days, can imagine how we felt. We must surely have looked a rag-tail army. Stubble sprouting on every face, eyes red-rimmed from lack of sleep, muscles aching and stiff and clothes crumpled and untidy. And just so that we would properly appreciate our position we were confronted with a large notice which proclaimed "RULES FOR PASSING COOLIES AND PRISONERS OF WAR". In the eyes of the Japanese we were just one class lower than the poor coolies - the lowest of the low. The great majority of our guards were Korean and this was our first experience of this section of the Imperial Japanese Army. We soon found that they were far less desirable types than were the fighting Japanese soldiers with whom I had previously had to conduct negotiations. Headed by the maniacal Toyama they would beat up a prisoner on the slightest provocation, and frequently for none at all. They took a special delight in assaulting officers and tall men. In addition to the three senior guards who travelled in the same truck as Col. Kappe, Jim Hardacre and me there had been a truck load of guards at the back of the train and many of the men had already suffered at their hands during stops on the journey.

After detraining at Bampong we were required to march about a mile to a staging camp, carrying all our belongings, but a truck was provided for the cooking gear and medical supplies. It will be remembered that almost one-third of the men were less than fit when we left Singapore, and the extended train journey had added to this number. In consequence there were many who lagged on the march and they were "encouraged" by the guards with the help of boots, fists and rifle butts. Conditions in the staging camp were almost beyond description. It had been used by passing bodies of native labour who had been impressed by the Japanese into a

labour corps for the construction of the Thai-Burma railway. Their standards of hygiene were considerably lower than ours, and the place was filthy. There were no latrines as we know them, and the whole of the camp area, both inside and outside the huts, was littered with rubbish and filth of every description. Flies and vermin abounded and the whole effect was completely nauseating.

Here we experienced another of the rude shocks which awaited us throughout the time we spent as railway builders, for this is what our task turned out to be - construction of the railway to link Bampong in Thailand with Thanbyuzayat in Burma. Contrary to the assurances given by the Japs before we left Changi, that no marching would be required of the 30% of sick men, we were now told that all men would be required to march to an unnamed destination. To where we were to march, what the distance would be, how long it would take, we were not told. We were told, however, that no transport of any kind would be provided - not even for medical supplies, and that whatever was taken was to be hand carried. We were also informed that all marching would be done at night, that we would be given one night's rest to recover from the train journey, and that the march would begin the next night. Finally we were told that contact with the native population was absolutely forbidden and that anyone disobeying this order would be severely punished. The latter order was flouted by, I should say, 90% of our troops. The position was that our men were hungry, and the Thais could supply food. They would not, however, accept Japanese money. This difficulty was easily settled, for the Japanese intimation that whatever we took on the march had to be hand carried - and over an unknown distance - resulted in our men making a quick reassessment of their needs. Then whatever was regarded as "not wanted on voyage" was bartered or sold to the Thais, who were ready buyers. It was impossible for the Japs to police the whole camp area and although a few unfortunates were caught and bashed the majority got away with it.

We left Bampong at midnight on Saturday 24 April on the first stage of our march. Our party, originally 600 strong, now numbered 573, as it had been necessary to leave behind 22 men who were already too sick to march, and the Japs had impressed five of our party to drive their trucks. Although this first march was along a formed road conditions were not easy, for the night was dark, without a moon. The only light came from torches carried by the Nip guards. Many of the men found that they were still carrying too much weight, and before many miles had passed they started to discard gear. The march that night covered 26 kilometres or 17 miles, and we reached our first halt at 1000 hours. After getting what rest we could - the Japs provided no shelter for us and we rigged our groundsheets to furnish a little shade - we were started on our next march at 2215 hours. Again we were forced to leave behind more sick men who just couldn't march any further - 19 this time. As before, we

travelled all through the night with a 10 minute rest after each hour of marching, and at 10 o'clock in the morning we arrived at Kanburi. Here our rest area was not far from the river and a swim parade was organised. Water for other purposes was in very short supply, for the quality of the river water was highly suspect, but one of our number located a well owned by an old Thai woman who, for 10 cents, would not only supply a bucket of clear fresh water but rub one's back as well. Despite the ban on contact with the natives, she did a roaring trade. We were told we would stay the night at Kanburi to undergo some "medical tests" the next day. These turned out to be the hateful "glass rod" test (we now referred to this as being "prodded") and the taking of a blood sample. Heaven only knows to what use, if any, the results of these tests were put.

So on the Tuesday we all once more suffered the indignities associated with "prodding", gave up ten millilitres of our blood, and got what rest we could. At 10 p.m. we were on the march again and after toiling through the night over another 26 kilometres, arrived at the next staging camp. By now we were developing a "march technique". At each 10 minute halt little fires would be lit throughout the marching column and groups of men would boil up some tea. A water bottle would be filled and shared by each group over the next couple of sections of the march. This procedure eased the strain of marching for the fit men, and was of great value to the large percentage who were already less than 100% fit. The capacity of the Australian soldier to improvise in even the worst of conditions contrasted strongly with the seeming inability of our English counterparts to do so to the same extent and accounts, I am sure, for the fact that whereas 62.9% of English P.O.W. who toiled on the railway in "F" Force died as a result, deaths among the Australian component, which was approximately equal in number, totalled 29.1%. Our Signals boys, in particular, were most efficient scroungers, and on many occasions I was indebted to numbers of them for material assistance. Recognising that my official position deprived me of the opportunities of relieving the Japs of some of their privileged possessions a band of my lads, among whom Jimmie Ling was a prominent member, often supplemented the official ration issues of Ben Barnett, Jim Hardacre, and myself with "unofficial" issues adroitly purloined - though not without great risk to themselves - from our Nip guards. Although Ben was marching a day ahead of Jim Hardacre and me we had all had one day together at Kanburi, due to the two-day stay there for the medical tests. Whilst there our generous Sigs. lads had presented us with a large bottle of Saki, six quite fresh eggs, and two tins of condensed milk. We mixed the whole lot together - Saki, raw eggs and condensed milk - and the result proved to be an unusual, but not unpleasant-tasting mess. I noticed that the two teetotallers - Barnett and Stahl - were not at all backward in downing their share.

On Thursday 29 April 1943 we spent the day at No. 4 halt - Wampo - after a march of 24 kilos. Whilst I constructed a shelter for our bivouac Jim Hardacre went walkabout to see what he could find. He was back in a few minutes. "Quick," he said, "give me our dixies, I can get some sago." In a couple of minutes he returned with each dixie half filled with boiled sago covered with a rich looking milk. Quickly we disposed of this unexpected delicacy, and we settled down to get some sleep. As I was drowsing off Jim said, "Like the sago?" "Sure did," said I. "How about the milk?" asked Jim. "Lovely," I responded. "Wonder where they got it" said Jim, "seen any cows around?" "No," I admitted. "Or goats?" asked my friend. "Now that you mention it - no I haven't" I told him. He could keep a straight face no longer. "The Thai woman who made the sago supplied it on the spot" said Jim. The realisation that I had had a further dose of Mother's milk after a lapse of 34 years didn't cause me the loss of one moment's sleep, but I did wonder what alternative food the woman's baby got.

We stayed at Wampo overnight and set off at 8 p.m. on Saturday 1st May for the next leg of the march. This terminated at Tahsoa - 28 kilos on - at 9 a.m. the next morning, but not before two events occurred which are indelibly stamped in my mind. As had been the case since the start of the trek from Bampong, I was marching at the head of the column, in company with the senior Jap guard. The C.O. was in his accustomed place, fifty paces behind. On this leg of the march we were traversing heavily timbered country which had been becoming more and more typical jungle since leaving Kanburi. Right from the start of this night's march I had noticed that the Nip at the head of the column seemed rather nervous, darting glances into the darkness right and left with almost every step he took. His worry was soon explained as he said, with a gesture which embraced the whole of the jungle ahead and astride us, "Tora, Tora". Somebody had obviously told him there were tigers in the area, and I didn't see why I should lighten his concern so, nodding my head vigorously, I embraced the whole of the jungle in a wide sweep of both my arms and said, "Tora, tora, tora". The effect was instantaneous, but not what I had expected. He immediately turned to me, pushed his rifle into my arms and said, "You - shoot." As I had no desire whatever to carry the extra nine pounds that his rifle weighed I promptly gave it back to him, telling him in good honest Australian what he could do with his rifle, and adding for good measure that I hoped it hurt. He wasn't very pleased with me, and tried to crack my skull with the butt of the rifle, but thanks to my by now much-practised footwork, aided by the dark of the night, he didn't get within a bull's roar.

His fear of tigers was, however, genuine and he was determined to waste no time in getting to our destination. So he stepped it out and succeeded in considerably irking our C.O. "Stahl", called out the C.O.

"Tell that bloody Nip to slow down - the men can't keep up." I did my best to convey this to the Nip, but he couldn't care less. He probably reasoned that if our men couldn't keep up, and some straggled, the tigers would eat them and not the Nip. And so, throughout the night, the unequal battle continued. Time after time the C.O. chorused from his position fifty paces to the rear, "Stahl, tell that bloody Nip to slow down." Time after time, without result, I tried to do so. Finally, as dawn was breaking, the C.O. called out for the umpteenth time, "Stahl, tell that bloody Nip to slow down." Something snapped. I was not then, nor am I now, an unduly profane individual. But I had reached the end of my tether. All night I had tried to do as instructed, as instructed by a C.O. 50 paces away who did not have to cope personally with a scared and bloody-minded Nip, and who, though he may have found the march wearing, could at least march without the continuous personal discomforts visited on me every time something happened which frightened or displeased the Nip. And so, as I say, something snapped. Using a four letter word which I hated then and still do, I called out to the C.O. "All fluffing night you've been telling me to tell this fluffing Nip to fluffingwell slow down. If you think you can do any better fluffingwell come up here and fluffingwell do so." Suddenly there was complete silence as the shock of the verbal encounter over the heads of a hundred or so men engulfed us all. I was appalled. Realisation of the enormity of my offence hit me as my anger cooled as quickly as it had arisen. I waited for the blast from the C.O., with a mental vision of a court martial unpleasantly in my mind. There was still no sound apart from the shuffling of feet on the ground as the column continued on. The seconds dragged by. Suddenly it was apparent that there would be no response from the C.O. - not then at any rate - and as if on a signal, the men started talking among themselves again. When we reached the end of the march at Tahsoa I reported to the C.O., braced for the blast. It didn't come. It never did.

Tahsoa was a supply depot for the Japanese, and there were quite a few Thai villagers living in the vicinity from whom our boys obtained a good deal of extra food, including eggs, by the use of the by now well-known barter system. There was also a Japanese hospital, with a Nip medico in charge.

We marched out of Tahsoa at 8 p.m. that night and arrived at No. 6 halt, Kanyu, at 8 a.m. after a march of 23 kilometres. Leaving Kanyu at 6 p.m. that night we arrived at Kinsaiyo, a shorter distance of only 18 kilos away, at three in the morning of Monday 3 May.

We bedded down immediately on arrival, but when I awoke, in broad daylight, I received quite a shock. Blank spots had suddenly appeared in my eyesight, and as I looked at Jim Hardacre, seated beside me, I could

see only portions of his face. It seemed he had quite large holes in his face, and as I didn't really believe what I saw I reported on sick parade. Our own medicos made a clinical diagnosis of Retrobulbar Neuritis - caused by a deficiency of vitamins in the diet - and the Jap officer in charge of the Kinsaiyo camp decided to return me to the Hospital at Tahsoa. I remained in camp when our party marched out that night, and was returned to Tahsoa, via a Nip truck, the next day. The Jap medico examined my eyes, confirmed the diagnosis made by our own medico, and after considering the matter for five days, decided there was nothing he could do for me, and at 10 a.m. on Tuesday 11 May I left Tahsoa, again by Nip truck, to rejoin the work party. In addition to myself there was a party of Japs on the truck, and also another Australian officer. We all sat on top of the load of supplies on the truck, and the total weight was obviously far more than the truck was designed to carry. At one stage it was labouring up a bit of an incline when it gave obvious signs of conking out. The Nips jumped off, and so did the other Aussie officer but I wasn't told to do so, so I stayed put. It was a bad error of judgment, for one of the Nips grabbed a rod of reinforcing wire which, unluckily, was part of the supplies carried on the truck, and did his best to break it on my back. This was the worst beating I suffered as a P.O.W. and you may be sure that when that truck laboured again, as it often did on the many rises on the road, I didn't wait to be told to get off.

Although the Jap doctor had decided there was nothing he could do for my eyes I had personally made good use of the five days I had spent at Tahsoa, and had eaten countless numbers of eggs. I'm sure this assisted, and I think the relief from coping with the Jap guards on the march also probably helped in making some improvement in my sight, for although the Retrobulbar Neuritis persists until this day, the blind spots are not as large as they were on that morning at Kinsaiyo. Treatment I received on my return to Changi a year later also helped.

The truck party camped that night at the side of the road. The Nips allocated to the other A.I.F. officer (I'll call him "Annie" which was the name by which he was known to the men in his own platoon) and me the job of keeping a bright fire burning overnight, for they still believed they were in tiger country. "Annie" and I did this in two-hour shifts, and were not really unhappy about it for by now we were in quite mountainous country and the nights were rather cold. We moved on early the next morning and at 9 a.m. arrived at No. 11 halt, known as Tamrampat. The men of the 30th Battalion had marched in that morning and I joined their working company which moved out at 7.30 p.m. that night. We arrived at No. 12 halt - Konkoida - at 9.30 the next morning after a march of 23 kilos. I learned that my C.O. - he to whom I had been so rude on the early morning of Saturday 1st May - was also in the camp, but was isolated due to an attach of Scabies.

Though he did not know it at the time the C.O. was fortunate to be isolated, for portion of Konkoida camp was occupied by a Thai Labour Corps amongst whom a number of deaths had occurred in the last few days. Several corpses were still lying in the huts. Though we did not know it at the time they had died of Cholera. After an overnight stop at Konkoida our party moved on at 8 p.m. on Friday 14 May and arrived at Shimo Nike at 8 a.m. the next morning. Again we stayed overnight but before we moved on on Sunday 16 May five men went down with Cholera. We left them behind and at 4 a.m. on Monday 17 May we started what turned out to be the last leg of our march - 12 kilos to a place called Shimo Sonkrai, which we reached at 8.30 a.m. that morning.

It is interesting to compare the "no marching" promise of the I.J.A. before we left Singapore with what actually took place. The march was long and extremely arduous, it totalled about 300 kilometres or 187 miles, and it laid the foundations for the widespread debilitation of "F" Force which played a major part in increasing the death rate from infectious diseases - Cholera, Malaria, Dysentery, etc. And, of course, the fact that the Nips sent the Aussie component of the Force off with only a partial inoculation against Cholera aggravated the position still further.

There was nothing to fill us with comfort on our arrival at Shimo Sonkrai. A number of huts had been erected, but they were roofless and floorless. They were of standard pattern, 100 metres long by 6 metres wide, each intended to accommodate 200 men. They were constructed solely of bamboo, which grew in wild profusion in the surrounding jungle - stems 4 inches wide were the rule, and not the exception. Our first job was to roof and floor the huts. The floors were made of bamboo slats, raised half a metre from the ground, and two metres wide, running down both sides of the huts. This left a two metre passage down the centre of each hut. Each man was allotted floor space of one metre by two metres.

The day after we arrived at Shimo Sonkrai we suffered our first death from Cholera. By Friday 21 May eleven men were down with this disease and two more had died. Roofing of the huts was commenced that day - the roofing material was a dried reed known as Atap, applied in overlapping layers, and I never cease to marvel at the efficiency of this primitive form of roofing which withstood the heaviest monsoon rains. Also, on that day, the first of our men were set to work on the railway and on the next day, Saturday 22 May, I too was out on the railway job in charge of a working party. I had fifty men in my party and our first job was a very simple one. The river, which we had followed at reasonable proximity for the whole of the march, flowed past the camp site. Just north of the camp, diverted by a small hill, the river had a U turn before resuming its north-south flow. Unfortunately the path of the railway crossed the deviation in the flow of

the river, and the Japs had decided that the bend in the river had to be eliminated. The method? My band of fifty men would dig a cutting through the hill - by hand. The two sides of the U deviation were about fifty yards apart, and the river was approximately 20 yards wide. I calculated there would be not less than 5,000 cubic yards of soil to be dug and carried away, ready to fill in the U when the river was straightened. This would be about two months' work for the fifty men, so you can imagine my surprise when the little Nip private in charge of the operation conveyed to me in broken English that he wanted the work finished that day. "You promise?" he said. Knowing the futility of giving a flat denial I said "I promise we will do what we can." At 4.30 p.m. that afternoon the Monsoon broke and it started to rain. If one has not experienced a monsoonal rain it is quite impossible to appreciate what this involves. The skies fell in, and in no time the rain became a deluge. It continued, without let-up of any kind, until early August.

I saw the onset of the rain as literally a Heaven-sent opportunity to distract the attention of the Jap soldier from the very small amount of progress we had made on our task. We had made about as much impression on the hill as one bite from a mouse would make in a whole cheddar cheese, and for some time the Nip had been getting more and more restless at our lack of progress. So I seized on the rain as a reason to suggest to our overseer that I should take my men back to camp, explaining as best I could with his limited understanding of English that if they continued to work in the rain they would certainly become sick and soon he would have no workmen on the job. The Jap was even more naive than I could have hoped for - he obviously didn't know that the start of the monsoon meant it would be raining just as hard the next day, and the day after that, and indeed, for the next three months - and after a little initial hesitation he agreed. I had my boys back in camp, all tools checked in, by 5.30 p.m., five hours before any of the other work parties returned.

In the event that Saturday proved to be the only day I was allocated for work on the railway. Our medical situation was deteriorating hourly, and forced a re-organisation which placed me in charge of No. 5 Company. The duties attaching to this command kept me within the confines of the camp area, so I never did see the river cutting job finished.

Many of the huts were still without roofs - the insistence of the Japanese in requiring men for railway work had limited our roofing programme - and the only shelter which many had from the never-ceasing rain was their groundsheet. The majority of our workforce went out to work wet, worked in the rain, usually for ten to twelve hours, returned to camp wet, ate in the rain, and slept under what little protection they could get from a groundsheet. In these conditions it was inevitable that our health situation must

deteriorate rapidly. By Thursday 27 May we had had 24 deaths from Cholera and 74 more cases were isolated on "Cholera Hill" in a tented area apart from the main camp, and many more were hospitalised with Malaria, Dysentery, Beri-beri and Malnutrition.

Vigorous representations to the Japanese resulted in them agreeing that all work on the railway should cease for three days and that our men would spend that time in making the camp more habitable. Accordingly the next day all fit men went to work with a will to roof the huts, dig latrines, etc. - as can be imagined the latter job was no easy one with inches of mud covering the ground - and, our urgent requests for Cholera vaccine having at last produced results, every man received his second anti-Cholera injection to boost the first one given at Changi over a month before. Three medicos - Major Bruce Hunt of Perth, Capt. Lloyd Cahill of Sydney, and Capt. Col. Juttner of Woodside near Adelaide, - between them inoculated over 1800 men, a herculean effort by any standard.

Unfortunately, the Japanese did not honour their promise of no railway work for three days, and on Saturday 29 May 720 men were back on railway construction. Our position was rapidly becoming desperate, and on 30th May the following letter was submitted to the local Japanese commander:-

30th May, 1943.

To:- Officer in Charge,
Shimo Sonkrai Camp.

The medical situation in this camp is extremely grave and is becoming worse every hour. At the present moment Cholera is raging - there have been 37 deaths and there are over 90 patients in hospital. New cases are occurring at the rate of 25 or more daily.

Dysentery is still a serious problem and many men are so debilitated by prolonged Dysentery or Diarrhoea that it will be many weeks before they are fit for any form of work - meanwhile their resistance to Cholera or other diseases is seriously impaired.

Malaria is rapidly increasing and we anticipate that within a week or two there will be hundreds of sufferers.

Taking the situation as a whole it is our anticipation that within one month there will not be 250 men in this camp fit to do a day's work.

The reasons for this situation are that the men in this camp have been subjected to treatment which it is wrong for any civilised Nation to inflict upon its prisoners of war.

In detail:-

1. The men, before leaving Changi, were weakened by Dysentery and deficiency diseases (Beri-beri and Pellagra) and were in no condition to withstand infectious diseases.

2. An assurance was given by the I.J.A. at Changi to the Commander A.I.F. at Changi that food would be better here than in Changi and that troops would not have to march from the train to their destination. Neither of these promises has been kept. Relying on the second promise many men totally unfit to march were included in the force - very many of these are now in hospital, some have died.

3. The hygiene of the camps on the road was appalling and hundreds of men were successively inflicted by Dysentery, by Malaria, and finally by Cholera - the present tragedy is the result.

4. The conditions of marching were extremely arduous and in some cases unwarrantably cruel. Sick men were driven out onto the road night after night, in some cases with high fever or active Dysentery. As a result when the men arrived here they were completely exhausted.

5. After arrival men were put in an unhygienic, badly situated camp, roofless and with very bad latrine accommodation. All conditions ideal for the spread of disease were present and disease has, in consequence, rapidly spread - your own report that 53 positive results for Cholera were found in about 500 apparently healthy men showed how rapidly and widely the spread took place.

6. No adequate rest was given to men, nor was any assistance given in response to requests for help. On the contrary men were sent out to work and kept out of camp 12 to 13 hours a day in the pouring rain - conditions typical NOT of the honourable treatment of prisoners of war, but of slave labor.

At the present moment:- (approximately)

37 men are dead of Cholera
95 men are in hospital with Cholera
250 men are in hospital with other diseases

140 men are excused all duty on account of sickness, and many of these would be in hospital if there were enough room or drugs or nurses.
150 men are so weakened by illness that they are only fit for light duty.
120 men are being used (or have been used) in the care of the sick, and of these 30 have already become so sick as to have been admitted to hospital.

Thus about 600 men out of 2,000 have become invalids or have been required to nurse the sick within 14 days of arrival in this camp - and the number is likely to increase rapidly.

In view of the above facts we demand:-

1. That this document be forwarded to the Representative of the International Red Cross in Bangkok or Rangoon.

2. That all work cease, NOT for 3 days, but indefinitely until the present Cholera epidemic has been fully controlled. In this circumstance we draw your attention to the promise given on 27th May 1943 that all work would cease for 3 days. This promise was broken the day after it was given. The reasons for asking for all work to cease are:-

   (a) To enable all necessary construction work around the camp on latrines, roofing and drainage to be done.
   (b) To enable hundreds of debilitated men to rest and recover their health.
   (c) To permit of enough men being allotted to nursing work to give adequate treatment to the hundreds of sick men, and rest to the present overworked and exhausted nursing staff.

3. Supplies of adequate drugs, disinfectants, soap, lights and other medical supplies.

4. The supply of blankets for the sick.

5. The supply of invalid foods, soups and tea and sugar for the sick.

6. The improvement of the camp diet by extra vitamin-containing food, for example:-
   rice polishings, towgay, meat, oil and fats.

7. The supply of suppressive atebrin for the whole camp - the present small quinine dosage is quite inadequate and without effect.

8. The supply of water containers, especially 44 gallon drums, to enable water to be used on a large scale, also smaller containers for water boiling to make sterilisation possible.

9. The supply of a large number of tents (waterproof) for the Cholera area, which is extending daily. At least 30 large tents are required apart from what is now in the camp.

10. The supply of oil for dealing with mosquito breeding places in the camp - a visit from Capt. Wilson, Malaria expert at H.Q. camp, is urgently necessary to locate these.

11. The supply of protective clothing - white coats for nurses handling Cholera.

12. As soon as the health of the camp has been improved, which may not be for several months, the evacuation of the area by troops and their subsequent treatment in a manner befitting the honourable Japanese Nation whose reputation must suffer gravely if the present conditions continue.

We demand that this document be laid before Lt. Col. Banno and the senior Japanese Medical Officer for the area, and also before Lt. Col. Harris (the senior P.O.W. officer) at the earliest possible moment - preferably tonight.

This letter was signed by the three senior combatant officers in the camp - Majors Johnston, Tracey, and Anderson - and by the senior medical officer Major Bruce Hunt. It speaks volumes for the courage of these four officers that they were prepared almost literally to lay their heads on the chopping block in their endeavours to gain some improvement in conditions for the men under their command. Bruce Hunt, the medico, was a man with whom I was to have a close association in the following months. He was a big man physically, most capable, but vain and arrogant to the point of rudeness, but he was decisive, and brave in his dealings with the Japanese, and to me his strengths outweighed his weaknesses. He had already suffered at the hands of the Nips. At No. 5 halt, at the time set down for the next

march to begin he fell-in 37 sick men apart from the main parade, and with Major Wyld, the interpreter, he stood in front of them. The Japanese corporal in charge of the march approached with a large bamboo in his hand and spoke menacingly to Major Wyld, who answered in a placatory fashion. The Corporal's only reply was to hit Major Wyld in the face. Another guard followed suit, and as Major Wyld staggered back the Corporal thrust at the Major's genitalia with his bamboo. Major Hunt was left standing in front of the patients and was immediately set upon by the Corporal and two other guards - one tripped him while two others pushed him to the ground. The three then set about him with bamboos and boots, causing extensive bruising of the skull, back, hands, and arms, and breaking a bone in the left hand. Having disabled Bruce Hunt, the Corporal then made the sick men march with the rest of the troops. At the next halt, when he once more tried to protect sick men, Major Hunt was again struck and his patients were forced to march. He adopted the practice of marching at the rear of the column to succour the stragglers and to endeavour to prevent any molestation by the guards. His efforts were usually crowned with success, but often at the expense of personal indignity and injury. As will be seen I was to have ample opportunity in the next few months to study this most interesting character in all his moods.

On Monday 31 May, the day following the lodgment of the protest letter, the I.J.A. demand for workmen for the railway was refused. Deaths by now amounted to 51, and both Majors Johnston and Anderson became ill and were admitted to hospital. Major Hunt expressed as his opinion, in view of the increasing demand for workers for the railway, that the only place where sick men could be assured of security was in hospital, and that every possible facility for treatment should be afforded to them. He also considered that isolation of Dysentery patients was advisable in the interests of the remainder of the troops.

A plan was accordingly organised, and put into action that very day, whereby the entire hospital was re-organised and the number of patients practically doubled - from around 400 to nearly 800. A special sick parade was held for all men suffering from any form of Diarrhoea or Dysentery. Over 300 cases previously being treated in the lines were admitted to hospital as a result of this parade alone. Six of the twelve camp huts were taken over for hospital purposes. One block of three huts contained one "Severe Dysentery" and two "Mild Dysentery" wards. One hut held patients suffering from severe Malaria and Tropical Ulcers, a fifth held Malarias and convalescents and the sixth was for accommodation of the hospital staff.

Lack of trained hospital staff, combined with the small number of medicos available, necessitated the use of combatant officers in the administration of the hospital. Each ward was organised under control of a combatant officer with a staff of two or three N.C.O.s or clerks to assist

in keeping records, controlling messing and the like. In this reorganisation I was allotted the task of Admission and Discharge Officer for the entire hospital. Knowing how important the records might be to the individuals concerned I endeavoured to make them as complete as I could in every possible detail. With the help of the civilian Japanese interpreter attached to the camp, Mr. Korosayu - he was quite a reasonable fellow and often came to my aid during arguments with the mad Toyama, who was unfortunately the No. 1 assistant to the Japanese camp commander - I borrowed (?) some paper from the Jap office, and supplemented this with an occasional exercise book found in a dead man's belongings. When a patient was discharged a summary was entered in his Pay Book. I also kept a burial register and a plan of the Cemetery on which I carefully entered the location of each grave.

At all stages of the period we spent as P.O.W. food and its preparation and distribution was a matter of major importance, for most of the time we were more often hungry than not. We were fortunate in Shimo Sonkrai camp that my friend, Capt. Stan Roberts, of 26 Battalion, was in charge of this vital task. He did a really magnificent job in the most trying circumstances.

On 1 June the Japanese demanded 400 men for railway work, and our administration compromised by offering 300 pending a response from Colonel Banno to our letter of 30 May. However the Japanese subsequently cancelled work for the day and later that afternoon Colonel Banno did in fact call at the camp. We got little comfort from his visit, however, the only definite statement he made being that it was his job to get the railway through and he would get it through even though it cost one life for each sleeper laid. This was an horrific prospect, for the line was to be about 400 kilometres long and at 1,000 sleepers to the kilometre this meant 400,000 lives.

Colonel Banno continued on to visit camps further up the line, but called at our camp again on his return journey on 4 June. By this time deaths from Cholera in our camp had mounted to 81 from 195 patients admitted to "Cholera Hill" and apparently the experience at an English camp further on was even worse. Colonel Banno instructed that work on the railway be suspended temporarily, and arranged for Bruce Hunt to visit the forward camps to report on medical conditions there. Accompanied by Lieut. Fukuda, Major Hunt visited Camps 2 and 3 (Shimo Sonkrai was No. 1) on 5 June, returning the next day. He had inoculated 380 men at No. 3 Camp against Cholera, which was just beginning to make its presence felt there, but he did not get up to No. 5 camp, where English personnel were quartered, and where Cholera had hit with great severity. He did however, arrange for improvements in staffing, administration and medical conditions at Camps 2 and 3.

On Sunday 6 June we were all once again submitted to that most degrading operation of "glass rodding" and we were informed that work on the

railway would resume the next day. It must be remembered that since 22 May the rains had continued without a break, consequently the ground in the camp area was an absolute quagmire, and it was about this time that I sustained a severe loss. I was suffering from an attack of Dysentery, and had a sudden and urgent call in the early hours of the morning. I pulled on my boots but could not wait to lace them up. In my race to the latrines my right boot bogged in the foot-deep mud and my foot pulled out of it. My need was so urgent that I could not stop to retrieve my boot then, and though I searched for it for several minutes on the return journey - getting thoroughly soaked in the process - I never found my boot. This was a real calamity, for I only had the one pair of boots, and for the rest of my time on the railway I either went barefoot or wore wooden clogs - a piece of wood roughly shaped to the foot, with a piece of material across the front portion through which the toes were poked.

By this time the only road was impassable to any traffic except the primitive Yak cart, and food supplies were endangered. The basic ration was reduced to 17 ozs. of rice and 2 ozs. of beans on 7 June, and on 9 June 50 men and a few Yak carts were sent to Nike camp for rations. A similar party collected some rations from Nike on 10 June, but sufficient food could not be transported and on 11 June rice was cut to $15\frac{1}{2}$ ozs. and the bean supply was further reduced. This was a serious matter, for we depended on the beans as our only source of vitamins. Work had resumed on the railway on 7 June, but out of about 1,850 men in camp only 230 were available and reasonably fit and by 10 June this number had been reduced to 80. This led to Lieut. Fukuda having all our officers paraded and haranguing us on our responsibility to the Imperial Japanese Army to get the men back on the job. He said that despite all the efforts being made on our account, in very difficult circumstances, by the Japanese, we were quite ungrateful and he was well aware that not only did we not co-operate with the I.J.A. but we deliberately did all we could to limit the number of men available for work. He said that unless the strength of the workforce improved not only would he make the officers work on the railway but a percentage of the sick men would also be drafted. The first threat worried us not at all, for all officers were quite determined not to assist the Nip war effort in any way, and our prime interest was the welfare of our men. It was to protect their wellbeing, so far as was possible in the circumstances, that officers went out as supervisors with the work parties. This was not always the case in P.O.W. camps for on occasions there was a small minority of officers who, to advance their own cause, collaborated with the Japs. However this was definitely not the case at Shimo Sonkrai, nor later at Tanbaya in Burma.

We were, however, very much concerned with the possibility that the Japs might attempt to force sick men out to work. Whilst it is true that some of the men in hospital were not seriously ill they were nevertheless not

fit for heavy labour, and it is quite certain that if they were forced out on to the railway work many would not survive. Because of the work I was doing - recording the admissions to and discharges from the hospital - I was caught up in the middle of this argument. It will be recalled that the mad Korean - Toyama - was Lieut. Fukuda's righthand man (there were many in the camp who believed there was a much closer relationship) and he was continually urging me to release more men. With the assistance of the Japanese interpreter who, as I mentioned previously seemed to be on my side, I survived many a torrid session, and I was often grateful that I had perfected my footwork in my arguments with Sjt. Sano at Adam Park. Toyama was also the complete sadist. Each evening he accompanied me on a round of the wards while he counted the number of sick men, and in the face of continuing opposition from the medicos, the wardmasters and myself, he insisted on all the sick men sitting to attention as he passed. One night, in the ward controlled by Lieut. Vern Baynes of 2/30 Bn. we came to one critically ill man who just couldn't raise himself. Toyama was immediately overcome with rage and, screaming obscenities, ordered the man to sit up. The poor fellow tried again, managed a feeble movement and fell back - dead, it transpired. I was standing behind Toyama, with Vern Baynes on my right, and I saw red. "Toyama," I muttered, "you are a dirty rotten little yellow bastard, and you ought to be shot." I don't think he heard me, and I fancy his next action was dictated by his anger because the sick man had not sat up. He turned around, reached for the ground, and I saw a mighty right swing coming my way. As I have said before, I was by then well versed in the art of evasive action, and I rocked on my heels, the blow missing the point of my chin by a fraction of an inch. Vern Baynes was not so fortunate and, quite unprepared, he took the full force of the blow on the jaw. He went down - and out. I often wonder whether he has ever forgiven me.

As with most bullies, Toyama was a rank coward. Our duties included checking the number of patients in the Cholera hospital, but he never went within 50 yards of the place. Each night he sent me in to do the check, and be accepted blindly the figures I gave him. Needless to say our count was always right, for I could fiddle the number on Cholera hill to suit our requirements. It is perhaps appropriate to mention here that Toyama did in fact suffer the fate that I wished on him that night. After the Jap surrender, having been found guilty of numerous beastly war crimes, he was executed by firing squad. I was required to submit evidence for his trial and even now, 28 years later, I feel absolutely no remorse in having done so. If ever a man deserved death it was he.

Toyama was not the only man afraid of the Cholera. We had in our camp two padres - Father Dolan, a Roman Catholic, and a Church of England Chaplain. Prior to the outbreak of hostilities I had been very impressed with the Church of England man. He had conducted a Church Parade for our Unit at Johore Bahru, and had delivered an address which I thought was most appropriate to the occasion. He had spoken in a manner which had obviously

appealed to the troops, and had the appearance of being a man's man. But at Shimo Sonkrai his feet turned to clay. Whereas Padre Dolan spent the greater part of his time in the Cholera hospital, ministering to all men irrespective of religion, the Church of England man, in all the time I was in that camp, never once set foot in the Cholera wards.

The food shortage also found a very senior officer wanting. We were now entirely dependent on man power for carriage of supplies and consequently the amount of rations available became more and more scanty. On 14 and 16 June teams of 80 men set off to carry supplies from the Burma border. The Japanese reduced the rations for sick men, allowing them only 9 ozs. of rice. The allowance for "fit" men was 15 ozs. and we were forced to make internal adjustments to the official Jap scale to allow a greater supply for the sick men, even though this meant reducing the share for the "fit" men. The supply of beans was further reduced and for over a month less than half a bag was issued daily for 1,650 men. It was about this time that an Australian Lieutenant Colonel arrived from Nike to take over command of our troops. One of his first acts was to issue an instruction that he was to receive double rations. The reason was, he said, "Someone must get back to tell the story of this bastardry and I am the one best qualified to do it." Despite protests he insisted on his order being carried out.

But the bastardry was not confined to the Nips on their side, nor to this particular officer on our side. One of our other ranks - a Private - decided to capitalise on the food shortage. He broke out of camp one night - an easy operation in the jungle camps where there was no fence round the compound - and stole and killed a Thai native's Yak. Making a number of trips he sold about 400 pounds of the flesh of the Yak to our meat-hungry men, charging the equivalent of one Australian pound in currency for each pound of flesh. This was bad enough, but far worse was to follow. To slaughter the Yak he had used a pick he had appropriated from the Japanese tool store, and he had left it at the site of the killing. To appreciate what followed it is necessary to understand that to the Japanese engineers responsible for building the railway each individual tool was as important to them as was an artillery regiment to the Army, a fighter to the Air Force, or a destroyer to the Navy. Each morning the various implements were issued to our troops going out to work on the railway, and as each party returned to camp they were required to carefully wash and dry each individual tool, which was then painstakingly checked into store. Naturally enough in these circumstances the fact that a pick was missing was discovered by the Japs the night after our Yak killer - I'll call him Yakkity for identification purposes - had borrowed it to make his kill. The last of the working parties didn't return until about 11.30 p.m., and it was after midnight when the tool shortage was discovered. Then all Hell broke loose - one could be forgiven for thinking we had mislaid a Jap battleship! All Company Commanders and OC's

of working parties were called out at 1 a.m. and thoroughly berated over the loss. We were told that there would be no food for anyone except men working on the railway and hospital patients too sick to leave their beds, until the pick was found. The theory was that everyone else was to look for the pick. Needless to say Yakkity did not own up. He didn't care one jot for the welfare of anyone other than his own self.

Breakfast time came and went, but there was no food except for the men who went out to work on the railway. In later years, after we were released from our incarceration at the end of the war, I was often asked to comment on the behaviour of those who had been P.O.W. In reply I would give as my opinion, and it was a matter to which I had given a great deal of thought after observing the actions and reactions of many men in those dark and difficult days, a belief that, in those circumstances, people could be divided into four main classifications - gold, silver, brass and dross. In the first category - the gold - were those who would do anything they could, at any time, to assist their fellow men, irrespective of cost or risk to themselves. In the second group - the silver - were those who would do anything they could to assist others, provided there was no great cost or risk to themselves. The third kind - the brass - were those who were interested only in their own welfare and would do all they could to advance it, short of causing injury or harm to others. Then there was the final bunch - the dross - consisting of those who were not only interested solely in their own welfare, but they would do all they could to advance their own selfish cause regardless of any inconvenience, injury, loss or hurt that might befall others as a result of their actions. I would place ten percent in the gold classification, fifty percent in the silver, thirty in brass and ten in dross.

Yakkity, of course, qualified as a full member of the "dross" class. Not only was he the direct cause of most of those in camp going without food, but he did nothing to correct the situation. In addition to the fact that he kept quiet about having purloined the pick, he did absolutely nothing towards recovering it. Instead, while most of the camp went hungry he and a few of his cronies gorged themselves on the last of the Yak meat. However, happenings such as these usually brought to light a member of the "gold" group, and on this occasion it was a Sjt. Cameron of the Australian Army Service Corps. He managed to find out where Yakkity had left the pick, found the spot and retrieved the priceless instrument. He then arranged to have it "found" under his bed space, and returned to the Nips. This was at 10.30 in the morning. The Japs punished him by making him stand in front of the guard-house, from then until 3.30 p.m. that afternoon, holding a heavy weight over his head at arms length. No rations were issued for lunch, and it was not until Sjt. Cameron's period of punishment was concluded that restrictions on the rest of the camp were lifted.

Yakkity's illegal activities did not stop at the killing of the Yak. Using the cash proceeds from the sale of the meat, he purchased the entire tobacco stock of a passing itinerant Thai trader. He then sold the tobacco to the many P.O.W. who craved a smoke, and, taking advantage of the fact that he had cornered the market, charged the equivalent of one pound in Australian currency for one ounce of tobacco. Those who had run out of cash - and there were many, for the 10 cents per day allowed to each man by the Japs did not last long - were allowed to purchase on signing I.O.U.'s payable in Australia after the war. Yakkity, and others of his ilk, collected I.O.U.'s for many thousands of pounds, but fortunately the Australian Government, on the return of the P.O.W. to Australia after the war, issued an instruction that the I.O.U.'s were not to be honoured.

Our medical problems continued and during the second week in July a total of 1,479 men were hospitalised out of the aggregate of just over 1,800 in the camp. After the early days of June the Cholera epidemic waned, and ceased to be a problem, but Malaria had started to appear, striking down more and more men. In the latter half of May more than 200 cases appeared and on 22 June 541 men were confined to hospital suffering from this disease. The period of disability lasted three or four days, but on 7 July there were still 475 cases in hospital, due to new cases and relapses. In addition it was estimated that at least 200 other patients who were admitted with Dysentery or other diseases, were also suffering from Malaria which occurred as an intercurrent infection. By 30 July there were fewer than 50 in the camp, out of the total strength of over 1,800, who had not had Malaria. I was one of those few, and I was fortunate enough not to contact the disease in the whole three and a half years that I was a P.O.W. I can only conclude that when the mosquitoes bit me they died.

Malaria and Dysentery were the commonest diseases - during my time at Shimo Sonkrai camp the daily average of Dysentery patients was 450 - but by mid-June Beri-beri had started to appear in increasing numbers following the reduction in the supply of beans, and from then on there were always 50 to 75 Beri-beri patients in hospital. Tropical ulcers, usually caused by scratches from bamboo, became common early in June, and by the end of July there were over 120 patients in hospital with this condition.

Keeping adequate records in these circumstances, failing provision by the Japanese of any writing material, was a difficult job, and in fact would have been an impossible one were it not for the use we made of bamboo. Within the hospital wards, all records were kept on bamboo slats, and it was only on discharge or death that a summary was transferred to my permanent files. Bamboo four to five inches in diameter was in abundant supply and from this bed pans were made. Smaller sizes were used for urine bottles. The walls of the huts were made of bamboo, and we slept on bamboo slats.

Many and varied were the eating utensils and food containers fashioned from this material. We even ate bamboo, in the form of shoots, but we did not know how to cook it properly and I never enjoyed it. Paths and drainage systems were also built from bamboo.

Not only did the Japs make no paper available for writing purposes. They failed to provide any for toilet use, and as a substitute large leaves from the jungle trees were pressed into service. I use the word "pressed" advisedly as this is the way we prepared them for use. In their fresh state they were not of much use, so we put them under our beds and the warmth of our bodies both dried them out and also flattened them for use. Keeping the hospital patients supplied was a major job and as the nearer trees were stripped of leaves within reach we had to go further and further afield each day to keep up the supply.

Inroads caused by illness of officers resulted in another reshuffle of duties and on 16 July 1943 I handed over the hospital work to Capt. Bob Howells of 2/30 Bn. and took up duties as Administrative Officer at Camp H.Q. In the six weeks that I had been at the hospital I had developed the greatest admiration for the work done by our Medicos. The skills they exhibited, their care of the sick, and the absolute dedication to duty displayed by each one of them were outstanding. Working with the small supplies of medicines and drugs we carried on the march, supplemented by a minute trickle from the Japanese, they effected cures in cases which seemed quite hopeless. Their reward must surely have been in the comparatively low death rate recorded in the camp. Although all but 50 of over 1,800 in the camp were hospitalised at least once in the ten weeks to the end of July, deaths numbered only 120 - and 101 of these were from Cholera.

The next 17 days were pure Hell for me due to the fact that as Admin. Officer at Camp H.Q. I was even more closely associated with that maniac Toyama. We were still quite unable to supply the number of workmen required by the Japanese Engineers, and I'm sure Toyama regarded me as being personally responsible for the shortfall - perhaps because I hadn't gotten the sick men out of hospital in numbers to suit him. On 16 July the I.J.A. had demanded 250 men for railway work, but we were unable to supply more than 212. This infuriated Toyama who demanded I prepare a statement showing exactly how we arrived at this number. I carefully compiled a parade state detailing the numbers sick in hospital, the number attending the sick, those employed on camp hygiene (all light duty men), cookhouse personnel and those such as myself employed on camp administration. The fact that only 212 of our men were available for railway work only enraged Toyama the more. He snatched the paper from my hand, tore it into shreds and threw them out of the door. Then he started to tell me, in his own language, exactly what he thought of me. From behind Toyama's back, where he apparently thought he

was safe, Mr. Korosayu, the civilian Japanese interpreter, was looking at me and tapping his head significantly. But Toyama must have had eyes in the back of his head. Turning round suddenly he caught poor Korosayu in the act, and flattened him with one blow. Korosayu was one of the few Japanese for whom I ever felt any sympathy.

The rain was still pouring down, the roads were still quite impassable to traffic, and we were still entirely dependent for our food on supplies carried from either Nike or the Burma border on the backs of our own men. With nearly 1,500 men in hospital the situation was really quite desperate. With work numbers so low even the Japs realised that something must be done and on 21 July there was revived an idea that was first mooted in late June. It had then been suggested, in view of the extent of sickness in the working camps and the extreme shortage of rations in the Sonkrai area, that a hospital camp might be established in Burma nearer the source of food supplies. It was proposed that such a hospital camp would hold 2,000 patients who would be of two classes - firstly men who were unlikely to recover from their present illnesses within two months, and secondly old men and those with permanent physical disabilities who were unfit for hard work. The patients would come from all the working camps in the Nike and Sonkrai areas where the men of "F" Force were situated.

The idea of the hospital camp was the brain-child of our senior medical officer - Bruce Hunt - who was informed on 24 July that Colonel Banno with Lieut. Saito, the prospective I.J.A. Commandant of the Burma Hospital camp, was proceeding forthwith to Burma to inspect the hospital site, and he was instructed to accompany them. This he did, returning on 26 July with the news that the hospital was to be on the site of an old working camp which was being renovated, that 500 men from our Sonkrai camp were to be transferred to the hospital camp, and that only men unlikely to recover within two months were to be included. Colonel Banno told Major Hunt that no move was likely for at least a week, but with typical Japanese cussedness plans were abruptly changed and on 30 July Bruce Hunt was suddenly summoned and informed that he must leave on foot for Burma with an advance party, within the hour. In addition to himself the advance party consisted of Capt. Frank Cahill as Medical Assistant, Capt. Stan Roberts as Hospital Messing officer and myself as Hospital Adjutant. We were also allowed to take a small party of other ranks. We marched out of No. 1 Camp, Shimo Sonkrai, at 1500 hours that afternoon, barefooted through the knee deep mud, carrying our small supply of personal belongings and protected from the still heavy rain by our groundsheets. The only other time I ever saw Shimo Sonkrai again was on Friday 26 November 1943 when we passed the camp site as, following completion of the railway, we journeyed by rail from Burma to Kanburi in Thailand on the first leg of our trip back to Changi.

CHAPTER V

TANBAYA HOSPITAL CAMP

3 August 1943 to 24 November 1943

It took us until 3 August to reach our destination - Tanbaya, in Burma. The first day we marched via the intervening camps to No. 5 Camp, where we stayed the night. This was the last of the "F" Force working camps, and the last in Thailand. It comprised English personnel and from here we were allotted a party of 40 all ranks to assist in renovation of the hospital camp and to prepare to house the patients. We left No. 5 Camp at 1300 hours on Saturday 31 July - by truck, to my surprise, for I found the roads roughly surfaced from here on. I was not aware at that time that "A" Force working from Burma since October 1942, had completed the railway from Thanbyuzayat to the Burma-Thai border and were now working into Thailand.

We arrived late that afternoon at Kando in Burma, after having travelled along the famed Three Pagodas Pass on the Burma-Thai border. To say that I was surprised when I actually saw the three Pagodas would be understating the case. In my younger days when I had done a little singing I had often attempted "The Road to Mandalay" and a picture of "the old Monlamein Pagoda", a grand and stately place of worship for the Burmese, was still fresh in my memory. In the event the three Pagodas in the Pass turned out to be facsimiles scarce 5 feet high, set at the edge of the road, side by side, so that the faithful could offer up their prayers on passing.

We were bedded down in a staging camp at Kando, but after an early reveille were on our way again, on foot, at 0430 hours the next morning. After marching ten kilometres we reached a Japanese camp where we were loaded onto trucks and transported another 21 kilos. to Ronshi. The new railway was in operation from Thanbyuzayat to this point, and after a meal at the local camp we were marched to the railway station for transport by train to Tanbaya. However, after a wait of several hours, during which no train appeared, we were sent back to the local camp.

We expected to move on again the next day but it passed without any sign that we would do so. However at 0900 the following morning we were on our way again, proceeding along the railway line, but on foot.

A few kilometres from Ronshi we came upon the reason why no trains were running. The railway crossed a fast-running river about 100 yards wide, and to our delight we saw our first evidence of effective action by our Air Force. Although the rails and sleepers were intact, the middle of the bridge, for a distance of about 20 yards, just wasn't there. Our pleasure at the partial destruction of the bridge was somewhat tempered by the fact that we found we had to negotiate the damaged portion by stepping from sleeper to sleeper. Held in position only by these sleepers the rails swayed violently, and this, combined with the rapid flow of the water only a few feet below, made progress quite hazardous. However we all got safely across and then proceeded without further incident to the hospital site at Tanbaya, 14 kilometres distant from Ronshi.

Our first sight of Tanbaya inspired no pleasure. It was, of course, still raining and due to a complete absence of drains, water was lying everywhere, and the huts looked to be in poor condition. There were no cooking facilities and we had no food, but after some delay our guards arranged for a supply of cooked rice for our lunch from a Japanese engineers' camp across the railway from our camp site. Immediately we had eaten we started working on a system of drains to take off the surface water, channelling it into a small creek, about six feet wide, which ran along one side of the camp site.

It was fortunate that we each carried our own bed-roll (I still had my down-filled sleeping bag) for on that first day at Tanbaya the Nips provided us with nothing apart from the empty huts. We borrowed the shovels and spades for making the drains from the engineers across the line who had provided the rice for our lunch, and we were indebted to them also for our evening meal, and for our breakfast the next day. However that same next day - Wednesday 4 August 1943 - things began to look up. We woke to find that, for the first time since 22 May, the rain had stopped, and we had only occasional showers during the day. Later in the morning 20 rice boilers arrived by rail from Thanbyuzayat, accompanied by an interim supply of rations, and we were able to set up our own kitchen for lunch. Over the next two days a large supply of food arrived by rail - 70 bags of rice, supplies of flour, sugar, salt and oil, and some dried fish. As was usual with the Nips they expected us to have the unloading of supplies completed before the train had even stopped, and it was a case of all hands to the pump. Nip guards with fixed bayonets lined the route from the railway to the camp, screaming at us to "speedo, speedo". A bag of rice weighs 220 pounds, and is not a light load even for a fully-fit man. In our somewhat debilitated condition it was an exceedingly heavy burden, and I was struggling through the mud with a bag humped across my shoulders when my foot slipped and I went down with the bag of rice on top of me. Immediately one of the Nip guards raced up and had a go at me with the butt of his rifle. Fortunately the bag of rice covered me,

and I hardly felt the blow, but rather incautiously, I told him what I thought of him. He immediately reversed his rifle and lunged at me with the bayonet, but again the bag of rice acted as a shield and all he did was to make a big hole in the bag and a very small cut on my leg. Rice flowed out of the bag, followed by a minute trickle of blood from my leg. Whether it was the loss of the rice or the sight of blood that prompted the Nip's next action, I don't know - I suspect it was the former, for loss of, or damage to food, was regarded as a crime in those days - but in any case he eased up the bag of rice and I struggled to my feet. There was no chance whatever of my lifting the bag onto my back - it had taken two men to do it at the railway truck - so I dragged it along through the mud, my load getting lighter all the way as the rice spilled out.

The main body of patients had not yet started to arrive, but already several of our working party had become ill, and by 7th August, only four days after our arrival, we had 14 hospital patients. Mostly they were cases of Malaria relapses, but several were seriously ill and on Friday, 13 August, we suffered our first deaths in this camp when a Private of the 2nd Loyals, an English regiment, and a Lance Corporal of the 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, a Scottish regiment, died. Burial in those conditions was an impossibility - we just did not have the fit men required to dig graves, and cremation, regardless of religion, was forced upon us. We had not then, nor at any time later, any Chaplain in Tanbaya camp, but before leaving Shimo Sonkrai I had obtained from the Anglican Chaplain a copy of a brief funeral service. I co-opted Warrant Officer John Kerr to assist me and together we built a funeral pyre. Fortunately the weather was clear that day and after reading the brief service adjusted for cremation, the two bodies were laid on the top of the pile of wood and bamboos and the fire was lit. Although I could not know it at the time I was to read that cremation service over a total of 660 bodies before I left Tanbaya.

I was walking past the fire a little later with our surgeon Frank Cahill, when Frank suddenly exclaimed, "My God, he's waving to us." It was almost literally true. Quite inexperienced in the art of cremation we had put the bodies on the pyre face-up, and, no doubt caused by the contraction of the sinews and tendons, one of the dead bodies had taken a sitting position and as we passed one arm slowly rose. We learned from experience and in all subsequent cremations the bodies were laid face-down.

The first batch of patients arrived by train from Ronshi, the Jap engineers having shown the same skill in repairing the rail bridge as they demonstrated in the Malayan campaign when there were a number of instances where they had re-opened bridges for traffic within a few hours of their being blown. Included among the new arrivals were a number of men who were very sick and within five days we had another two deaths. A fresh outbreak of Cholera in Thailand resulted in all movement being held up for a couple

of days, but on 21 August another party of 50 patients arrived, and we also suffered another death. Rain had started again two days previously and was still falling heavily, and it took us a great deal of time getting the cremation fire burning fiercely enough to overcome the rain.

Between 21 August and 7 September 16 more parties arrived. The condition of many of the patients on arrival was deplorable. Many were in their final days of life, with absolutely no hope of survival. Two men in Number 10 party died en route and were buried at the side of the railway at the next halt. Numbers 11, 12, 13, and 15 parties all had some patients dead on arrival at camp - a total of eleven men in all. Altogether the intake at Tanbaya was 1924 men, and of these 660 had died by 24 November. It will be seen that the hopes at first held for the success of the hospital camp were not realised. 660 deaths in three and a half months out of a total of one thousand nine hundred and twenty-four men grimly summarises the whole ghastly story. My daily diary entries recorded the pitiful details. I'll not go through them all day by day, but the entries in seven days in September provide an epitome:

Sunday, 19 September	2 amputations, 18 deaths, Beri-beri increasing - wet.
Monday, 20 September	Major Hunt submits request for immediate supplies Vitamin B1, drugs, etc. - 2 amputations - 17 deaths - showery.
Tuesday, 21 September	Copy of Major Hunt's letter forwarded to Nike - 1 amputation - notification of probable inspection on 23 September by General of I.J.A. medical services - 14 deaths - fining.
Wednesday, 22 September	Major Hunt asks for more beans - issue increased to one bag - 9 deaths - showery.
Thursday, 23 September	Visit of I.J.A. medical General postponed 24 hours - 6 deaths - showery.
Friday, 24 September	7 deaths - fine.
Saturday, 25 September	Visit by I.J.A. medical Colonel - 12 deaths - weather fine.

Some amplification of these brief entries is, I think, necessary. The 18 deaths on 19 September was not the greatest on any one day, 19 having occurred on 6 September. Between 13 August and 24 November the average was

more than 6 deaths per day. I'll not attempt to describe the grisly job of cremating as many as 19 bodies in one day, but as can be imagined it was a heartbreaking task. I imagine that an Undertaker's work becomes quite impersonal, for he deals in the main, with unknown bodies. For me, however, the situation was quite different. Each man had been a comrade in arms, many were lads from my own Unit, quite a few were personal friends. I took great care to recover some token ashes for each of the deceased and these were placed in a bamboo container and buried in a tiny plot - 18 inches by 12 inches - with each plot marked by a small cross. One of my Sigs. lads - Bernie Hensby - made a coloured drawing of the area and on an attached plan I recorded full details relating to each token grave site. This information, together with that relating to the Shimo Sonkrai cemetery, and a later one at Kanburi I handed in at A.I.F. Headquarters on my subsequent return to Changi and, I understand, ultimately all were used by the War Graves Commission.

The five amputations referred to in the diary entries were some of a total of forty resulting from tropical ulcers. These occurred very frequently and followed upon small scratches or cuts, the skin of many of the P.O.W. appearing to possess little or no resistance to infecting organisms. Quite a large proportion of the ulcers were of horrifying severity - huge areas of skin, flesh, and in some cases bone, were eaten away. Although Tanbaya was supposed to be a hospital camp no drug supplies of any kind were received from the Japanese until 5th November - three months after the hospital was established and only 19 days before the main body of surviving patients was evacuated. The only dressings available were those made from the clothes of dead men, and in most cases the ulcers were bandaged with banana leaves. In the absence of suitable drugs the only treatment available was scraping away of the putrid flesh with a spoon - an agonising process for the patient. It was not uncommon for blowflies to lay their maggots in ulcer wounds, a happening which was usually welcomed by the sick for the maggots ate only the purulent flesh and disposed of it in a much less painful way than the scraping with a spoon.

In these conditions it is not surprising that the only hope of saving the lives of a large proportion of the ulcer patients lay in amputation. Most ulcers occurred in the lower leg, and particularly in the region of the tibia. The ulcer wound spread with ferocious speed and often extended from ankle to knee. In these cases amputation above the knee was imperative. We had a first-class surgeon in the person of Frank Cahill, but he had no operating instruments. The Japs were unable to supply any, but agreed that Frank could visit an "A" Force camp at the 45 kilo. mark to endeavour to obtain some. He was successful in borrowing most of the essentials but could not get a surgical saw. A further appeal to our own Jap guards failed, but again the Nip engineers at the camp across the railway came to our aid, agreeing to make a carpenter's panel saw available from three to four p.m. each day.

There was an acute shortage of trained medical orderlies, Frank Cahill's only qualified assistant being a sergeant from the Australian Army Medical Corps. Had our family finances been sufficient to cover the costs involved, I would dearly have liked to study medicine myself, but the cold facts were that it was not possible for me to stay at school beyond third year at High School, and "Dr. Stahl" was an impossible dream. However, in the conditions existing at Tanbaya Frank readily accepted my offer to help in any way I could and in fact I became one of his assistants at every operation, and also at several post mortems he performed.

The "Operating Theatre" was a small hut, about ten feet square, with bamboo sides and a floor of bamboo slats. The roof was of Atap. The operating table was made from bamboo, with the top also of bamboo slats. Outside the door we built a fire to boil the water in which we sterilized the instruments, including the Japanese saw. Fortunately, included in the medical supplies laboriously carried from Changi and husbanded so carefully there was some Pentothal and Chloroform. The former was used by the anaesthetist, Capt. E.J. Emery, R.A.M.C., to induce unconsciousness, the patients then being kept under by ether. Even in those daunting circumstances the skill of Capt. Emery in anaesthesia was so great that no amputation patient - and many of these patients were appalling anaesthetic risks - died during the operation.

No praise can be too high for the work done by Frank Cahill in those primitive conditions. Looking back on the circumstances under which he worked (he actually fell through the bamboo-slat floor in the middle of one operation) one wonders that he had any success at all. Altogether he carried out 40 amputations - 39 legs and 1 arm. But he operated against almost hopeless odds. His patients were all grossly undernourished, being long deprived of adequate protein and vitamins. They had been forced to labour outrageously long hours in mud and filth, they were constantly exposed to trauma and infection, but deprived of adequate drugs and dressings. It is little wonder that ulceration and gangrene spread like wildfire and that by the time they reached the operating table their resistance to infection had already been reduced to a very low level.

Despite this not one patient died during an operation. Sepsis in the stump was, however, extremely common, and one patient died within 24 hours of the operation. Four more died during the next six days and thereafter the death rate steadily rose. Intercurrent disease was particularly lethal among the amputees and finally only four of the forty survived. Small though this proportion might appear, it was nevertheless a major triumph for the surgeon for had the operations not been performed not one of the forty could have survived.

From the diary entry for 22nd September it will be seen that on that day Major Hunt asked for more beans and he succeeded in having the daily issue raised from one-third of a bag to one bag. The diet at Tanbaya, far from being better than at the working camps, as had been promised, was for a long period considerably worse. Rice was, in general, in adequate supply, but every other essential for a complete diet was grossly deficient. In particular, until the bean ration was raised on 22 September, the rations supplied contained practically no vitamin B or C. Innumerable protests and requests for rice polishings and for more beans were made to the I.J.A., but always met the answer that all the rice polishings available were required for the Japanese Army horses and that there was a great shortage of beans which were being reserved for the camps further from the railhead. In view of this we were more than mildly interested when we learned, on October 19th, that the "A" Force Hospital camp, situated only 5 kilos away from our own, had been receiving an adequacy of beans since its formation in July. We pointed this out with some force to the I.J.A. Camp Commandant and he raised our issue from one bag to two and a half bags forthwith. We knew from past experience that a portion of our rations always disappeared en route from source of supply and ultimate delivery to us, and it was now apparent that the Jap administration at Tanbaya camp was no better, in this regard, than had been the case at the working camps. With food in short supply for the civilian population it was easy for the Japs to line their pockets at the expense of the P.O.W.

Naturally the Japanese wished to keep this blackmarket trading with the Burmese natives as their own private lurk, and they took a very dim view of any effort by the P.O.W. to trade with the civilian population. Contact with the natives in any way except on officially authorised buying parties, was strictly prohibited. Some of the more adventurous P.O.W. were prepared to risk the wrath of the Nips, if caught, and ignored the prohibition. At first our guards were content to rough-up any offenders they caught, but they soon became bored with this and, in characteristic fashion, they handed the responsibility over to our own camp administration, threatening to cut out the buying parties if unauthorised contact with the natives continued. This was a very serious matter for us, for we depended on the buying parties for such small purchases as we could afford of extra food for our patients, particularly, for example, eggs which were naturally never on our official ration issue but provided a valuable source of protein and vitamins for sick men. Funds for these purchases were obtained from several sources. The Japanese allowed the fit men 10 cents a day as working pay, and officers received 25 cents per day. (The money was paper currency, specially printed by the Japanese for the occupied countries.) All those receiving pay contributed ten percent to the camp messing fund and officers, in addition, donated the balance of their pay over 10 cents a day. A canteen was established from which all ranks could make purchases with their

nine cents per day net. The small profit made by the canteen was also used to augment the "special messing" fund.

It will be seen, therefore, that any threat to the official "buying party" was a threat to the welfare of every man in camp, and we could not afford to have selfish individuals (the "dross" of Tanbaya camp) endangering the continuance of the venture. But our powers of dissuasion in those circumstances were extremely limited. We could fine a transgressor and make an entry of this in his paybook, but to a man interested only in his own welfare, with no certainty that he would even survive to return to Australia, the prospect of a £5 fine in his pay book meant less than nothing as a deterrent. We couldn't gaol an offender, for we had no means of detention, and we couldn't confine him to barracks, because nobody got any leave in any case. And so, when our only available means - persuasion - failed, and our buying party was cancelled following the Nips catching another of our troops redhanded, we adopted a very drastic solution - corporal punishment. This, of course, had long been banned, but in the circumstances then existing its reintroduction as a temporary measure was considered fully justified. After ensuring that all in camp had been adequately warned, and the period for which the Japs had banned the buying party having expired, everyone knew what the penalty would be for illegal contact with the natives. Even so it was not long before another offender was caught by the Japs and handed over to camp administration for punishment. A parade of all fit men in camp was called and the delinquent was given two strokes with a cane on his bare buttocks. I doubt that the caning, administered by an officer from the culprit's own Unit, caused much physical pain, but the humiliation and ignominy he suffered, coupled with the scorn his comrades showed for his despicable behaviour, proved to be quite salutary, and thenceforth we had no necessity to have recourse to that type of medicine at Tanbaya, although as will be seen it had to be used again for an even more serious offence some time later at Kanburi.

The "dross" at Tanbaya were not confined to those who broke camp to trade with the natives, and included in this class, were both officers and other ranks. One officer was known as "Swill-pit Annie" to the men in the camp because of his daily habit of foraging through the swill pit in the hope of finding something edible. When one remembers that rations were always in short supply and that every scrap of what could normally be considered as usable material was invariably utilised in the cookhouse in food preparation, it will be realised that what was discarded as refuse really was unusable. But this did not deter "Swill-pit Annie". It is an unfortunate fact that in the P.O.W. camps, where human nature was exposed in all its complexities, the proportion of officers who failed to line up to their responsibilities was little, if any, better than that of the other ranks who also comprised the "dross" class. On one occasion, our ration supply

included some prawns. By the time they reached us, having travelled in open rail trucks in the heat of the sun, they were putrid and fly-blown. The medicos decided, however, that the flesh was still edible and a valuable source of protein, so the maggots were washed off, the prawns were shelled and the flesh cooked and served to all in camp. It was horrible, and tasted like ammonia smells, but on the doctor's advice we forced it down. The shells, of course, were thrown on the swill pit. One of the men saw in this a great opportunity. He recovered the shells, pounded them into a fine grit, and sold it as "meal" to some of the patients in the hospital wards. Included in the buyers were many Dysentery patients, and the effect on them can well be imagined. But the vendor couldn't care less. That he had acquired some purchasing power at the cost of pain, suffering and possibly even death of some sick comrades disturbed him not one whit.

The heavy rain had eased during August, and the latter part of the month was quite fine. The first half of September saw a resumption of showery weather, but by the end of the third week the conditions were fine again and the rains had gone. We were very happy about this as the ground dried out and movement round the camp area - and maintenance of the cremation fire - became much easier. Our pleasure was short-lived however. We were dependent for our water supply on a small creek which formed one boundary of the camp area. On Sunday 10 October the flow of water, which had been quite strong, showed signs of diminishing and when morning broke on Tuesday 12 October we found the creek to be quite dry. Our cookhouse was situated on the creek bank for ease of supply of water and the sudden drying-up of the creek caused us a major headache. The nearest available source of supply was another creek, still running well, located about a quarter of a mile from the camp site. Faced as we were with a chronic shortage of fit men and with no wheeled transport of any kind available, we found the man-handling of a sufficient quantity of water from this creek to the camp to be quite impracticable. There was only one solution and that was to move the cookhouse to the second creek. This was done, and although it involved the carrying of the dry rations and the cooked food, to and from the cookhouse over the extra quarter mile each way the task was accomplished each day with the assistance of all fit personnel of all ranks.

The respite provided by the second creek was shortlived. By 18 October it showed the same slackening in the flow that had heralded the end of the water in the first creek, and by 21 October it too was completely dry. The Japanese approved the move of the cookhouse to a permanent river about another 300 yards from the camp, and by 22 October we had re-established the kitchen there. About 100 yards downstream from the cookhouse we had our daily baths, and early in November one of our officers expressed great concern because, he said, the level of the water in the river was also falling.

As the river was a good 10 yards wide, and quite deepish, we asked him on what premises he based his statement. "Well," he said, "the first day we bathed here I stood on this stone and water just reached the tip of my John Thomas - now it's two inches below it." This was too much for Stan Roberts who countered, "Come off it brother - the first day you were here you were singing about the Rose of Tralee and her great beauty, and today you are down in the dumps and wondering whether you will ever see Australia again - quite frankly I don't think you can rely on your measuring apparatus."

On Saturday 23 October the Japanese instructed Major Hunt to survey all those in camp, and to report to them the number of men who could be regarded as fully fit. So far as we could gather the railway was about to be completed and the Nips were planning to return to Changi the survivors of "D", "F", and "H" Forces, the responsibility for these parties, despite the fact that we were so far away, having remained under the control of the Japanese P.O.W. Administration in Singapore. No wonder we had found it so difficult to get anything done to improve the supply of drugs and food, or in our living conditions! Major Hunt supplied the Japs with details of fit men on 28 October and, in response to another I.J.A. request, he provided information as to the likely number of patients who could be safely moved in the following weeks. On 12 November the Nips advised us that the railway had been damaged and that rations then on hand would have to be stretched to last five days. The prospect of still less to eat gave us no joy, but we were cheered by the further evidence of successful activity on the part of the allied Air Force. Despite the damage to the railway, planning for the move continued and on 16 November I started on the preparation of nominal rolls, in parties of fifty. Once again we all suffered "glass-rodding" and blood tests prior to the move. The supply of rations was resumed on 17 November - I was interested to note that the forecast of 5 days as necessary for repairs had proved correct - and on 19 November the Japs advised that the first 200 of those to be returned to Singapore would leave the next day.

So began the evacuation of the main body from Tanbaya. Over the next five days 944 all ranks entrained for Kanburi in Thailand, which proved to be the point of concentration of the working parties from "D", "F", and "H" Forces.

The Tanbaya Hospital Camp could not by any stretch of imagination, be considered as a success. It will be remembered that the reason for its establishment was that it would be in an area close to the source of supplies, so that food and drugs would be more freely available and so enable the patients sent there - men unlikely to be fit for work under two months - to effect recovery from their illnesses in much better conditions than those

obtaining in the railway working camps. The reality proved to be quite different. Of the total camp intake of 1928, the sick men numbered 1781, and to care for them the Nips allowed 138 all ranks, of whom only 8 were medicos. An additional 4 officers and 5 other ranks were permitted for camp administration. The work load on the fit men was therefore very high, and practically all were incapacitated at some time or other. Far from supplies of drugs and food being better the reverse was, for a long time, the case. No drugs at all were received from the Japanese until 5th November, three months after the camp was established and only three weeks before the main body was evacuated, and by which time 574 men had died. As mentioned previously the total death roll to 24 November was 661 a further 87 having died between 5 and 24 November.

So far from the diet being better than at the working camps it was for a long time considerably worse. Rice was generally in adequate supply but it was always polished rice, and although as previously mentioned, numerous requests were made for rice polishings with their valuable vitamin B content, regular supplies were not received until 26 October. In addition to the basic rice issue, supplementary foodstuffs in the form of onions, sweet potatoes, pumpkins and dried beans were issued in small quantities, and occasionally dried whalemeat, dried fish or dried seaweed was added. And there was, of course, the one notable issue of prawns!! Until nearly the end of October, however, the camp diet was highly deficient in all vitamins, and to a lesser degree, lacking in protein. When to these deficiencies was added the dearth of drugs it is little wonder that 661 of the already badly weakened patients failed to survive, or that when we left on Wednesday 24 November 1943 we were forced to leave behind 218 patients who were too sick to travel and of whom it was thought not more than 50% could survive. Five medical and administrative officers and 96 other ranks for medical and general camp work remained with this party, the survivors of which were sent to Kanburi in April 1944.

No, Tanbaya was not a success, and our only regrets as we departed were for the dead we left behind.

CHAPTER VI

THE RAILWAY - KANBURI

30 November 1943 to 25 April 1944

The journey from Tanbaya to Kanburi was a very uncomfortable one, for several reasons. We travelled in open trucks, thirty three men to a truck, and the train took from 11 o'clock on the night of 24 November to 10 in the morning of 30 November to cover the distance of approximately 250 miles. The train stopped often and for long periods, and we were frequently side-tracked. The supply of food was irregular, poor in quality and minimal in amount. No-one could lie down, for there was barely room to sit, and what sleep we did get was taken in a sitting position. And always in the forefront of our minds was the knowledge that our boys, in building the railway, had done all they could to sabotage the operation. Particularly were we conscious of this as we crossed the many high bridges. Built entirely of wood with not one nail used in their construction - wooden pegs took their place - they swayed ominously as the train crossed, and the sight of several crashed trucks at the bottom of one deep chasm did nothing to inspire confidence. However, we reached our destination without major mishap, but dirty, unshaven, bleary eyed, with the fit men close to exhaustion and many of the sick again prostrate. Two had failed to survive the five and a half day journey, which had taken three days more than the Japs had said it would.

Within a few days the remnants of "F" Force had been brought together at Kanburi, and the sorry story of the Force began to emerge. It transpired that of the 7,000 men of "F" Force who left Singapore in the latter half of April 1943, by the end of November of that year 3,100 were dead, just upon 3,000 were in various hospitals, and the number of reasonably fit men did not exceed 900. In these circumstances I considered myself fortunate to have survived with nothing more serious than a fever at Tanbaya which Bruce Hunt had clinically diagnosed as a mild Scrub Typhus, and the incidence of some blind spots in my eyes, more marked in the right eye than in the left. Much later we were to learn that the railway cost the lives of 80,000 natives, 20,000 prisoners of war and 200 Japanese.

My friend, Ben Barnett, had arrived at Kanburi late in the night of 30 November and we both received orders to rejoin the C.O. of our Unit, he also having returned to Kanburi from up country. The Nips had decided to

send two parties of 500 each back to Singapore - with only 900 reasonably fit men left in "F" Force some of these obviously had to be selected from the less sick of the hospitalised men - and Ben and I were allotted to No. 2 party. No. 1 party left on 2 December, but before No. 2 departed both Ben and I were removed from the party - I suspect it was arranged by Bruce Hunt - and transferred to the hospital staff, Ben as Quartermaster and myself as Registrar. The hospital was not in good shape. As had been the case when we passed through Kanburi on the march up country, water was in very short supply. Firewood was scarce and latrines grossly inadequate. The situation with food, however, was much improved as compared with our experience up country. Although the rations issued by the Japanese were still not much above subsistence level, there were available locally abundant supplies of bananas and eggs, and a canteen was established through which these could be purchased. On occasions, too, native traders would appear selling small fresh fish which we found most palatable. In the four months I spent at Kanburi I recovered a good deal of the weight I had lost up country.

On 14 December the Japs advised that all of the remaining personnel of "F" Force who were fit to move would be returned to Singapore, and the remaining sick men would be moved to a hospital to be established in a camp situated nearer to Kanburi township, which had previously been occupied by fit men. Those nominated for Singapore moved out by train over the next four days, leaving a total strength in camp of sick men, medicos, nursing orderlies and administrative personnel, of 710. This remnant of "F" Force consisted of both Australians and English troops, and included, in addition to Ben and me, my stalwart friend Stan Roberts with whom I had been so closely associated at Adam Park, Shimo Sonkrai and Tanbaya camps. Hutted accommodation in the camp to which we moved on 19 December being insufficient to meet the needs of all, I spent the next four months sharing a tent with Bruce Hunt, Ben, Frank Cahill, Stan Roberts, and George Gwynne, a delightful Perth man who was a Captain in 2/4th Machine Gun battalion, and who had been with us at Shimo Sonkrai and Tanbaya, where he had done an outstanding job as a Wardmaster.

On the night of the day we moved into the new camp we had our first air raid alert. Allied planes were overhead from 15 minutes after midnight until four in the morning. Nearby anti-aircraft batteries opened fire, but no bombs were dropped in our area and we assumed the planes were raiding Bangkok. The Nip sentries just about went berserk. They were all third line troops and none had seen active service. Although "lights out" was at 10 p.m. and the camp had been in darkness since then the Nips charged about the camp, flashing powerful torches and shrieking "lights out - all lights out." One even jumped on a mosquito coil, its glow so tiny that it couldn't be seen more than five yards away. His performance was so ludicrous that we couldn't contain our laughter, but we soon changed our tune, for he wasn't amused and started swinging his rifle butt in the darkness with rare abandon. There were quite a few more alerts before I finally left Kanburi for Singapore on

25 April '44 but no bombs were dropped in our area. Those who stayed in the Kanburi district after we left were not so fortunate, and between September and December 1944 over 170 prisoners of war were killed in allied air raids, and some 550 wounded. The railway yards at Kanburi and the river bridge at nearby Tamarkan (the "Bridge on the River Kwai") were prime targets for our bombers and with the siting of P.O.W. camps in the area it was inevitable that casualties would be suffered. By February 1945 the bridge had been completely destroyed.

The medical situation was still grim in December 1943, and in the last two weeks of that month we had 66 deaths. Thereafter the rate gradually slackened, but before I left Kanburi my death register contained over 220 names. No longer did I have to read the burial service, for we had two English padres in camp. One of these was the Rev. Noel Duckworth, who pre-war had coxed the Cambridge crew in the annual boat race against Oxford. He was rather diminutive in size - I'm sure he would have been too short to qualify as a combatant - but that was the only thing about him that was small. He had a big heart, a big voice, and a big appeal to most of the troops, with whom he was able to converse in their own language. Affectionately known as "Ducky", he was liked and respected by all, and he was one of only a very few of his profession whose performance as a P.O.W. came in for no criticism from those very good judges - the soldiers to whom he ministered.

The major medical problem at Kanburi was the paucity in the supply of drugs. As will be seen later, we were able to augment food supplies, but the quantity of drugs received from the Japanese at no time even approached the level required for proper medical care. It was a combination of these two circumstances - availability of extra food, and shortage of medical supplies - which led to the second flogging episode. The native Thais had the food to sell, but they too were desperately short of medicines. They were happy to exchange food for clothing, but by this time few of the men in camp had any garb other than what they stood up in - and in most cases that was mighty little. With the great majority of P.O.W. all valuable personal belongings had long ago been traded, and most relied for extra food on the "working pay" of 10 cents per day allowed by the Japanese. As had been the case up country, officers contributed their pay above 10 cents per day to buy extra food for the sick, so all fit men in camp, whether other ranks or officers, were on the same basis so far as private purchases were concerned. It was in these circumstances that it was discovered that our already meagre supply of drugs was being eroded by theft. Accounting for our small stock had always been carefully maintained - all drug requisitions were checked and countersigned by the O.C. hospital before completion, and this system not only ensured a just distribution of drugs between various wards, but also the conservation of the precious supply.

When it became apparent that some of the drugs were being used illegally - obviously for sale to the local natives - all in camp were informed

that the offender, when caught, would be dealt with most severely and the men were asked to inform camp administration if they knew which of their number had so little regard for the welfare of the sick men that he would steal drugs so vital to their recovery. The warning proved ineffective for the next day a bottle of 500 Quinine tablets disappeared from store. The appeal to the general body of men, however, did produce a result and camp administration was informed quite quickly of the name of the thief. Learning that he was about to be apprehended the offender sought to dispose of the evidence by dropping the tablets down a latrine, thus making an odious crime even more heinous. He was charged, tried and found guilty, and was given twelve strokes on the bare buttocks in front of a parade of all fit men in camp. Though I played no part in the decision to inflict this form of punishment, I would have supported it had I been consulted, and I believe that the great majority of those in camp considered that the punishment fitted the crime. In the event, it proved to be effective, and we had no more trouble with thefts of drugs.

It was through purchases in Kanburi town that we officially augmented our food supplies. The Japanese allowed our messing officer - my good friend Stan Roberts - to go into town under escort where he purchased provisions from a Thai merchant named Boonpong. Mr. Boonpong was a very brave gentleman who acted as an Allied agent at the risk, of course, of his own safety and well-being. He passed to us money and messages and kept us well informed as to the progress of the war. Whenever possible Stan Roberts took another of our officers with him when he visited Mr. Boonpong and it was the job of this officer to keep the escort occupied whilst Stan did his business with Mr. Boonpong. I went with Stan on Friday 31 December 1943 but my task wasn't a very onerous one. The two Jap guards were too busy filling their bellies at the expense of Mr. Boonpong to take much notice of what Stan was doing as he went about making his purchases. Unfortunately a pro-Japanese Thai informed on Mr. Boonpong and Stan Roberts was taken away by the Kempetai - the Jap secret police - for questioning. But Stan was a tough and courageous man, and although he was severely beaten by the Japanese with a baseball club, and returned to us with his back and arms grossly swollen and black and blue, the Nips got no information from him. They apparently failed to secure any evidence about Mr. Boonpong, who continued his activities, although on a reduced scale. Unfortunately he was shot by the Japanese just prior to their surrender, but although he was hit by three bullets he fortunately survived. He now conducts a business in Bangkok, and quite a number of Australian P.O.W. have visited him in post-war years to express their appreciation. I saw him in 1965 and we still keep in touch.

As I have said, life at Kanburi was much easier than it had been up country, and one day was much like the one before and the one to follow, the care of the sick being our prime responsibility. Deaths still averaged

four a day during December but the rate gradually decreased thereafter. Even so I recorded over 220 deaths during our stay at Kanburi. Life was not really difficult for me there, so I was surprised when a medical check by Bruce Hunt disclosed that I had sustained a Cardiac Beri Beri, or enlarged heart due to lack of vitamins. However, with light duty and rest the condition gradually cleared up, and by the time we were advised of our return to Changi I was O.K. again.

By mid-April deaths among the survivors of "F" Force had practically ceased, and the Nips decided to return us all to Changi. We travelled by train in two parties. With Bruce Hunt and Stan Roberts I left on Anzac Day - 25 April - and Ben Barnett followed the day after. Again we travelled in all-metal rice trucks and conditions were, if anything, even more crowded than when we had travelled up from Singapore a year earlier. We still had 28 people in each truck, but on this occasion we had at least one stretcher case per truck. The engine on our train was showing signs of long usage without proper maintenance and despite three runs at it, could not pull the train up the hill outside Ipoh. Ultimately all fit men were ordered out of the trucks to push, and with this help the engine finally made the grade. Nip food supplies on the journey were infrequent and small, but we were greatly helped by the native population in both Thailand and Malaya, many of whom braved the wrath of the Jap guards to pass supplies of fresh fruit to us.

I arrived back at Changi, followed a day later by Ben Barnett, on 28 April 1944 and we rejoined what remained of our Unit at Selarang barracks. We had been away one year and ten days, during which one half of those who comprised "F" Force had died, so we counted ourselves lucky to still be numbered among the living.

CHAPTER VII

CHANGI

28 April 1944 to 31 March 1945

The camp conditions to which we returned were very different from those we left a little more than a year previously. The eastern tip of Singapore Island had been vacated and the Japanese had begun construction of an aerodrome. As P.O.W. were carrying out the necessary works, the Japs made no reference to the true nature of the project but euphemistically referred to the task as being one of "ground levelling". All the P.O.W. had been concentrated in the Selarang area and on the playing fields on the opposite side of Changi Road where a large number of huts had been erected. Living conditions were much improved, those of our technical men who had been left at Changi having done, under the direction of the 2 i/c of our Unit, Major Reg Bridgland, a particularly fine job. No longer did we have to rely on oil lamps for lighting, for the electricity supply had been re-established, the Nips having approved a limited service in all buildings, and when I returned from Thailand our boys had just completed the necessary wiring to restore the supply. Cigarette smokers who previously had had to rely on burning rope ends to light their fags could now do so merely by pressing a button at public cigarette-lighting points, upon which the element of the lighter glowed brightly. Steel cooking and eating gear had been manufactured from old steel lockers, using a welding machine put together by our P.O.W. technicians. A machine for crushing grass to produce raw grass soup - vital for treatment of eye troubles caused by avitaminosis - had been constructed, and, most outstanding achievement, a fluoroscopic screen and X-ray machine had been fabricated.

With the restoration of the electrical supply there was no longer any need to purloin batteries from Japanese trucks to activate our secret radios, and a daily bulletin with the latest news was clandestinely circulated. It was a full news service, as our operators listened regularly to services from Australia, America, Europe and even Japan. Needless to say our radio operators constantly ran the risk of discovery and shortly before my return had had another narrow escape. The Nips swooped one evening - obviously on information from a collaborator - but fortunately drew a blank. The "Bird", as it was known, had been removed only a few hours previously, for technical adjustment.

A major amenity and morale booster was provided by the A.I.F. Concert Party. A permanent stage with backstage appurtenances had been built and the shows were truly professional. I still marvel at the magnificent scenery and costumes those concert boys improvised. In addition to the shows at the "theatre" the concert party performed at least once a week in the hospital wards, and no preise can be too high for the work those lads did in maintaining morale in a camp where the large majority were unfit.

Following a medical examination and a visit to the eye specialist on my return to Changi it was found that my eyes had been affected by retrobulbar neuritis, due to shortage of vitamins in the diet, and I was instructed to drink one pint of grass soup per day. It was particularly horrible, being literally the uncooked extract obtained by crushing raw grass. But it was well worthwhile, for it stabilised the condition and prevented further deterioration. From a carefully-hoarded store of Marmite I was also given one teaspoon per day for four weeks and this also played a big part in stabilising my eye condition.

Two days before I arrived back from Thailand the Japanese had advised our administrative H.Q. that all P.O.W. were to be concentrated in and around Changi gaol. They also notified us that officers and other ranks would probably be separated. Until this time the civilian internees had been housed in the gaol, but they were now moved to Sime Road Camp in Singapore. As accommodation in the gaol itself was very limited - it had been built to house a few hundred Asiatic and 24 European prisoners it was necessary not only to allot three P.O.W. to each Asiatic cell and four to each European cell, but to erect hutted accommodation both within the gaol walls and on the adjacent outside area. A large proportion of these huts were those then standing on the playing field area at Selarang. These had to be dismantled and transported by trailer parties to the gaol and there re-erected. In addition many new huts had to be built. As the Nips would not reduce the number of "ground-levelling" workers, and it was imperative to maintain our gardening area - this was now quite extensive and an important source of a sizeable portion of our ration supply - the work load on the remaining P.O.W. was very heavy indeed. Nevertheless the move, which started on 4th May, was completed by 31 May. The more seriously ill men in the hospital were sent to Kranji, and a hospital of reduced size to cater for light sick, malaria cases, etc., was established outside the gaol walls. I personally had moved into the gaol - European cell No. 24 on 9th May, having been appointed as Administrative Officer to Lt. Col. "Bill" Jeater who commanded a composite battalion. I lived in that cell for six weeks with three of my friends and then, the Japs having decided that the officers were to be quartered separately from the men, I moved to the Asiatic warders' quarters outside the gaol, where I shared a room with Ben Barnett and Jim Hardacre. The Japanese guards and administrative staff lived in the European warders' quarters, a double line of houses running the length of the

northern side of the gaol. Lieutenant Takahashi, the Camp Commandant, lived in one of these houses, sharing it with his pet monkey. The monkey often sat on a post fronting the road along which our boys walked when moving between the gaol and the outside hutted area and many of them took a perverse delight in throwing the animal an impeccable salute as they passed, with the greeting "Good day Lieutenant Takahashi". We learned from some of the guards that Takahashi was aware of this pantomime but he wisely never let on to us until some time later when he handed over command of the camp to Lieut. Wokabyashi. He then told us that he was leaving and "the other Lieut. Takahashi was going with him".

I spent the next ten months at Changi, living a reasonably ordered existence. Compared with life on the railway job, Changi was a haven of peace. My contact with the Japs at this stage was minimal. My quarters, though austere, were waterproof, and although I was occupied all day my work was neither heavy nor difficult. Until 30 September I continued my administrative work, but the Nips having decided to separate officers entirely from other ranks at that date I thenceforth worked in the camp gardens until the end of March 1945. The camp gardens were now quite extensive and were becoming increasingly important as a source of food supplies. The Japs progressively reduced the rice ration, blaming difficulties in supply, and by mid-March 1945 the issue was down to less than eight ozs. per man per day. The balance of the official issue consisted of six ozs. of root vegetables, meat or fish, $1\frac{1}{2}$ ozs., sugar $\frac{1}{2}$ an oz., oil 7/10ths of an oz., and tea 1/7th of an oz. In addition there was a firewood issue of 21 ozs. per man. It will be seen that the produce from our own gardens provided a much needed and valuable addition to the official ration issue. A sample menu at this time would be, for each person: Breakfast – $\frac{3}{4}$ pint of Pap (a weak porridge made from crushed rice); Lunch – $\frac{1}{2}$ pint of boiled rice, $\frac{1}{2}$ pint of stew (so-called) consisting mainly of boiled vegetables; Evening meal – $\frac{1}{2}$ pint of hash, $\frac{3}{4}$ pint of stew, 2 small rice cakes. A mug of tea was available with each meal. It will be seen that the diet was rather meagre, but the greater threat was the deficiency in vitamins. Although the commonest diseases requiring hospitalisation were dysentery and malaria there were, in the nine-month period June 1944 to March 1945, 6,755 fresh cases of deficiency diseases treated in out-patient clinics, and this out of an average camp population of 10,000. The price of foodstuffs for private purchase rose continually. Coconuts, which before the war cost one cent each, were priced at $1 on 17 November 1944, and had risen to $2.40 each by 16 March 1945. Sugar rose from $5 a pound on 29 July 1944 to $10 on 16 November that year. I was finally forced to sell my watch, which I had managed to hang on to until then, and I received $500 for it. I allocated half the proceeds to provide additional food for those of our boys sick in hospital, and the balance for Ben, Jim and myself. Carefully eked out it provided additional food for several months. Despite this, however, my weight at 21 March 1945 was down

to 9st. 3lbs., a reduction of a stone and a half since my return from Kanburi. Food, or the lack of it, was a constant topic of conversation and quite a large number of the P.O.W. had compiled thick books of recipes of most varied nature, happily anticipating the day of eventual release and the prospect, it seemed, of substituting continual eating for continual hunger.

Except for a small minority the maintenance of morale among the Australian P.O.W. had always been at a good level. As I mentioned earlier the concert party had played a significant role in maintaining morale and they continued to do so magnificently in the twelve months I was in the gaol area. A new "Playhouse" was built inside the gaol and opened in September. It consisted of a sizeable stage and proscenium with backdrop and wings, with dressing rooms attached. It was, of course, an open air theatre, and the seats for the audience consisted of rows of coconut-palm trunks. The standard of the presentations had to be seen to be believed. How the scenery and costumes were provided still baffles me. They were absolutely marvellous and the skits and sketches, many of them topical, were not only humorous but remarkably clever. The Japanese, some of whom were present at every performance, and most of whom did not understand English, were very suspicious of the presentations. It must be admitted that they had good reason to be, for not only was a good deal of the patter directed against the Nips, but opportunity was always taken to build upon the constantly improving news we received over our secret radios. On 16 October 1944 the Japs cancelled all entertainments, but a fortnight later allowed them to be reinstated on a less-frequent basis. However, on 10 March 1945, following a most spectacular presentation at the Playhouse which showed the P.O.W. embarking for home, the then Japanese Commandant, Lieut. Wokabyashi ordered the theatre to be closed permanently "because it encouraged dangerous thoughts."

Another morale builder was the receipt of letters from home, the first of which arrived on 8 May 1944. Though they were by then about two years old they were avidly welcomed. Further letters arrived at irregular intervals and in the next ten months there were six such deliveries. I was fortunate enough to receive some letters from home each batch. In addition we were permitted to send another card home on 9 August. In actual fact that card was never delivered until after I arrived home safely 14 months later.

Still another event which kept our spirits high was the Allied air raids over Singapore. As early as 17 August 1944 the Japanese had warned us of impending air raids, and on 7 October a continual "brown-out" was ordered. The first raid came on 5 November 1944 when between 30 and 40 Flying Fortresses plastered the docks in Singapore. It started in the early afternoon, and I was working in the garden at the time. We were watching fascinated, as one of the Allied planes, almost overhead, was tackled by a Jap fighter. A few moments later there was a crackling all round us as explosive bullets hit the

ground. Although it was over two and a half years since we had seen any action our reflexes acted automatically and we all hit the ground as one man. Nobody in the gardens was hurt, but the bullets also fell in the hospital area and several patients were wounded. Unfortunately one later died from his injuries. Other raids followed and on 1st February 1945 Singapore was hit by 100 Flying Fortresses, followed by another raid by over 100 planes on 24th February. The raids continued, at intervals, for the balance of our period as P.O.W.

During this period I was fortunate enough to be present at the first "Thought Reading" display given by Sid Piddington. On this occasion he was assisted by Russell Braddon who was the "receiver" of the "thought transmission". Post-war Sid was to hit world headlines as he performed the same act with his wife as his assistant. Sid was a most gifted amateur magician, as was also my friend Ben Barnett with whom I attended this first show. The climax of the entertainment baffled me completely. With his assistant effectively blindfolded, Sid produced three books which he put on a table in front of the audience. Then he took a piece of paper and asked a member of the audience to write on it a number consisting of two figures, and then to fold it until it was quite small so that there was no possibility of Sid seeing the number. Sid then took the folded piece of paper and passed it to someone else, asking him to add a two figure number under the first and again fold the paper into a small piece. He did this with perhaps 10 or 12 people, each time taking the folded paper and passing it on. Then he passed the paper to still another member of the audience, asking him to draw a line under the last number and add up the column of figures. This done, and the paper again folded, Sid passed it to another person to have the addition checked. He then opened the paper and asked someone to read the total. I don't remember the actual number, but let's say it was 239. Sid then said he would take book number two, turn to page 239 and by thought reading, inform his assistant of the wording of line 9. He found the page, silently read the line and started the "thought transference" process. Putting on a very convincing act, his assistant strained to pick up the message. Finally he came out with one word, which Sid wrote on a blackboard. Haltingly, other words followed, until at last the whole line was written on the board. Sid asked another member of the audience to take the book, turn to page 239 and read line 9. There was no doubt about it - the assistant had correctly spoken the words. Loud and sustained applause broke out. Pre-war I had seen quite a few "thought reading" acts, where the "medium" sat on the stage and the other partner in the act moved amongst the audience seeking small articles to be identified by the "medium". In all these the partner in the audience kept up a continual patter, and it was fairly obvious that clues were passed to the "medium" in this way. But the intriguing part of Sid Piddington's act was that from the time he took up the book to find the required line, he spoke not one word until the whole line was written on the blackboard as his assistant said the words.

I was very much impressed by the performance and completely mystified, and I said so to Ben as we walked back to our quarters. He chuckled. "Fred" he said, "you and I could do that act without any trouble." "We could?" I said incredulously, "tell me more." And it was so simple I couldn't help laughing at the ease with which I had been taken in. Ben told me that the basic requirement was that the main performer (in this case Sid Piddington) should be an expert at sleight of hand. He explained that an essential part of any magician's gear is a false thumb-tip, and he said that had he and I been doing the thought-reading act the following is what would have happened. The props required would be three books, a blackboard, a piece of chalk, a blindfold, a pencil, two pieces of paper identical in size, and the false thumb-tip. To prepare the act he would write, say, twelve two-figure numbers on one piece of paper, taking care to make the writing vary from number to number. He would then add up the numbers, taking a note of the total but not writing it on the paper. To keep the example easy we will say the total was 239. I then find page 239 in the book to be numbered two and memorise line nine. We are now ready for our "thought reading" act. Just before the performance starts Ben folds up the prepared piece of paper and puts it in his false thumb-tip. We go on stage and Ben explains what is to happen. I am blind-folded, the books are placed on the table, taking care that the selected book is in No. 2 position, and Ben starts the audience writing down the two-figure numbers on the unused piece of paper. It is important to remember that the paper is carefully folded after each number is written down, ostensibly so that only the person writing the number down knows what it is. The crunch, of course, comes after all the numbers have been written down. At this stage Ben would take the folded paper from the person who had written the last number, in order to pass it to the next member of the audience to add up the numbers. But in doing so he switches the prepared piece of paper - hitherto hidden in the false thumb-tip - with the piece that had been circulated among the audience. The rest of the operation then becomes routine.

So the days at Changi went by. The air raids enlivened the proceedings, the ever-improving tone of the news cheered us considerably, and as the rations supplied by the Nips diminished in quantity we took comfort from the fact that the increasing difficulties they were facing in obtaining supplies was a sure indication that the war was going against them, and we went on happily clearing more and still more ground to extend our gardens. As the early months of 1945 wore on I began to think that my then mode of living at Changi would continue until we were liberated - an event which we now took to be a certainty. But such was not to be, for in the last days of March I was ordered to take charge of a working party required by the Nips for we knew not where. And so, on 1st April 1945 I left Changi for an unknown destination for the third time in three years.

CHAPTER VIII

"X3" CAMP - BUKIT PANJANG

1 April 1945 - 20 August 1945

April Fool's Day, and April generally, seemed to play an important part in my life as a P.O.W. It was on 1st April 1942 that I was told I was to be a member of the Adam Park working party, and in April 1943 I left Changi for the Burma Railway job. I departed from Kanburi on returning to Changi in April 1944, and then to cap it all off, on April Fool's Day 1945 I set off from Changi with "X3" working party. I had had some close calls during the Malayan campaign, and some nasty moments on the railway job, but my most testing experience was yet to come - at Bukit Panjang, where, it turned out, "X3" party was headed.

I had been placed in command of "X3" party which consisted of seven officers including myself, and 357 other ranks, who came from 13 different regiments. When we left Changi we did not know our destination, but it turned out to be Bukit Panjang, a village clustered about the junction of Bukit Timah Road and Choa Chu Keng Road. The position chosen by the Japs for our camp-site could hardly have been less desirable from our point of view, especially with allied air raids now a regular feature. The railway line to the north ran parallel to the Bukit Timah road, and the Choa Chu Keng Road ran out to Tengah aerodrome. Our camp was located on the Choa Chu Keng Road, less than a quarter of a mile from the railway, less than three miles from the aerodrome, and slap bang up against an ammunition dump.

I was very fortunate in the officers who had been allocated to my party. Second-in-command was Capt. George McLaughlin of 2/18 Battalion and the Quartermaster was Capt. Bernie Schulte, R.A.A., and an international rugby player. My interpreter was Lieut. Penrod Dean, of 2/4 Machine Gun Company, who had learned his Japanese the hard way whilst confined in the infamous Outtram Road gaol for incurring the displeasure of the Japanese. I had two medicos - Capts. Lloyd Cahill and Joe Vincent, and Capt. Max Winchester of the Dental Corps. They were all great chaps. Unhappily Bernie Schulte and Joe Vincent, though they survived the war, died shortly afterwards.

Although the other ranks came from so many different Units they were a great bunch of lads, and maintained a high level of morale. I was particularly pleased to have 98 of my own boys from 8 Div. Sigs. in the camp. Having seen

in previous camps how quickly dissension could arise if there was any suspicion of inequitable distribution of food supplies I instructed at the outset firstly that there must at all times be at least one representative from each Regiment on the cookhouse staff, and secondly, that there would be no separate cookhouse for the officers who would share and share alike with the men. I'm glad to say that as events turned out we always had good discipline, but equally good personnel relationships for the duration of the camp.

The Japanese guard at the camp consisted of about 25 soldiers commanded by Sgt. Ohori, who was also responsible for administration of the camp. He in turn answered to Lieut. Matsuda who visited the camp frequently. Because of his name Sgt. Ohori was soon nicknamed "Danny" by our boys and he became universally known by this soubriquet. Danny was a front-line soldier so I had hopes he would turn out to be a reasonable individual. He allowed me 15 men for cookhouse staff, 10 as medical orderlies and for camp hygiene, and 7 as company clerks. The accommodation at the camp consisted of four attap and mat huts each about 40 yards long. Latrines were the open-trench type, and 3 shower points were available. There was no lighting of any kind. Camp duties commenced immediately upon our arrival - the main body of 220 at 12.30 p.m. and the balance of 144 at 4.30 p.m. This work consisted of repair of huts, erection of a six-foot wire fence along the camp boundary, the building of an I.J.A. guard-house, and cleaning up the camp area.

The next day, 2nd April, the Nips demanded 270 men for outside work (the nature of which we did not know at that stage) and this number paraded at 8.20 a.m. but were not marched out until 10.30 a.m. The remainder of the men continued on camp duties. We had our first hospital admission that day when a gunner from 2/10 Field Regiment suffered a fit. He was the first of 550 patients who were admitted to our camp hospital in the next four and a half months. Of these 361 were malaria patients. The balance consisted mainly of dysentery and diarrhoea, respiratory and skin cases. In this camp we were remarkably free of deficiency diseases, only eight cases being admitted to hospital. Danny had advised me that the ration scale would be 500 grammes of rice per day for outside working parties and Changi scale for the remainder. I protested about this and Danny agreed to a temporary arrangement, "pending advice from General Saito," he said, whereby outside workers would receive 500 grammes of rice, inside workers 400 grammes, and the sick 300 grammes, other dry rations to be as per Changi scale. That was his idea. Needless to say we pooled all rations and everyone shared equally. Danny also instructed me that the huts were to be occupied as follows:

No. 1 - Officers, Warrant Officers, permanent camp duties and hospital

Nos. 2, 3, and 4 - each two working parties of 50 other ranks.

When the men returned from work that day they reported that they were engaged on road-making and that conditions of work were reasonable.

Having surveyed our needs, I submitted to Danny on 3 April a request for the following:

Rice polishings or unpolished rice to avoid deficiency diseases; a microscope, bed pans and urine bottles for the camp hospital; a water-testing outfit, Malariol and mosquito nets for control of malaria; messing containers, ladles, knives and choppers, a mincer and grinder, two forty-four gallon drums or baths for water storage in the cookhouse; boot and clothing repairs; and urine tubs, rakes, cuttings of spinach, tapioca root and Sweet Potato for the establishment of camp gardens.

Danny noted the requests and also agreed to the sites I had selected for the digging of slit trenches for protection during air raids. He also agreed to make men from the working parties available to dig the trenches. He kept his word and two days later 100 men started on the job, which was completed within a few days.

There were two matters on which I had seemingly endless discussions with Danny. One was food supplies and the other the question of the number of men available for Jap working parties. The scale for the rice issue laid down by Danny on 2nd April didn't last long. On 6 April he received fresh instructions from his H.Q. altering the issue to 300 grammes of rice per day, plus 250 grammes of tapioca root or, if taproot was not available, 200 grammes of corn for all workers. For the sick the rice was reduced to 250 grammes, supplemented by either taproot or corn on the same scale as the workers. We had had only one delivery of vegetables in our first week in camp, and I took this up with Danny on 9 April, pointing out to him the poor balance in our diet and stressing the necessity for regular vegetable supplies. He was quite helpful and went off personally to investigate the delay in delivery of vegetables. He came back with two days' supplies of veges. Later that day we received a special issue of what the Japs termed "energy rations". The issue consisted of oatmeal, glucose, coffee beans and jam, and was on the basis of one month's supply at 33⅔ grammes per man per day of the oatmeal, glucose and coffee beans, and 5½ grammes of jam. On 12 April Danny told me that as the light-duty men were being used to do odd jobs round the camp area the rice issue would be 300 grammes for all in camp, the 250 grammes per day would apply only to sick men evacuated to Kranji hospital.

Still a further alteration to the ration scale took place on 19 April when the rice issue was reduced to 250 grammes per day from 300, and tapioca root was increased to 500 grammes. Four days later the camp was inspected by an I.J.A. officer, Lt. Col. Chikuyi, accompanied by Capt. Matsuda (just promoted). I took the opportunity to point out the deficiencies in our

diet, and was promised that the rice issue would return to 300 grammes, and that the oil and salt issues would be doubled. The promise was honoured so far as the rice issue was concerned, but not for the oil and salt. Our outside working parties received a surprise on Anzac Day, when each member of the working parties was presented with a pipe and a fill of Barneys tobacco, and were promised a daily pipeful in future.

Although we had no secret radio of our own in "X3" camp, there was one at Kranji camp and our boys contacted lads from there whilst out on the working parties, so we were kept supplied with up-to-date news. By this time, of course, the news from Europe was getting better and better, the Nips were being pushed back consistently, and we had high hopes the war would not last too much longer. The Japs apparently didn't share our view though, for on 29 April they supplied us with two young pigs, a boar and a sow, "for breeding purposes". It was obvious that the Jap supply problem was intensifying, and on 17 May our daily ration was reduced to rice 250 grammes, maize 50 grammes, and tapioca root 300 grammes per man per day. It was therefore with the greatest pleasure, equalled only by our surprise, that on 23rd May we were the recipients of 260 Red Cross food parcels. They had obviously been in store for some time, but on opening, although there was some wastage, most of the contents were in fairly good condition. We recovered, in usable form – biscuits 180 lbs., jam 120¾ lbs., syrup 95 lbs., meat paste 30½ lbs., condensed milk 266¼ lbs., margarine 177 lbs., tomatoes 208 lbs., bacon 135 lbs., cheese 66 lbs., creamed rice 116¼ lbs., meat galatine 222 lbs., meat & vegs. 344 lbs., puddings 180 lbs., chocolate 67½ lbs., tea 41¾ lbs., sugar 65¾ lbs., soap 345 cakes. Total weight was 2,335¾ lbs., or 6.5 lbs. per man.
After conferring with the two doctors I decided to make a personal issue on a share and share alike basis, to all in camp, of the biscuits, sugar, tea, chocolate and soap. Of the balance, 12 tins of condensed milk went direct to the camp hospital, and all other food was issued through the cookhouse over a period of one month.

During June the official ration issues fell away and it was fortunate that our camp gardens were by then starting to produce green vegetables. We used nearly 100 lbs. from this source in the week ending 24 June. On that day I took up with Danny the matter of the continued falling-off in tapioca supplies and he agreed to refer the question to his local H.Q. As nothing eventuated I tackled him again on 2 July. He said that tapioca root supplies had decreased because of falling off in production. He said he would endeavour with the next issue of rice to include an extra 50 grammes per man per day of red rice for outside workers. He would also endeavour to increase the fish supply. As we were only getting ½ an oz. of fish for each man per day at that stage – 12 lbs. for the whole camp – I didn't think his task was over difficult, but he wasn't able to get any additional fish. He did, however, manage to get a little extra rice – 2/3rds of an ounce per man per day! – but it was still all polished.

As we had done in the railway camps, all at "X3" contributed to a fund for extra messing supplies - the "Camp Messing Fund" or "CMF" - and we used the proceeds mainly to purchase additional cooking oil. Prices of most other goods were beyond our reach as will be seen from the following list supplied by the Nips on 8 July 1945. Chillies $120 per kilogram ($55 per pound), Gula Malacca (a type of brown sugar in semi-liquid form) $27 per kilogram, Salt $32 per kilogram, Ketchup $13 per pound, Tapioca Root $5.50 per kilogram, face soap $4 per cake, washing soap $20 per bar, cigarettes $4.50 for 20, Java tobacco $200 per kilogram. The lowly coconut was then priced at $4.50. Inflation was rampant and prices had doubled since mid-March.

Official supplies of all types of our rations further declined in quantity during July and August, but on 18 August (we had not then been officially informed of the end of the war) our rice issue rose dramatically from 260 to 500 grammes per man per day. I kept a most careful record of all food supplied to us by the I.J.A. and for the whole period of the camp the daily average in ounces per man per day was:

> Rice 9.45; maize 1.62; roots 12; greens 4.6; other vegs. 2.5; fish 1.25; sugar 1.4; salt .6; pepper .35; curry .14; tea .23; oil .7; oatmeal .92; jam .3; milk .08; coffee .2

Everyone in camp was weighed by the Nips on five occasions - 17 April, 12 May, 10 June, 8 July and 7 August. The average weight per person was 8 st. 13 lbs., 9 st. 3.1 lbs., 9 st. 5.2 lbs., 9 st. 3.1 lbs., and 9 st. 1 lb. I was interested to note that the falling away in ration supply during July and August resulted in a weight loss of 4.2 lbs. per man.

It will be seen that there was never any great superfluity of food in "X3" camp, but there was one of our boys - a lad from my own Unit - who was always eating. I'll call him Teddy. From the time the camp opened on 1st April until it closed on 20 August, neither I nor any of the officers was allowed out of the camp area. Consequently we were reliant on the boys who went out on the working parties for news and the obtaining of any additional personal supplies. One of my lads - Jim Ling - acted as my agent in these matters. One day after the working parties returned Jim came to me and said, "I nearly got a chicken for you today." "Oh Jim," I said, "What do you mean - you <u>nearly</u> got me a chicken." "Well" replied Jim, "I was chasing it and just about had it, when it fell into a latrine. I don't think you would want it after that, would you." "No, thanks all the same, I wouldn't Jim," said I, and thought no more about it. However, Jim came to see me again the next night and said, "You know that fowl I told you about last night?" "I remember very well" I answered. "Well" Jim continued, "It's in camp." I was, to say the least, surprised, and no doubt my reaction showed it. "Who do you think brought it in?" asked Jim. I said, "I'll

have one guess - Teddy." "Teddy it was", said Jim. It was my habit after the evening meal each night to stroll through the lines and talk with the men who had been out on the working parties and as I did so this particular night I came across Teddy still eating. "I believe you brought a fowl into camp Teddy," I said. "That's right, sir" he answered. "How did you get it past the guards?" I asked. "I crutched it," said Teddy. I must digress here to explain that the Nips had a very strict rule that the men on the working parties must take nothing out of camp, and bring nothing in, and to ensure that the rule was observed they searched the men both on leaving and returning to camp. But in the three years we had been P.O.W. the boys had devised several ways of beating the search, and one of these was to build a large pocket into the crutch of the "G" string which served as underpants. It was to this method that Teddy referred when he said "I crutched it." Knowing where the fowl had spent the previous twentyfour hours I said "Did you wash it first?" "I'd like to have done so, sir," he said, "but I didn't have time!" Teddy survived the P.O.W. period and post-war he studied for the Ministry and became an ordained Methodist Minister.

As I mentioned earlier, the other major matter apart from food which dominated my conversations with the Japanese was the subject of outside working parties, but in these talks our roles were usually reversed. When the topic was food I was a sort of perpetual Oliver Twist, always asking for more, but when the discussion was about the working parties Danny was usually demanding more. Because of the importance of this subject I always carefully recorded details in my "X3" War Diary, and where I thought that later reference might be required had Lieut. Dean, my interpreter, check the entries and confirm their accuracy by signing that particular reference. I handed the Diary in to H.Q. on my return to Changi. It was ultimately returned to me, and in this section on work parties I shall be quoting from it verbatim many times. In them are a couple of references to a Colonel Newey. The senior P.O.W. Officer at Changi camp was Lt. Col. Holmes, a British Officer, who was responsible to the I.J.A. for command and discipline of the Allied P.O.W. He was a good officer who refused to be intimidated by the Japanese and he represented the cause of the P.O.W. with vigour and determination. However on 21 July 1944 the I.J.A. had issued an order that in future they would regard Lt. Col. Newey, another British officer, as representing the P.O.W. and that all communications to and from the Japanese must be through him. Though the P.O.W. command had perforce to recognise this arrangement so far as actual negotiations with the Japanese were concerned, Col. Newey remained a figure-head for this purpose only, and the chain of command within the P.O.W. organisation was not affected.

By 11 April 42 men had already been admitted to our camp hospital, 30 of them with Malaria, and on that day I was unable to supply the number of workmen demanded by the Japanese. My diary for that day records:

'256 other ranks on outside work. Following intimation from I.J.A. that they considered the number of sick to be too great (today's figure is 59) I interviewed Sjt. Ohori. He told me that there were far more sick in this camp than in any other, and that at Kranji camp 600 men were working out of 650 in camp. He added that Colonel Newey had given instructions that slightly sick men were to be sent to work as it would make them better. I informed Sjt. Ohori that Lt. Col. Newey had nothing to do with the men under my command and that I was directly responsible, through my own Australian Commander, to the Australian Government. I added that I must be guided in matters of sickness of my men by the advice of my senior Medical Officer, whose ability was undoubted. Sjt. Ohori said he must have 270 men daily for outside work. I replied that I could give no guarantee regarding numbers available, but would inform him after tonight's sick parade of the number of men who would be fit for work tomorrow. The interview ended with Sjt. Ohori reiterating that he required 270 men.

(The above-written is a correct record of this morning's interview.
(Sgd.) P.V. Dean,
Lieut.-Interpreter,
2/4 M.G. Bn. A.I.F.
11 Apr. 45)"

A later entry in the diary the same day reads:

"2000 hours. A maximum of 265 men will be available for outside work tomorrow. I.J.A. have accepted these figures."

My next confrontation on this subject was on 15 April. The diary entry reads:

"2030 hours. Availability for tomorrow's working parties advised to I.J.A. as 269. Sjt. Ohori informed me that he had just received orders from his Headquarters that 300 men are required for tomorrow. I told him that these could not possibly be supplied. In the ensuing discussion (completely amicable) Sjt. Ohori said that when he controlled a working party in Thailand it consisted of 500 men commanded by Lt. Col. Newey. 50 permanent duties were allowed and there were 80 sick, leaving 370 workmen available. His H.Q. (I.J.A.) demanded 420 workmen and Lt. Col. Newey complied by sending out 50 sick men. In explaining that I would never consent to send out sick men, I pointed out to Sjt. Ohori that the fact that English officers permitted sick men to work, whereas Australian officers would not do so, possibly accounted for the fact that 61% of English P.W. who went north in "F" Force died there, as against only 29% of Australians who died. Sjt. Ohori replied that he appreciated the fact and realised, after dealing with P.W. for three years, that the sick should not be sent out to work. In reiterating that in no circumstances could I agree to sending sick men to work I informed Sjt. Ohori

that if at any stage this was insisted upon, I should require a written order from the I.J.A. which body would then have to carry the responsibility of such an action. Sjt. Ohori agreed to vary the order from his H.Q. by reducing the party for tomorrow to 271, and I agreed to find the extra 2 men from my permanent duties, pointing out, however, that I did this purely as a gesture in appreciation of the assistance he has rendered us.

(The above is a true record.

(Sgd.) P.V. Dean,
Lieut. 2/4 M.G. Bn.
Interpreter)"

Over the next week or so the numbers available for outside work fluctuated between 268 and 271. On 23 April a young Japanese medical officer who was apparently responsible for our camp paid us a visit and urged that a reduction in sick figures was possible. Our S.M.O. pointed out that the figures represented the true position. Next day he paid us two more visits. He brought some supplies of malt extract and "Zambuck" for treatment of sick men, and again said that a reduction in the number of sick men was expected. He also urged the reduction of period of treatment of malaria cases from 7 days to less days. It was pointed out that this would serve no useful purpose and that provision of adequate prophylactic quinine and sufficient mosquito nets to equip all personnel would be more effective. He departed hitting himself on his bare shaven head with his clenched fist. However on 28 April we did receive 14 mosquito nets, each covering 6 to 8 men, and on 2 May a month's supply of prophylactic quinine of 5 grains daily was delivered.

It will be remembered that in the early stages of the camp the outside work parties were engaged on road making. Towards the end of April this changed to digging tunnels in the hilly central portion of the Island as the Nips prepared for an expected Allied invasion. On 3 May two of our work parties reported that they had had a bad day - they had been driven hard by the Nip corporal in charge, had not been permitted to have "smokos", and had been worked an hour beyond the usual finishing time. I therefore represented these matters to Sjt. Ohori, and protested against the fact also reported to me by my men that the work was being done in such a way that falls of earth were occurring almost daily and endangering men's lives. Danny said he would send out one of his own men the next day with each of the two parties concerned, and would protest to his H.Q. regarding earth falls and late work. The result of his representations was not what I had hoped, for next day he informed me that hours for work had been extended to 1900 hours (from 1730 hours) and said extra rations would be provided to compensate. However they never eventuated. I again protested against the dangerous nature of the work being done by my men, as more earth falls had occurred. Sjt. Ohori replied that Japanese soldiers were working under the same conditions and he thought there was no undue danger.

I told him I wished to inspect the conditions under which my men were working, and asked him to arrange for me to do so. In reply he said that this could not be permitted.

The next day Capt. Matsuda visited the camp and I tackled him on the subject. My diary entry reads:

"Working hours and conditions. I pointed out (to Capt. Matsuda) that longer hours would inevitably react to the detriment of the men's health, and enquired whether it was essential that they should be extended. He replied that it was essential, and I informed him that I could not regard the position with equanimity and that additional ration supplies would be vitally important. He stated that these had been applied for at H.Q. On my directing his attention to the falls of earth occurring on the jobs on which the men were working he asked if I could send two experienced miners with each working party. I replied in the affirmative but pointed out that this would be of no avail unless the I.J.A. soldiers on the job made use of the expert knowledge of these men, and at the same time I indicated that the I.J.A. should bear responsibility for any accidents which might occur.

(The foregoing is a true summary.

(Sgd.) P.V. Dean,
Lieut. 2/4 M.G. Bn. - Interpreter)"

The crunch came four days later, on 9 May. Again I quote from my diary:

"1415 hours. Sjt. Ohori and an I.J.A. doctor arrived at camp with the dead body of WX6877 Sigmn. Wilson K.G. who had been suffocated in a fall of earth on No. 5 party's job, together with NX29757, Pte. Collings L.W. who had been injured in the same fall in which an I.J.A. officer also sustained injuries. Capt. Matsuda also arrived but left again almost immediately, and before I had the opportunity of speaking with him. After examination by our medicos Pte. Collings was evacuated to Kranji hospital.

I then interviewed Sjt. Ohori regarding the accident, pointing out that I had warned (in an interview with Capt. Matsuda on 5 May '45) that the working conditions were dangerous and precautions against accident should be taken; now, in view of developments, I could not let my men continue to go to work unless adequate precautions were taken immediately, to ensure their safety.

Sjt. Ohori replied that I.J.A. officers and soldiers were working in the same conditions and that accidents such as the present one were just unfortunate, that I must remember we were Prisoners-of-War and that there was still a war on.

I then told him that P.W. should not be doing this type of work. He replied that he was aware of this but the circumstances of this war were peculiar and that International Law was not being observed by any of the countries at war, quoting in support that the Americans had recently sunk a ship which was returning to Japan after delivering Red Cross supplies to Singapore, and which was sailing under a guarantee of safe passage.

I replied that this did not alter the position so far as I was affected, that my only concern was the safety of my men, and unless I received assurances that the working conditions were to be made quite safe I would not permit them to go to work tomorrow.

He then said that if I took this action he would have me executed. I told him this did not alter my decision."

Sjt. Ohori looked directly at me, and I returned his gaze, fair and square. Suddenly I knew that this was one of the most fateful moments of my life. That Danny would have me executed if he deemed it necessary I did not doubt, for numbers of P.O.W. had already been so dealt with. I realised that the staring match I had had with Sjt. Sano at Adam Park, and others I had had when up on the railway job, paled into insignificance when compared with the outcome of this confrontation with Danny. My heart started to pump at an alarming rate, and as I was wearing only a pair of shorts I felt sure that Danny must see the commotion in my chest, even if he couldn't hear the pounding in my ears. It was imperative that he discern no sign of weakness, so I crossed my arms across my bare breast, hoping so to hide any sign of unusual cardiac activity, and continued to stare at him. Again, how long did this contest last? A half a minute, a minute, two minutes? I managed to maintain an unblinking stare, and Penrod Dean, my interpreter, stood frozen, not moving a muscle. Suddenly Danny dropped his eyes, and I breathed a soundless, but heartfelt, sigh of relief. The diary entry goes on:

"Sjt. Ohori then said that if I persisted in this attitude I would be handed over to the I.J.A. Military Police and he (Sjt. Ohori) would send the men out to work in any case. I informed him that he would have to do so, as I could not willingly consent to my men continuing to work in existing conditions. He then suggested that he would arrange an interview with Capt. Matsuda for me on Friday, May 11, so that I could lay my case before him, provided I would allow the men to work tomorrow. As I consider it essential that I gain access to higher Authority than Sjt. Ohori I said that I would agree, under protest, to the men working tomorrow provided he arranged the interview with Capt. Matsuda.

(The above is a true summary of the conversation at the interview referred to therein.

(Sgd.) Penrod V. Dean,
Lieut. 2/4 M.G. Bn. - Interpreter)"

Again I quote verbatim from my diary. The entry for 10 May 1945 reads:-

"150 other ranks on outside work.

0930 hours. Funeral of WX6877 Sigmn. Wilson K.G. buried in grave No. 24 in A.I.F. cemetery at Kranji hospital.

1330 hours. Summoned to I.J.A. office - found there a Lieutenant of the I.J.A. working group carrying out the job upon which my men are engaged. He expressed his regret at what he termed "the unfortunate accident which occurred yesterday" and said he hoped I would reconsider my decision of yesterday and allow the men to go out to work, as before, in future.

I thanked him for his condolences but pointed out that the question of sending the men out to work was bound up with the safety of the working conditions.

He replied that I.J.A. officers and men were working with the P.W. and that, in fact, an I.J.A. officer had been dangerously hurt in yesterday's accident, and that the I.J.A. would automatically take all possible precautions to protect their men, and thereby, our men; he continued that at the present time there was no absolutely safe work upon which P.W. could be employed.

I then suggested that there were available at Changi Engineer-officers who could materially assist in the completion of the work and the provision of safety measures, and asked that some be brought out for the purpose.

He replied that this was not possible but reiterated that all safety precautions would be taken and said he considered yesterday's accident to be an unfortunate one caused by the rain.

I then told him that the accident had caused me great concern as the responsibility for the welfare of the men rested in my hands. He said that he understood this and the position was the same in their army, therefore the officers would take the necessary precautions to protect the men.

I replied that, in view of their undertaking to employ all possible precautions I would permit the men to continue to work.

The I.J.A. Lieutenant then stated that had I not been prepared to do so it would have resulted in serious trouble for myself and the camp. He also said that the injury to the I.J.A. officer had caused his H.Q. great trouble and he reiterated that all possible precautions would be taken.

I then formally agreed that, subject to no further accidents occurring, I would continue to send the men out to work.

The Lieutenant then stated that the work of the men on the job today had been affected by yesterday's accident and requested that I inform them all that yesterday's was an unfortunate accident and that precautions would be taken.

I promised to inform the men.

(The foregoing is a true record of the interview.
(Sgd.) Penrod V. Dean
Lieut. 2/4 M.G. Bn. - Interpreter)"

The next day, 11 May, returning work parties reported a good day, and although a small fall of earth occurred in one of the pits on 15 May, our Sjt. in charge said that the position was quite O.K. Thenceforth we had no further trouble of this nature.

On 15 and 16 May Capt. Matsuda visited the camp and had very lengthy conversations with Sjt. Ohori. Although, of course, we were not given any indication of the subject under discussion, we had learned through our contact with Kranji camp of the surrender of Germany, and it didn't need much imagination on our part to guess what it was all about. It is of interest to recall that we received our issue of Red Cross parcels about a week later, on 23rd May. On 2 June Capt. Matsuda again visited the camp and told me that we would be getting another forty other ranks from Changi and that it would be necessary to erect additional accommodation for them. We built a new hut for the extra forty men expected, but when the party arrived on 18 June it consisted of only twenty men.

Following the arrival of the new men Sjt. Ohori told me on 20 June that his H.Q. had demanded 320 workmen each day, but that he had had the number reduced to 300. I told him we might just be able to make this total. In actual fact we could only muster 296 workers the next day, and we were struggling in the following days to make the 300. On 26 June Danny suggested that three of the cooks be sent out to work and that convalescent sick should be used in their place. I pointed out that this was impracticable and he agreed not to press the matter provided the working party was maintained at 300. On 4 July Danny again tried to use the convalescing sick men, instructing that they be used for grass cutting. I objected, telling him that the work would impair recovery of health. He replied that those who were fit enough to peel vegetables were fit enough to cut grass. I pointed out the vast difference between sitting down cutting up veges. and standing up slashing grass, and said that rather than have the sick men forced to do such work it

would be done by the officers. Sjt. Ohori replied that officers were only a hindrance or obstacle to him (he had expressed these sentiments previously also) but he did not insist on the sick men cutting the grass. This was done by the officers.

On 11 July all personnel were confined to camp and no working parties were required. It appeared that the Japs were conducting a military exercise. Three days later I made representations to Danny on several matters. The following is a verbatim extract from my diary:

"1st July 1945. 297 other ranks on outside work. Interviewed Sjt. Ohori ref:-

(1) Decrease in availability of workmen

I pointed out that I had done my best to keep up numbers, keep the camp clean and hygienic, speedily restore the sick to health, and to assist myself in the general work in the camp, but despite my efforts it was becoming increasingly difficult to provide the number of workmen asked for, owing to increasing sick figures. Today the situation had arisen where I was unable to supply an additional man requested by I.J.A. for camp work. Sjt. Ohori asked the reason for the increase in sick figures. I gave four points:-
(a) recent fall in ration issues (100 grammes per man per day in June)
(b) long working hours
(c) inability to allow men normal periods of convalescence
(d) shortage of drugs and dressings.
He answered that conditions at this camp were at least as good and probably better than at others, and that sickness was not on the increase in the other camps. He could not understand, therefore, why our sickness was on the increase. The situation, he said, would receive his further attention if at any time we were unable to supply 297 workmen.

(2) Use of Red Cross personnel for digging slit trenches for I.J.A.

I pointed out that Red Cross personnel should not be employed on this type of work (they have been so engaged yesterday and today, the nature of the work not having been known to me yesterday when I supplied three medical other ranks for "work in camp", having no others available.) Sjt. Ohori replied that there were ten medical O.R.'s in camp - of these four were sufficient to look after the sick, three were ample for camp hygiene, and that he could use the other three as he saw fit. He saw no grounds for my protest.

(3) Dangerous situation of camp in event of hostilities

I pointed out that it appeared, from preparations being made in the vicinity, that there was a possibility of hostilities in this area, and

should this happen, the men under my command would be dangerously situated. I then asked that consideration be given to moving the troops to a safer area. Sjt. Ohori replied that the camp was in a safe area. In any case, he said, he could not understand why I was approaching him in the matter as I lost all my responsibility when I became a P.W. and the I.J.A. who had sent the men to this camp assumed full responsibility for the action. Similarly it was the responsibility of the I.J.A. to move the men if the necessity arose. The matter, he said, was nothing whatever to do with me as I was in the camp only to carry out orders transmitted to me, through Sjt. Ohori, from Colonel Banno. I replied that I must endeavour to protect the interests of my men. He reiterated that the responsibility was not mine, but as the interview closed he said 'I will speak to someone higher for you.'

(The foregoing is a true summary of the interview referred to therein.
(Sgd) P.V. Dean
Lieut. 2/4 M.G. Bn. Interpreter)"

The next day I was summoned to an interview with Capt. Matsuda, I.J.A. Commander of "X3" camp. The diary entry reads:

"He took up with me my recent representations to Sjt. Ohori regarding the reduction in rations and the matters mentioned by me yesterday. He said that a reduction of 100 grammes per man per day was not very great and reiterated, with regard to all the points of yesterday, everything that Sjt. Ohori had said. He stressed the fact that the I.J.A. assumed full responsibility for dealings with P.W. and that I had no responsibility but to comply with instructions passed on by Sjt. Ohori. I replied that though I had no responsibility to the I.J.A. except as outlined by him I still had my responsibility to the Australian Government. This brought an emphatic statement to the contrary from Sjt. Ohori, and the interview again ended on this note.

(A true record.
(Sgd) P.V. Dean,
Lieut. 2/4 M.G. Bn. Interpreter)"

Though most of my differences of opinion were with Sjt. Ohori, I did have arguments on occasions with the guard commanders. One of these is worth recording. On this occasion the commander of the guard was a Korean named Yamomoto. It will be remembered that there was a Jap ammunition dump adjacent to our camp, and on this particular day a party of our lads from Changi camp arrived with several truck loads of artillery shells which they proceeded to unload. Naturally those of our boys still in camp engaged them immediately in conversation, completely disregarding the Jap order that we must in no circumstances communicate with anyone from outside our camp. Yamomoto

charged among our boys buffeting and whacking them in an attempt to stop the intercourse, but though he broke up one conversation at a time, many others continued, and those he broke up resumed as soon as his back was turned. It didn't take long for his temper to flare, and he sent for me. Through Penrod Dean, my interpreter, he told me he wanted all men in camp who had talked to the unloading party to be paraded in front of the guard-house. I went down to the men's lines, told them what had happened, and asked for six volunteers to front up to Yamomoto, promising at the same time that I would do my best to see that nothing happened to them. In no time I had my six volunteers and I marched them to the Nip guard-house adjacent to the camp entrance.

Through Penrod Dean I told Yamomoto that these men had spoken to members of the ammunition party, and freely admitted that they had done so. At the same time I endeavoured to convey to Yamomoto by my attitude, that I didn't approve what he was doing. Apparently this was not lost on Yamomoto, for he said something to Lieut. Dean, who passed it on to me. "He wants to know" he said, "why is Capt. Stahl looking so angry?" Falling back on my by now, fairly extensive experience of arguing with Nips I said, "Tell Yamomoto that if he wants to talk with me, he must look at me." Yamomoto did not accept the invitation, but started to rant at the six men, in Japanese of course. Suddenly he stopped, and although he had his back turned to me he spoke again to Lieut. Dean, who translated for me - "He wants to know why Capt. Stahl is looking so angry." Again I said to Penrod Dean, "Tell him that if he wants to speak to me he must look at me." My interpreter relayed my comment to Yamomoto, but again he failed to accept the invitation and resumed his verbal lambasting of the six men. After a while he again turned to Lieut. Dean and said, once more without looking at me, "Why is Capt. Stahl looking so angry?" For the third time I said to Penrod, "Tell him if he wants to speak to me, he must look at me." Lieut. Dean duly translated. There was a moment's hesitation, then Yamomoto said, "O.K. dismiss the men" and, still without looking at me, went into the guard-house. My six boys dispersed, sound in wind and limb, and Penrod Dean and I returned to our quarters, but next morning there was a most unexpected sequel. I had seen the various work parties off on the job, and returned to my hut. Almost out of nowhere Yamomoto appeared, having just been relieved from guard duty. Glancing stealthily around to make sure he was not observed he dropped a parcel in front of me, and without a word, vanished. The parcel contained a new hand towel, a cake of soap, a toothbrush and some tooth powder. A peace-offering indeed and as I said when retailing my experiences at Adam Park, I was never one to look a gift horse in the mouth - not in those conditions at any rate.

Although Yamomoto had struck quite a number of our men in the incident I have just described, I'm happy to say that this was an exception to the general rule at "X3" camp. In the first week in the camp, following an episode in which Lieut. Dean had been struck by a Japanese guard, I protested

strongly to Sjt. Ohori. He instructed his guard that officers must not be struck, and I obtained from him an understanding that if any of the men were detected in breaches of Japanese orders no physical punishment would be inflicted on them, but they would be required to carry out extra duties. Danny must also have discussed this arrangement with Capt. Matsuda for on 17 July I was summoned to him at 1700 hours. He told me that one of our Serjeants had been caught stealing meat at the local I.J.A. headquarters. He said the Sjt. would be returned to camp, where, as punishment, he was to do one hour's woodchopping and clean the latrines, each day for 30 days. Capt. Matsuda went on to deliver a diatribe to me on the shortcomings of Australians working at his H.Q. intimating that quite an amount of stealing had been going on, and added that offenders would be severely dealt with by the I.J.A. in future. He mentioned that a supply of candles had been stolen some weeks previously, and although no action had been taken on that occasion he repeated that all future offenders would be severely punished. He ordered that I pass this message on to the men.

Next morning at the work parade I informed the men of what Capt. Matsuda had said, and emphasised that, although I was by no means suggesting that the Japs were no longer fair game from our point of view, they could no longer rely on escaping physical punishment if they were caught. Unfortunately on 30 July two of the lads were detected by the guards smuggling goods into camp. One had some cigars and the other some rice. (They were unlucky - nearly everybody smuggled goods into camp at some time or other without being caught.) The first I heard of the occurrence was when I was told that Sjt. Ohori had beaten up the lad who had the cigars. Danny sent for me and told me that he had investigated the story told by the lad who brought in the rice - that it had been given to him by a Chinese - and was inclined to disbelieve it. He asked me what the men did these things for when they had been continually warned not to do so. I replied that it was useless asking me what happened on working parties when he would not let officers go with them to supervise. I again requested that instead of beating men who did wrong he punished them by allotting periods of extra work, which, I said, I thought was more effective. He was non-commital. He stated that he intended to continue questioning the soldier who brought in the rice until he arrived at the truth. When the work parties returned that evening Danny further questioned the lad who had brought in the cigars and then dismissed him without further punishment. He then continued a thorough investigation regarding the circumstances in which the other lad obtained his rice. Finally, after long discussion he accepted my opinion that the lad was telling the truth, and dismissed him. Either by good luck or by good smuggling no-one else was detected in wrongdoing over the balance of our time in the camp.

About this time - the end of July - we began to get some rather

disturbing hints from some of the guards. Yamomoto, who had a few words of English, said to me, "Our orders say, your soldiers come Singapore, bang bang bang, we shoot all prisoners." My informants on the working parties brought back similar information, and our contacts with Kranji camp confirmed the advice. It did appear, from the preparations they were making, that the Nips were anticipating an invasion, and I decided that we should make preparations for such an eventuality. There were at that time seven officers and 371 other ranks in the camp, including 37 men in hospital, and in consultation with the other officers I split the men into seven parties, each commanded by an officer and each responsible for five or six sick men. Our plan was simple. It provided that if I considered the circumstances justified it, we would break out of camp, hopefully with limited casualties, the seven parties would each go their own way, hoping to take to the watercourses in the west of the Island and endeavour to make contact with friendly forces. For security reasons we decided not to acquaint the men with our plans until further developments rendered such action necessary. Fortunately the atom bomb dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki saved the situation for us, for after the Japanese had capitulated it was found that orders to liquidate all P.O.W. in the event of an Allied invasion of Singapore had, in fact, been issued, and the invasion had been planned for early September - just three weeks after the Nips surrendered.

Within 24 hours of the first atom bomb dropping on Hiroshima we knew of the happening through our contacts with Kranji camp. The camp was buzzing with the news. Twenty thousand tons of T.N.T. equivalent in one bomb! A whole city flattened! It was incredible. It seemed to me that the war must end soon, and I very much wished to have an Australian flag to fly when that occasion came. I called on my friend Jim Ling for assistance, and he was not found wanting. Within 48 hours he had obtained for me from the Japs (without their knowledge or permission) some blue material, canvas binding, and a length of rope. One of the English lads in camp donated an 18" x 9" Union Jack which he had hidden through many Jap searches, and with white handkerchiefs from Red Cross supplies for the stars we had all the necessary materials. Fortunately the Japs had supplied us on 1st August with a sewing machine to repair what little remained of our clothing, and in Sjt. Smith of the Royal Australian Ordinance Corps we had a first-class tailor. Using a tiny replica of the Australian Blue Ensign in the A.I.F. soldiers hand-book as a guide he produced a 3 foot by 18 inch flag correct in every detail. That same day the second atom bomb fell on Nagasaki, and I felt the flag would soon be flying free.

I return to my official diary entries to summarise the events from 16 to 19 August, 1945:

"16 Aug. 45 — 293 other ranks on outside work - 2 on camp work.

17 Aug. 45 — 290 other ranks on outside work - 2 on camp work. Work parties return to camp from 1430 hours onwards.

18 Aug. 45 — No outside work today - no reason given. (But we are pretty good guessers!)
Rice ration increased to 500 grammes per man per day.

19 Aug. 45 — No official advice of what we all know unofficially, but, 1100 hours, combined non-denominational Thanksgiving service.

2100 hours. Informed by Sjt. Ohori that the war is finished and that the camp is to move to Kranji at 0900 hours tomorrow."

After Danny gave me the official news I attached the flag to a Malacca cane walking stick which I had carried all through my P.O.W. days, and at daybreak on 20 August I fixed it to the gable of the hut in which I lived. There it fluttered free in the breeze until we evacuated the camp - not at 0900 hours as Danny had said, but at 1200 hours. Though Danny could not avoid seeing the flag, he gave absolutely no sign that he had done so, and during the trip by truck from Bukit Panjang to Kranji it gave me a great deal of pleasure to fly the flag, unfurled, from the end of my walking stick, as I did again next day during our journey from Kranji to Changi.

The last entry in my war diary reads:

"21 Aug. 45 — Warned at 1200 hours that party is to move again at 1800 hours tonight.

2030 hours. Moved in convoy of 12 vehicles to Changi camp, last vehicle arriving 2400 hours. Total personnel moved to Changi - 7 officers 362 other ranks. Left at Kranji as patients - 11 other ranks.
Personnel handed over on arrival at Changi to camp staff and "X3" organisation wound up."

There were a few days of uncertainty after we returned to Changi as there were some indications that the local I.J.A. General in charge might not continue to observe the general order to surrender. Then one day some British officers dropped in on us - literally. They parachuted in as the advanced guard of the relieving Allied troops, and they immediately assumed control of the Japanese. They gave their orders to the Nips, in a way which showed they expected them to be carried out immediately, and they were. They were quickly followed by other troops and we were soon enjoying with quiet satisfaction the spectacle of Jap P.O.W. pulling trailer loads of supplies for us.

For the purpose of enabling us all to hear the description of the official surrender ceremony in Tokyo Bay a public address system was erected, and the Union Jack was to be broken from the flagpole on the gaol. I received a summons from "Black Jack" Galleghan, our A.I.F. P.W. commander. He was a very direct man and when I reported to him he said, "I believe you have an Australian flag, Stahl." "Yes, sir" I said. "I want it" said B.J. "Sorry, sir" said I, "it's my personal property, you can't have it." Fortunately being a direct man himself, he appreciated a direct reply. "I don't want to keep it, you bloody fool," he said, "I want you to raise it on the A.I.F. Headquarters flagpole to mark the surrender. You can have it back as soon as our own forces bring one in." "That's different, sir" I said, "I'll go and get it." And so my flag was not only the first Allied flag to fly on Singapore Island after the Jap surrender - at Bukit Penjang on 20 August - but it also flew for some days at A.I.F. H.Q. at Changi when the Japanese surrender became official. It's now in the Australian War Memorial at Canberra.

A day or two later all Japanese and Koreans who had acted as guards or officials at P.O.W. camps on the Burma railway or on Singapore Island were assembled and those of us who had had active contact with them were required to identify those whom we considered should be charged with inflicting atrocities upon the P.O.W. We were also permitted to point out those who had been reasonable and fair in their treatment of P.O.W. There were quite a few in the first category, in which I nominated the infamous Toyama, and some, though not a great number, in the latter classification. Despite his threat to behead me I was happy to nominate Danny Ohori as a reasonable and responsible soldier, for I felt that on most occasions he had done his best to meet my many requests.

It was during this parade of our ex-captors that the Lieut. Colonel who had ordered the issue of double rations for himself at Shimo Sonkrai railway camp further distinguished himself. Subsequent to our departure for Tanbaya this particular Lieut. Colonel had been ordered by Toyama in one of his megalomaniacal moments, to kneel to him. To the disgust of everyone

in the camp the Lieut. Colonel had done so. After the event he made it clear that he would "get" Toyama if ever he had the opportunity. He saw the parade of the Japanese as this opportunity and, guarded by two hefty British military police to ensure no retaliation, he took Toyama away and beat him up mercilessly.

I obtained my satisfaction for the maltreatment and insults which had come my way, in a somewhat different fashion. It may be remembered that the Japanese were quartered in houses running along either side of Half-moon Street, on the northern boundary of the gaol. I had by now received a new shirt and shorts, socks and boots, and the three stars indicating my rank were back on each shoulder. With my hat on the correct angle and carrying my precious walking stick, I set off by myself from the western end of Half-moon Street and walked down the centre of the road, which was about a quarter of a mile long. There were Nips everywhere, and as I made my slow progress each and everyone of them saluted me, and I meticulously returned each salutation. In view of the displeasure and annoyances I had suffered when I had been forced to salute every lousy little Nip during the previous three and a half years, it will be appreciated that I really felt at the end of that walk that my P.O.W. days were finally behind me.

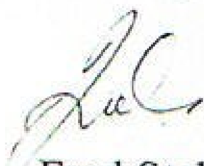
Dear Peter,

Here it is, with compliments.

The hard-cover book is for you to use as you see fit. If it is necessary to unbind it, that is perfectly acceptable.

We do not expect any of the contents herein returned, however, given my failure to get good copies of the wartime material, I'd appreciate the scanned versions when you have time. I can then print copies for my mother to retain.

Best regards



Fred Stahl

21 Aug 2007