

## **TRENOWETH JOHN WILLIAM NX56488 Signalman 8 Div Signals**

**John Trenoweth was born in Randwick, Sydney, New South Wales on 9 December 1916. He enlisted in the Australia Imperial Forces on 5 July 1940 as a Signalman and was allocated to 8<sup>th</sup> Division Signals.**

**There is a picture of L Section of 8<sup>th</sup> Division Signals taken in Perth in August 1941. So it is clear that John only arrived in Malaya in the latter part of 1941 and shortly before hostilities commenced.**

**John is pictured below with his great mate Roy Polkinghorne NX56335. They are standing - Roy on the left and John beside him.**



**In April 1943 Sig Trenoweth (with 7,000 others) was sent to Thailand to slave on the Burma Thailand Railway as a part of "F" Force. Within "F" Force John was with a group of 712 men known as Pond's Party. Pond's Party had a dreadful time, being initially marched about 270 kms to the northern end of the proposed railway in Thailand. They were moved repeatedly.**

**When their slave task in Thailand was complete, members of "F" Force (and "H" Force) were returned to Singapore. This would have been in early 1944.**

**The following 28 pages depicting the experiences of John Trenoweth as a POW have been provided to me by his widow Marcelle and son Mark (both of whom travelled to Thailand for Remembrance Day 2006).**

**The report on "Conditions of POW's in Thailand May-December 1943" was copied by John when he saw the report on his return to Singapore in 1944. The identity of the author of the document is not known. It could have been Captain (later Sir) Adrian Curlewis, who was also a member of Pond's Party.**

**The last documents in the bundle are two drawings of a house which John designed, with the assistance of a fellow POW who was a draftsman, whilst he was in Changi Prison. What is of interest, is that the drawings were done on the back of two official papers obtained while they were incarcerated in the Prison.**

**At the end of the War John returned to Australia and was finally discharged on 2 January 1946. John returned to civilian life as a salesman for Strongburg Carlsen Electrical Products and went on to manage Hills Telefix in NSW until a severe series of strokes ended his working life in July 1967. He married Marcelle Hosking in March 1947. They had 2 children Mark & Jeff. John fought on enjoying his life for another 35 years after his strokes and passed away 2 November 2002.**

*It is a privilege to bring this story to readers. Peter Winstanley*

***JOHN TRENOWETH'S HAND  
WRITTEN NOTES ON CONDITIONS  
IN THAILAND***



*REPORT ON CONDITIONS OF POW'S  
IN THAILAND  
MAY TO DECEMBER 1943  
(‘F’ FORCE)*

(4)

REPORT ON CONDITIONS OF P.O.W.'S IN THAILAND MAY-DECEMBER, 1943.

INTRODUCTION.

The Representative of the Imperial Japanese Army Military Police has requested that a frank report be made on the recent conditions of P.O.W.'s in Thailand.

It is neither a complaint or a protest but merely a statement of facts, all of which can be substantiated by officers who were present. The suggestions in Part 2 are made in the sincere hope that the conditions of the P.O.W. will improve in the future, since it is our firm belief that our recent experiences have not been in accordance with the policy or intentions of the Imperial Japanese Government in Tokio or the Japanese Red Cross who cannot have been aware of the state of affairs in Thailand.

PART 1. FACTS.

1. Early in April, 1943 orders were issued to prepare 7000 P.O.W.'s for a move by train. The Orders stated:-
  - (a) The reason for the move was that the food situation in Singapore was difficult and would be far better at the new camp.
  - (b) This was not a working party.
  - (c) As there were not 7000 fit men available in Changi, 30% of the party were to be unfit - unfit to march or work. The unfit would have a better chance of recovery with good food and in a pleasant helpful, with good facilities for recreation.
  - (d) There would be no marching except for a short distance from train to camp and transport would be provided for unfit and baggage.
  - (e) Band was to be taken.
  - (f) All tools, cooking gear, engines and gear for electric lights to be taken.
  - (g) Gramophones, blankets and clothing, mosquito nets would be issued in the new camp.
  - (h) A good canteen would be available in each area after 3 weeks. Canteen supplies for first 3 weeks to be bought with prisoners' money before leaving Singapore.
1. Medical Party of 350 with equipment for a central hospital of 400 beds and medical supplies for 3 months.
11. As each train of 600 arrived at Bangpong, to their dismay and astonishment were informed that a march of several days was to be carried out by all men including the 30% unfit. All kit and equipment that could not be carried by officers and men was to be stored at Bangpong. This amounted to 15 trucks of stores, medical equipment and baggage.
111. The march in fact was one of 300 kilos in 15 stages and lasted for 2½ weeks. Marching was at night along rough jungle tracks and was garrried out in total darkness. Control by officers, medico's and N.C.O.'s almost impossible. (all torches were confiscated).
- IV. After the first stage the unfit men became increasingly ill and a heavier handicap to the fit who because of conditions were becoming exhausted. Carrying the sick and unfit daily became more arduous.
- V. Staging camp conditions.
  - (a) No cover or protection except for a few tents. Weather varyable, monsoon season began during the march.
  - (b) Food supplies very poor and in some places consisted of rice only.
  - (c) Water scarce - at Kamburi water had to be bought by individuals from a privately owned well.

- (c) Contd.  
Col. Holmes protested but nothing done.
- (d) No proper arrangement made to accommodate sick at camp and absolutely unfit men were forced to march - in fact were beaten and driven from camp to camp. Officers including M.O. begged and prayed for sick men to be left behind, but were themselves beaten at many camps. In one particular camp a Jap M.O. (Lt.) ordered the Jap. Corp. in charge at Tasso staging camp to keep 35 men back as they were too ill to march. The Cpl. refused to obey the order and a Br. Major and Aust. M.O. Major were severely beaten and a bone in the M.O.'s hand broken. Of the sick forced to march all have since died, including a chaplain who was specially mentioned by the Jap. M. O.. He died at next camp.

VI. Marching from 7 P.M. - 7 A.M. then camp duties included cooking of our meals and washing of clothes and selves during day - hence very little rest.

#### MEDICAL.

Such medical stores as had be hastily selected at Bangpong were rapidly exhausted as the march continued with no medicines. Dysentery and Diarrohea broke out in all parties and exhaustion was general. Ulcerated feet occurred in large numbers owing to sick men with blisting feet being forced to march on night after night.

VII. At Koncoita the marching parties were quartered in the same camp as their labor Corps. who were suffering from cholera. The infection was picked up by the 13 parties of marching men.

VIII. On 15th May Cholera broke out at Shimo and Niki. Col. Harris (Co) immediately reported to Col. Banno the IJA Commander and requested movement to cease until outbreaks were controlled and that Koncoita camp not be used by further parties at any cost - Col. Banna unable to comply - result Cholera at all 5 camps.

IX. Only small quantities medical supplies at Bangpong brought up by lorry. More than  $\frac{3}{4}$  still there when force returned in December. At this time IJA unable to provide or produce any medical supplies whatever - except Cholera vaccine and Quinine which were always supplied as requested. Col. Banna gave 6 tins of own private supply (milk).

X. Camps consisted of huts without roofs even though rainy season had begun. It was some weeks before camp fully roofed and men had no adequate cover during that period.

XI. In spite of the above conditions and the general state of exhaustion of men, the presence of epidemic cholera in all camps and practically universal malaria, diarrohea and dysentery, the men were put to work at once by engineers.

XII. Maximum numbers of men were taken out each day. This left insufficient fit men for Sanitary and Nursing duties - disease of all kinds increased. In some camps Red Cross personnel were sent to work.

XIII. Scarcity of tools in some camps made habitation and sanitary conditions impossible. Tools brought from Changi never brought on from Bangpong.

- XIV. Became clear that if Engineers continued practice of taking all fit and convalescing men to work each day their available source of labour would soon be destroyed. Explained to our IJA guards who agreed but could do nothing - apparently engineers able to do as they liked. The task in front of Engineers and need for speed fully realised by us, but the wanton destruction of available labour by themselves difficult to understand. A little commonsense and consideration early in June would have saved what became a deplorable situation for both them and us. Unfortunately, for us, the shortsighted policy continued and by the end of June only 700 of 5000 men north of Niki were working daily and of these men more than half were unfit for heavy work. Remainder included Rec Cross, admin. staff were lying ill in camp hospitals.
- XV. By this time rain had made road to South impassable and North almost same. Rations fell far below scale required to keep men fit and to build up sick. It has been said we were on same scale as IJA soldiers but the error of such statement can be easily proved. Rations - hospital patients 250-300 gms. rice and small quantity of lime beans per day. The error of the IJA idea that low rations would force men out to work to obtain the heavy duty scale of rations was pointed out repeatedly to no avail. It may be effective if men were not genuinely ill but the sadly high death rate proved such was not the case in these instances.
- XVI. As general health grew the demands of engineers became more and more difficult to meet and their treatment more brutal. Work was often beyond the strength of normally fit men and was certainly impossible to the weakened men forced out to work. This applies especially to the carrying of heavy logs for corduroying roads. It was most noticeable that when the Thai. or Burmese labour was used 2 or 3 times the number of men per task was used. It became common for our men to be literally driven with wire whips and bamboo sticks throughout the whole working day. Hitting with fists and kicking occurred frequently. It is emphasised that beatings were not for disciplining purposes but purely to drive unfit men to efforts beyond their strength.
- XVII. Excessive hours common - 14 hrs. daily and no breaks of a day allowed, many men only saw their camps by daylight when they became ill and for weeks on end had no chance to wash themselves or their clothes except in the daily rain storms when they were forbidden to take shelter.
- XVIII. When numbers of fit men fell below the engineers demands they invaded the hospitals and from these forced obviously unfit men out to work on the road. Except in isolated instances officers were not forced to work outside the camps but the threat that they would be used if more men were not turned out of hospital was frequently used.
- XIX. At Sunkurai, where conditions worst, the IJA Coy. Officer, (Lt. Abe) tensely came into the Officers' quarters and asked to see the most seriously ill officers (three died later) and said unless more men were sent to work my soldiers will take these men out to work tomorrow. This Officer was conspicuous at all times for failing to stop brutal treatment of P.O.W. by his men even if present at beatings. Of 1600 men of Sunkurai camp in May 1200 died and 200 more still in hospital - many will die. Petitions and appeals treated with contempt. It is not hard to realise what would have happened but for the arrival of Lt. Wackabashia of the Malayan P.O.W. Admin. in Sunkurai early in August. Conditions at this camp gradually improved.

- XX. By July more than  $\frac{1}{2}$  force were without boots due to constant work and walking in the mud - poisoned and trench feet were general rule. Blankets promised at Changi were never issued - clothing issues negligible and medical supplies inadequate. Banana leaves strips of shirts were used to bandage hundreds of ulcer cases. This caused the unnecessary amputations of ulcerous limbs and many such patients subsequently died.
- XXI. Road to Bangpong still impassable at end of July, but even though river was open to traffic and being utilised by IJA and thus canteen supplies requests for medical supplies and stores left at Bangpong were repeatedly ignored.
- XXII. Several men alone or in groups endeavoured to escape via the jungle during this period. Probable death under these conditions preferable to the abominable treatment received. One party of officers seeing their men ill-treated and dying tried to escape to take news to the Inter. Red Cross authorities, but 5 died and 4 were recaptured.
- XXIII. In August a camp was established at Tombaya (Burma) and 2000 sick men were sent there. Unfortunately rations still deficient of vitamins and 800 died - nevertheless the Burma camp did great work, as there was no Engineers work to be done and men had a chance to work and receive slowly even with poor rations.
- XXIV. From August on things improved at Sunkurai but not so much at Kami-Sunkurai. The Engr's blasted each day at the back of the hospital. Rocks from the blasts fell on the patients in hospital and one man had his arm broken and later died. This went on for a week before representations were acknowledged by the IJA and the blasting controlled. In this camp the latrines used by Tamil labourers were within 10 yds. of P.O.W.'s officers. Tamils subsequently proved to be infected with cholera and small pox.
- XXV. Due to totally inadequate accommodation in all camps men slept actually touching - consequently skin infection was 100% throughout the force - except at Sunkurai - officers similarly placed.
- XXVI. The move back to Kamburi began in November and such was the state of health of the men that 46 died en route and 186 within 3 weeks of arrival at Kamburi. This figure excludes the worst cases left at Burma. It is certain that several hundred more will die as a result of the treatment in Thailand.
- XXVII. The Changi Guards on the whole treated us quite well. IJA officers discouraged face slapping but it was vainly common nevertheless. It arose mainly from language difficulty and when our officers were slapped it made maintenance of discipline difficult. It also bred resentment and had feelings in the men which will continue long after this war is over. However, the Guard GURROKIE TOYAMA who claims to be well educated was a notorious face slapper and officer abuser. At Bangpong he hit officers and men of every party with the steel shaft of a golf club, cutting open one major's head and breaking the arm of another. The cause of these assaults was known only to Toyama. Later at Shimo Sunkurai he habitually hit officers and men for no apparent reason. He has an ungovernable temper and was apparently uncontrollable by his own officers. It was a pleasure to him to insult our senior officers - he should never have been allowed in control of P.O.W.



XXVIII. Laterly our Changi guards prevented many cases of maltreatment, by Engineers.

XXIX. It may be thought that some of the above report is exaggerated, it is however only the barest outline of a period of intense and bitter hardship suffered by a party of P.O.W.'s. If proof is required, surely it is sufficient to quote the figures that speak all too plainly. Of the 7000 men who left Changi in April, now in December about 3000 are dead, 3000 more are in hospital and convalescing, of whom several hundred will die during the next few months from hardship undergone.

XXX. We knew from letters received from England and Australia, that it is believed that P.O.W.'s are being well treated by the IJA. If and when the actual facts regarding treatment in Thailand are known abroad the news will be quoted with widespread amazement and indignation.

*JOHN TRENOWETH'S HAND WRITTEN  
ACCOUNT OF EVENTS  
AS A POW*

Nearly two years have passed since that infamous <sup>1819</sup> Singapore fell, and in so doing passed into the hands of my present host - the Nipponese. There have been times when the period of captivity seemed much longer than the contrary. At other times I thought it much shorter, due I suppose to the incidents, that have I suffered being so vividly impressed on my mind.

I don't suppose that my last couple of letters were ever received, so perhaps it would be better if I started my story from the time when we had to make our inglorious retreat from the mainland of Malacca to that isolated fortress Singapore. I was attached to the 2/19 Regt. which unfortunately suffered the greatest number of casualties of any unit during the fighting on the mainland, losing nearly 75% of our strength in killed and missing. We repaired our guns and re-embarked at a place called Juban Pan. When this was completed we were given the task of covering the retreat of those who were left on the mainland - luckily for us we never contacted the enemy and the whole force was allowed to retreat to the island. Luckily I say because as we found out later many of our reinforcements could not even be recalled as yet. No doubt I have heard how Singapore fell, so I won't go into the many details many of which are not worthy of reporting.

It was during our retreat that our last general Regt was the 2/19 Regt in a week to settle in Japan ~~and~~ not our ~~territory~~ <sup>territory</sup> ~~in which~~ <sup>in which</sup> ~~we~~ <sup>we</sup> ~~were~~ <sup>we</sup> ~~in~~ <sup>in</sup> ~~charge~~ <sup>charge</sup>. I think you know the end very well. The day our one again attached to the 2/19 in a position overlooking the Straits of Malacca. To make the usual long story short. The Gaps eventually attacked and got strong foot holds on the island immediately. The morning after they landed found our position isolated and finally surrounded. The only way out that order was given to retreat was through a mangrove swamp which they waded across, a distance of a mile or so. Sometimes we waded up to our ankles and at other times it reached our waist. Ray and I were separated and did not see each other for a couple of days. During the walk across the swamps we were machine-gunned, mortared and described the whole way - in all quite a torrid crossing. Ray told me later that his crossing was much the same as mine except that the mortars missed me when they hit bolts. He and his two friends helping me and rounding the other two. Both Ray's two friends were able to get out under their own steam and when I saw them a couple of weeks later in the hospital they were practically right again.

The so called battle for Singapore lasted as much as which  
time years truly if sea time had of hours up, months long  
visited the "Barly Gates" on many an occasion. My old  
Duesless hat was forgotten during the last week on the patch  
padding and cables layers were being killed and wounded as  
fast as they were replaced. So a like noting I did go.  
Capitulation was and so it is to gods to let me fight  
another day.

After capitulation we were sent out in massive to a  
place called Changi where we were left in confinement  
peace for the next four months. Till my personal  
idea of a POW life was shattered when I voluntarily  
became one of those unfortunate. I imagined that some  
jokes, sentences marching around and not as less the  
monkey in a cage, stunk. It actually we were placed  
in the old Changi Barracks which has an area of perhaps  
30 or more acres; and as far as the joys were concerned  
we seldom saw them. The wife although not offering  
to do all our administration and to get food supplies in  
with food, but we well alone. The first few weeks  
of our imprisoned rest was as good as after our previous  
 hectic few months. But time dragged everything and it was  
not long before we were suffering from the worst disease  
"Dysentery" and some started to fall heavily in our hands.  
Concert parties, lectures and educational classes were soon  
started and these helped along to a great extent.  
In April 42 about 5000 of us were then sent to Bukit  
Timah which is near Singapore proper - Changi being well up  
in the east coast. Our work at Bukit Timah was to  
build a Shrine in memory of the Japanese Soldiers killed  
in Singapore Island - for this task we were paid the  
British sum of 15 cents a day. Work in the shrine was  
not hard but description forbids me from telling the full  
details of my activities during the next eight months. We  
usually found the food very much better when we were out  
on a working party than back at Changi - due I suppose to the  
fact that the wife stayed we obtained more food when we were  
earning our living. The food question without a doubt has  
been our greatest problem to date. It is in fact seems to  
agree with the people of that part - but Singapore has a  
thousand times less than there have been our staple food all  
along with a few green vegetables, potatoes and fish. In the  
last 4-5 years we have been the prison  
for a great deal of our sickness. While we were sent  
at Bukit Timah we were allowed a lot more freedom  
and with our 15 cents a day we could supplement our  
diet with fruit and eggs. Well as all good things come

***JOHN TRENOWETH'S TYPED ACCOUNT  
OF EVENTS  
AS A POW***

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In this account of events, I tried to leave out as many I's as possible and make the description as impersonal as I could. If success was not achieved in that respect, I fear it must be put down to human nature.

The two main factors that have worried us most have been lack of food, and secondly, the uncertainty of the duration of our stay under the yoke of Nippon. If only we could have been given a definite number of years to do, or more "prison like" to serve - say two, three or four - we would have had something to work on, something concrete to go by. But things were, so much uncertainty always hung over us, and this left a breeding ground for rumours and speculations to run riot.

I should have kept a diary, but views and notions are often warped when one is living in a world of ghostly fantasies where one's fate hung daily in the balance. Men died not heroically, nor in a clean way, but in filth. There was something clean and noble about the wounds and deaths caused by the war; death often came instantly or in other cases at short intervals. Whereas on the other hand, men died in Thailand filthy of such diseases as Cholera, Dysentery, Typhus and many others of just plain starvation. Others died because they hadn't the spirit and "Gutz" to carry on - so lay down to await death in any form that it may take. This did not happen in a few isolated incidents but in hundreds of cases. Others who had the "Gutz" did try to live and often lingered on for months only to break in the end from sheer exhaustion.

It was wonderful that so much spirit and tolerance was shown unto others, as when one looked facts in the face our future looked gloomy and uncertain to say the very least. If only we had gone through the hardship and trials of endurance without the shadow of death being cast over so many, because if so, our memory of those dark years would have had many bright spots amongst them.

From my observation of human nature I never saw where suffering enobled men, to the contrary it made them petty and suspicious, made them more ready to doubt the good intentions of others. I will admit that in a few isolated cases it did enoble them, but for the majority - No. More often I saw how suffering deproved them, and I feel that I learnt more from my observations of seeing others suffer than perhaps I would have if I had been in their place. I have always imagined that suffering would give one a warped outlook on life - no doubt to the contrary, if the sufferer had a strong enough personality, it would give him character and perhaps a more tolerant outlook on life. To the others I would say that illness only bought deterioration to their character and a warped and twisted mind. But who am I to judge. I read an article by Somerset Maugham and what he said is well worth quoting:-

"But when we come to judge others it is not by ourselves as we really are that we judge them, but by an image that we have formed of ourselves from which we have left out everything that offends our vanity or would discredit us in the eyes of the world".

"I am not my brother's keeper. I cannot bring myself to judge my fellows; I am content to bserve them. My observations have led me to believe that, all in all, there is not so much difference between the good and the bad as the moralists would have us believe".

Nearly two years have passed since that impregnable fortress of Singapore fell, and in so doing passed into the hands of my present host - the Nipponese. There have been times when the period of captivity seemed much longer, then to the contrary, at other times, I thought it much shorter, due, I suppose to the incidents that have happened being so vividly impressed on my mind.

I don't suppose that my last couple of letters were ever received, so perhaps it would be better if I started my story from the time when we had to make our inglorious retreat from the mainland of Malaya to that Island fortress, Singapore. I was attached to the 2/19 Batt. which unfortunately suffered the greatest number of casualties of any unit during the fighting on the mainland losing nearly 75% of our strength in killed and missing. We refitted and gathered our reinforcements at a place called Johone Baru. When this was completed, we were given the task of covering the retreat of those who were left in the mainland - luckily for us we never contacted the enemy and the whole force was allowed to retreat on to the Island. Luckily I say because as we found out later many of our reinforcements could not even handle a rifle. No doubt you have heard how Singapore fell, so I won't go into the harrowing details, many of which are not worthy of repeating. One thing that bears telling and that is how friend, Ray, was wounded. The Nips gave us a week to settle in before we met their tornado attack in which time we "dug-in" and put up barbed wire here there and everywhere. Ray and I were again attached to the 2/19 in a position overlooking the Straits of Johone. To make the usual long story short the Japs eventually attacked and got strong foot holds on the Island immediately. The morning after that landing found our Battalion isolated and practically surrounded. The only way out when the order was given to retreat was through a Mangrove swamp which we waded across, a distance of a mile or so. Sometimes we waded up to our ankles, and at other times it reached our waist. Ray and I were separated and did not see each other for a couple of weeks. During the walk across the swamp we were machine-gunned, mortared and dive-bombed the whole way - in all, quite a torrid crossing. Ray told me later that his crossing was much the same as mine except when the mortars missed me they hit both he and his two friends killing one and wounding the other two. Both Ray and his friend were able to get out under their own steam and when I saw them a couple of weeks later in hospital, they were practically right again.

The so-called battle for Singapore lasted a week, in which time, yours truly, if his time had of been up would have visited the "Pearly Gates" on many occasions. My old wireless set was forgotten during the last week as Despatch Riders and Cable-layers were being killed and wounded as just as they were replaced. So a bike-riding I did go. Capitulation came and so allowed the gods to let me fight another day.

After capitulation we were sent out en-masse to a place called Changi where we were left in comparative peace for the next four months. All my preconceived ideas of a P.O.W.'s life were shattered when I actually became one of those unfortunates. I imagined barbed wire fences, sentries, marching around and more or less the monkey in a cage stunt. But actually we were housed in the Old Changi Barracks which has an area of perhaps 30 or more acres; and as for as the Jap were concerned we seldom saw them. The Nip allowed our officers to do all our administration and except for supplying us with food, left us well alone. The first few weeks of our enforced rest was a god sent after our previous hectic few months - but time changes everything and it was not long before we were suffering from the P.O.W. disease "Boredomitis" and time started to fall heavily

on our hands. Concert Parties lectures and Educational classes were soon started and these helped things to a great extent. In April, '42, about 3000 of us were then sent to Bukit-Tima which is near Singapore proper - Changi being well up in the east coast. Our work at Bukit Tima was to build a Shrine in memory of the Japanese Soldiers killed in Singapore Island - for this task we were paid the princely sum of 15 cents a day. Work on the Shrine was not hard but discretion forbids me from telling the full details of my activities during the next eight months. We invariably found the food very much better when we were out on a working party than back at Changi - due I suppose to the fact that the Nip thought we deserved more food when we were earning our living. The food question without a doubt has been our greatest problem to date. The rice diet seems to agree with the people of the East - but Europeans No. A thousand times No's. Rice has been our staple food all along with a few green vegetables, potatoes and fish. In this diet Vitamin A-B are lacking which has been the reason for a great deal of our sickness. While we were out at Bukit Tima we were allowed a lot more freedom and with our 15 cents a day we could supplement our diet with fruit and eggs. Well as all good things come to an end, so did our stay at Bukit Tima. 700 were picked to go North (we think Formosa) and the balance to return to Changi. I went to Changi and Ray to Formosa. Time will tell who was the lucky one.

NX56335

Life back at Changi was very much the same as our first couple of months as a P.O.W.. The food was a little better in quantity but quality was on a par with what we had before we went to Bukit Tima. At this stage the meat supply on the Island had given out and so ended our Protein issue.

The next three months eventually passed and much excitement was caused by an announcement of another party to go north to an unnamed country, where food was plentiful and the climate cool as we would be in the mountains. Rumours and speculations ran riot concerning our ultimate destination - also the Japanese gave out that there would not be any work - never were so many fooled by so few. Our "promised land" turned out to be a land of hell death and disease, not to mention one of starvation. But I am running ahead of my story. 7000 were ultimately picked - 2700 English and 2300 A.I.F.. We were despatched in 600 lots, 27 to a truck in true "a la cattle truck fashion". It rained cats and dogs the night we left Changi and so arrived at the station with ourselves, our goods and chattles sopping wet - not a very happy start. Eventually we settled into our sardine tins on the 18th April and took stock of our position. We were 27 to an iron closed in van, the only ventilation being a sliding door on each side and in this "Hells Inferno" we had to stay, what turned out to be six days. Once we were on our way our destination was announced as Thailand. As the days passed conditions got worse - during the day the sides of the truck got so hot as to be untouchable and the atmosphere within was insufferable. Sanitary conditions were very primitive and to say the least inconvenient. Eventually we neared the Thai border and in so doing were met practically on the line by a scare or so of vultures - a bad omen I thought. The incident brought to mind the story of the Ancient Mariner; he granted, only had an Albatross following, but our fate in my estimation turned out to be much worse. Our train ride came to an end at Bangpong, much to our great joy. This state of mind was short lived as we were enlightened that our next destination would be a 100 miles away; only this time we would not have the inconvenience of a train ride, but that we would use Shankes pony or walk.



Their estimate of a 100 miles was just 110 miles out, as our Promised Land lay on the 210 mile peg. When I read Kenneth Roberts' description of Major Rogers and his forced marches through the French and Indian country I thought Roberts wrote a masterpiece, but rather exaggerated and overdid the hardship that the Rangers suffered, as they could not possibly in my estimation stand up to those forced marches, suffering from sickness as they did. But often what I experienced and observed during those next 19 days, I feel that if Roberts' wanted to exaggerate he would have no further extend those marches.

My respect for the human body has always been very great, but never in my wildest dreams did I ever think that I would actually see and experience the heights to which the human body and its endurance could be extended.

When we heard about the March everyone started to examine their goods and chattles and dump all unnecessary articles. Some were dumped on the spot but most of the spare clothing was sold secretly to the Thai civilians who lived near our camp. This dumping of clothing was necessary as we had to carry all our equipment which included cooking dixies, medical stores and all things thought necessary to make our land of Promise inhabitable. At this stage we were enlightened as to the true reason for leaving Singapore - we were to be labourers to work on the Railway line connecting Rangoon to Bangkok. Another reason for our lightening of packs was because we were under no allusion as to the difficulties that might be experienced on the road as many of our Party were sick men before they left Singapore.

Our force was recommended to take a percentage of sick as the Japanese thought that the extra food and better climatical conditions that we would encounter at our destination would be beneficial to our sick and in our blindness we heartily agreed. When I say we lightened our packs, that is not to say that we carried next to nothing - my equipment was fairly typical of what everyone carried i.e. 1 Pack, 1 Haversack, water bottle and bed role, in all weighing about 45 lbs.

On the 24th April, 1943 we left Bangpong 600 strong practically on the stroke of midnight. We covered nearly 35 miles in the first two marches, travelling all the time along what the Thais call a main road. At this stage, we realised what trouble we would experience in the very near future, many were at this time suffering from blistered feet and just plain exhaustion. Naturally the worst cases, were those who left Changi as convalescents, plus those again who had not done any work to any great extent for almost a year. Being the first party to leave Bangpong we were lucky in a way because we could leave 6 or 8 of the worst cases at each of our stops to cook for the following parties who were leaving Bangpong at the rate of 600 a day. This number that we were able to leave did not come anywhere near solving our problem. Except for a few isolated cases the nip would not allow us to leave any of our sick at the stopping places along the road; this necessitated us always carrying their gear and in many cases carrying them themselves. After the first two days March, we branched off the main road and took to a jungle track which we followed for practically the rest of the journey. Up to this stage we had been averaging from between 13-18 miles per day or more correctly, night and part of the following day; leaving as I said at night and arriving at our daily destination before lunch the following morning. The balance of the day would be devoted to eating, sleeping and in many cases "licking our wounds" - and then off again the same night. At this stage I had a little foot-trouble myself in the way of a couple of ulcers on ~~one~~ ankle.

But compared to the plight of others mine was a mere bag-a-telle. Out of the goodness of their hearts the Nip let us have a night's sleep at number 5 camp after being on the road for 5 days. Travelling by night has its advantages in as much that it is cooler, but against this, night travelling had to contend the mosquitoes, sandflies and not to say anything of the ruts and the holes in the road that we fell over and down. Especially was this trying when one carried an additional pack or perhaps a stretcher.

The trip could have been made a lot easier if we had of been able to make our own time, but the nip had apparently a certain itinerary to keep, and in so doing did not allow for our sick and footsore or for those who developed an ailment on the journey.

How clearly I remember that first night's stop after five continuous nights on the track - just as though it was a gift from the gods. Some I suppose, at this stage had doubts whether we were the chosen race and will remain so until our release. But that night of peace and quietness, was the lull before the storm. The next morning the 600 who were following us arrived into our camp and looked a sick and sorry lot, worse than us, I suppose, but we had the advantage of having a good night's sleep and for me, likewise many others, the first sleep since we commenced our march. Its wonderful what a good clean up will do. The other party experienced the same trouble as ourselves and their story differed very little from ours. That night we continued our journey to we knew not where and started out for number 6 camp.

It was during the next stage that our first real attack of sickness struck us. It came in the form of dysentery - this made very little difference to our numbers, but it was another burden we had to carry - and some believe me were mighty heavy.

It was about this stage of our journey that we came across a party of A.I.F. who left Singapore a couple of months before we did. They enlightened us as to our true destiny, and as we thought then, pointed a not too hopeful picture. I remember overhearing one of our Medical Officers asking their M.O. how his supplies were holding out. He laughed and went on to give his list of substitutes - charcoal for diarrhoea, boiled water for an antiseptic, leaves for bandages; and rest, if such a thing can be had for any other ailment. The farther the march progressed the worse the blistered feet position came. Early blisters were not allowed to heal and many were now turning into ulcers. This caused many of the boots to be out about in all manner of ways - bits here and pieces out of there. The further we marched along the track the more delapidated the boots became, until finally they were tossed to the wayside. The following parties needed no pathfinder to follow our track - boots were not the only things that were thrown out - any surplus articles quickly followed.

The scenery and beauty of the countryside was of very little interest to us - mostly due to the fact that in most occasions our heads were usually hanging down and of a day we were too busy catching up on a bit of shut eye. The vegetation differed from that of Malaya by being more open and not so closely meshed. Endless clumps of Bamboo grew along the track - towering above and sometimes completely closing over, making a jungle canopy.

Our track weaved a way of many directions but always ultimately ended by going North, keeping on the left of a rugged mountain range on the eastern side of the Burma border. Practically every day we touched the river that afterwards turned out to be the Mekwe-narroi.

On and on went our trek - to us it seemed endless. The comradeship I saw on that trip was wonderful to experience. Self, I saw time and time again forgotten to think of others. No one ever dropped out on the track without the familiar words coming from those nearby - "Want a hand mate". Naturally as human nature will always vary - so goodness came out in many and badness came out in a few. But the few instances of badness only emphasised the comradeship showed towards one another. Our hardships seemed to bring us closer together.

And so the days went on, sometimes at night tropical downpours would soak us and so make conditions a little more difficult. Carrying gear at any time is hard work, but when it is sopping wet it seems to add points to the weight. But at this stage we thought that things could not get very much worse and at that time it was as good a philosophy as another.

A week had passed then a fortnight and still no sign of a stop. When we left Singapore everyone man had a pair of boots, but after two weeks on the road it was quite a common sight to see many of the lads walking barefooted or some with rags or pieces of sack wound around their feet. It was still raining day and night religiously and so we often ploughed through a foot or so of mud. In this country, rain is not gauged in inches, but in feet. Fifteen - sixteen - seventeen - eighteen days of marching passed and at the end of the nineteenth day, we reached our promised land "Toimenta". Very little enthusiasm was shown as a drearier place could not be imagined. Very definitely we could not see any milk and honey". Bamboo huts were made but unfortunately we arrived a couple of months too soon as there were no roofs or adept thatching on them. However, the tents were issued and those who were lucky enough to fit in them kept dry - others just "too bad".

At our journey's end, many of us thought our hosts would have given us a little rest for may be two or three days. Any such optimists of this nature were quickly disillusioned as after all, we had only marched a distance of some two hundred miles. So out we went to work the next day and some were unlucky enough to work the same afternoon as we arrived. Our first task in this great military project was to build a bridge over a small stream. Building bridges under modern conditions I imagine would be comparatively easy, but under the primitive conditions that we laboured, few unions would stand it for long. Our job was firstly to procure the correct type of timber and carry some from the depths of the surrounding jungle - then merely carry same to the bridge site, often the logs were anything up to 30 ft. long and 18" in diameter. On rare occasions and "Pancake Days" a couple of elephants would work with us. I remember on one occasion there were 12 of us "coolies" working with an elephant or perhaps vice-versa and the log got caught in the undergrowth and friend elephant would not or could not extract same - our host then changed us places with this Mammal and <sup>after</sup> much pushing and grunting we extracted same and finished up by "carrying it out too".

- After this I laid claim to being 1/12 elephant power. Our hours of toil at this time was fairly reasonable from 7 O'clock to 8.30 at night. Work carried on much the same for the next 15 days until we had our first death, which was diagnosed as Cholera. This was on 26th May, 1943, and for the next 10 days we were put in isolation and which was worse, on light rations. Our diet consisted of two meals a day. Our first meal was a pint of thin rice gruel and our tea the same, plus  $\frac{1}{2}$  pint of onion water - not very appetising I assure you but from experience I have found that when one is hungry there is no need for food to be appetising. During the next 21 days we had 48 meals of plain rice and onion water. We had been warned previously about the Cholera as the camp farther up the river had cases a few days previously and called on one of our M.O.'s to help them out - leaving us one. Everyone seemed to take the Cholera scare very calmly, which in one way is surprising I suppose, for after all it has been causing panics for centuries past. Little did we know at this time that nearly half the force of 7000 men would be wiped out by this disease and other plagues that we would encounter in the next six months. One death quickly followed another until on June 8th, 1943 the first party left for a place called Niki, a distance of some 13-14 miles. As we were to find out later our party of 600 was the "travelling party", that is to say, when any part of the line was behind schedule we were despatched to bring the work in line with the other sections of the Railway. As I said earlier we were in separate groups of approx. 600, and these parties were given separate tasks, all the way along the line. Further Cholera cases were occurring daily and almost dying at the same rate.

By June 16th all of our party had arrived at Niki where our job was to build a road. Our stay here was short-lived as on June 19, we again left Niki to go south to a place called Taratumpot, a distance of some 100 Kilometres. (60 miles). Of all the heart breaking jobs we had had to far, this turned out to be the worst. We were well into the Monsoonal Season by this time - torrential rains poured down half the day and night leaving the road and track nothing but a quagmire - in many places past our knees, and through this mud we had to carry our sick, our equipment and almost carry the Yaks that the Nip had pulling carts loaded with tools and tents. This went on day after day. Many times we had to push the carts through to their daily destination and later return for our sick and other "odds and ends".

Many of the Cholera cases that occurred on the journey were left in camp in charge of Medical Orderlies as the whole party only had one M.O. attached. Other diseases were now taking toll of our men besides Cholera, such as Dysentery, Beri Beri, Malaria and what was classed as Pellagra. This was actually caused by our living conditions - starvation rations and just plain exhaustion. Our numbers decreased daily. On our downward trek we passed through Teimonta, Konkoita, then on to Kramkrai. About this stage we had to unload the Yak carts and carry the loads ourselves, then return the next day to help pull the carts through the mud, plus a little help from the Yaks themselves. It is doubtful who were in the worst condition - the Yaks or ourselves. We started out with nearly a spare Yak to each cart and by the end of the journey there were certainly no spares.

During our trek down we saw many dead "Boongs" mainly Chinese and Indians who died on the wayside, whereas others were left on the roadside to die. Parts of the way, the stench was terrific. Finally on June 26th, 1943, we arrived at our destination. The Paddy Fields (later called Turarumpit). We were given two days to "lick our wounds" and build tent sites.

We camped in the middle of an ex paddy field, covered in places with inches of water and to say the very least with mud all over. Our first job was to make a platform to put the hospital tents on. Up till now the Cholera cases had been lying on stretchers, flat on the damp ground.

At this period, we had with us in all about 20 Cholera cases. These had occurred on the last part of our journey and a few that broke out immediately on our arrival.

At this early stage our tents were showing signs of wear, gaping holes appeared through which the rain poured. In peace time 6 men occupied a tent, in which now we packed 20. We were shoulder to shoulders, foot to foot, an ideal position for the breeding of diseases. Our cemetery grew as the days passed. One day a man would stop beside you and the following night he would be sleeping peacefully at rest in the cemetery.

Work at this camp consisted of making an embankment across the Paddy Fields. Anything so primitive as the way we made it could not be imagined. The earth was carried in little baskets, holding about three shovels full-these we dug out on the side and thrown on the embankment site. Another method was to make a stretcher out of a rice bag then carried and emptied on the site.

On 2nd July, 1943, we moved this time toward Jackanun, where we stayed until Aug. 18th when an advanced party (the fittest of us) went north again and passed through the same old places, Kramkri, Konkoita, Tarmenta, until we arrived at our new camp site near Termon. Here we stopped for the next 14 days.

The working hours were now very much longer, we ate our breakfast in the dark and after walking sometime a mile or so to work, we would start at 8 o'clock. Work would not stop on the approach of darkness, but at times when the work was very much in arrears we would work well into the night with the aid of carbon lights. We were lucky if we arrived back at camp by 8.30 P.M.. We did work as late as 2 o'clock the following morning on many an occasion.

Apparently from what we gathered, each party had a certain amount or distance of the Railway to complete. This allotment was originally estimated on an assumption that we would always have our original full complement of men. This was always to the contrary, as never at any time were we able to muster  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the camp for work. The greater majority of the time it was less than  $\frac{1}{2}$  (due to sickness).

The Nips were forever worrying our M.O. to send more sick men to work. We could never satisfy them as to our numbers. At times they were reasonable and at others most unreasonable. As long as a man could walk it was their contention that he was able to work. The position got so bad at one camp to our north that on some occasions they had to even carry men to work to have their full quota at work as requested by the Nipponese. This state of affairs continued until the Railway was finally through.

As it can be imagined this continued call for men left the camp completely void of fit men; and as duties such as hygiene and various other duties had to be carried on it made things very difficult to say the very least. This was one of the main factors why the diseases spread so rapidly.

At this time fresh diseases broke out amongst the troop, namely typhus and blackwater fever, luckily these were able to be controlled and did not get the control that Cholera had. Chronic Malaria kept a fair proportion of the men off work. Several cases of Pneumonia appeared, and in the majority of cases proved fatal, as the men had not the resistance left in them to fight it off.

Up to this time the Termon camp was the worst one we had lived in. Sanitary, living and hospital conditions were appalling. Indians and Chinese lived with us in the same huge barn like hut. We were separated only by a thin bamboo partition. Under this same roof men died, starved and cried; others tried to fight their way back to health only to be carried away by some other filthy disease. Day and night the stench never left the area as the ground surrounding the hut was fouled continuously.

Latrines were on the two sides of our hut, within five yards at places from where men were sleeping. Rains water was forever filling in these latrines - overflowing them and so fouling the surrounding areas. Conditions soon got from bad to worse. Why more men never died in this misbegotten hole, only God knows.

At last even the Nipponese saw that conditions were too filthy to live in, so on Aug. 21 we moved to a new camp site, which proved to be the cleanest and best organised camp we had yet seen.

Tropical ulcers were the cause of many men being in hospital or at least in a separate hut which we called a hospital. Lack of medical supplies was the direct cause for more of the skin complaints. Proper bandages had given out months before and antiseptics were at a premium. Any skin eruption or knock or two turned into an ulcer. Many grew to the size of 6 -7 inches in diameter. With the lack of good food and the low resistance of the men these often proved fatal when they turned septic or gangreen set in. Amputation of limbs were necessary in many cases. When this occurred the patient only had a 50-50 chance of recovery. The medical officers did a marvellous job, but lack of instruments and supplies beat them time and time again. Saws used in amputations were borrowed ones, previously used on hut building. It was a miracle that so many recovered from these primitive operations. Treatments for the ulcers were many and varied. Scraping them with a spoon every day was the most painful way of treating them I saw - nerves and sinews would often be completely exposed - a more bloody looking sight could not be imagined. The men would dread the time when their turn approached and often when they were told their leg would have to be amputated were glad to have the operation.

Amputations were carried out under a Mosquito net in the open. Men suffered more actual pain from ulcers than from any other disease that we encountered. Some of the sights seen in the hospitals were so ghastly that mere description, could not in any way paint a true enough picture.

In many ways we were more fortunate than some of the other camps. Two hundred of our worst cases were able to be evacuated down the river to a large hospital camp at Kamburi. They composed Beri-Beri cases, ulcers and convalescents from every disease that we encountered. Quite a number died on the journey down and many died soon after their arrival. On the other hand if they had not made the journey, probably over 50% would not have survived over the next month or so. The camp to our north were able to send some of their worst cases to Burma. There again, many died on the way and as Ulcers would not be treated and bathed during the journey, they turned septic and in many cases gangreen was the result.

Many and varied were the ways the Nip enticed, forced and persuaded us to work harder.

One stunt was to allot the men in groups of 3 and give each group a certain number of cubic metres to dig on the side of the railroad - they carry the excavated earth up in to the embankment. The procedure would be as follows:- two men would carry the earth while the third member of the party filled the carrying stretchers. When the task was completed, each party was allowed to go back to camp. From our point of view the majority found many of the tasks impossible. In some cases a party could finish at a reasonable hour - that is if everyone in the party were fit. But in the majority of cases, at least one or sometimes two, would be unable to do his share of the work, then the work fell mainly on the third member.

Originally from what we gathered it was assumed that the P.O.W.'s would be able to finish the railroad without any outside help. But as time went on they readily saw that we could never complete it any where near the allotted time. This resulted in them bringing thousands of Chinese and Indians from Malaya to help complete the task. How many there were is hard to say but it would be in the vicinity of 130,000. Only for their help, I doubt if any of us would have left the country alive. Their casualties were far heavier than ours. It is doubtful, if, at a conservative estimation 25% returned to Malaya alive. They lacked organisation and discipline. This resulted in absolute chaos breaking out when diseases and plagues appeared in their camp. Many of our Doctors were sent to help them but in practically every case they were sent without medical supplies. \* (Later information gave the deaths of natives as 80,000).

However, as I stated earlier, we moved to our new camp on Aug, 21st, from this date on, conditions started to improve. The monsoon period which had caused all the trouble and the majority of the sickness, was now on the wane. Our death rate fell down to normal and for the first time in months/<sup>one</sup> felt that we had a good chance of surviving.

An increased effort was now made by the Nipponese to finish the railroad - so progress resulted and working hours increased. We started practically at dawn and worked on many occasions well into the night. Food was now a little more plentiful and generally everyone was in a happier frame of mind.

September and October passed, and with their passing the line from the south and the one from the north, gradually grew closer together; Until on 25/10/43, the two lines met just south of Taimonta where we were. And so the cause for which so many lives were lost was completed. After this the work gradually slackened off and we had our first rest for about six months.

By this time, we had had work that when the Railway was completed, we would return again to Singapore. For each and everyone of us the time never came quick enough. We thought in our innocence that now our days of hardship would be over, but once more we were disillusioned, as we had yet another endurance test to go through.

Even though the train line ran through our camp, we had to March 12 miles to the north to catch our train to Singapore. Not only did we have to walk, but we had to carry out hospital patients, their gear plus our own. Out of our original 700 we now numbered slightly less than 200.

Our day of trial or more correctly trials came on Nov. 6, 1943. The hospital had 35 patients who had to be carried and another 40 they thought were capable of walking without carrying any gear. The so-called fit personnel amounted to 125 of which 120 would be required to carry the 35 patients (four to a stretcher). This left 5 men to carry the remainder of the gear.

The party left on the morning of the 6th and arrived at Niki, which was approx, 12 miles distant at varying times. Some carried the first stretcher in at 6 P.M. and the last one eventually arrived about 9 o'clock. Each stretcher party carried their own and the patients gear, plus the patient and any other little odds and ends they may have acquired. Calling them stretchers was somewhat flattering. Actually they were made out of Bamboo and Rice Bag.

If our march had of been along a road or track it would not have been such a hard journey; but to make the party march along a Railway line, increased the difficulties threefold. In the majority of places we had to walk on the line and sleepers as the path on the side was too narrow. However, we did the task as we did everything else - somehow - someway. Immediately on our arrival we were informed there was still another march ahead of us that night. The fit personnel had yet another 8-9 miles, to journey to their destination. This camp was called No. 2. From the tales told, this place was a "death camp" if ever the name could be applied.

We gathered that there were originally 1400 men in the camp to build a bridge nearby. During its construction over a thousand men died before it was finished and a further 200 died later. Of the remaining 200, one hundred were sent to Burma. This left 100 semi fit men out of an original 1400. Such sacrifices as these would only be required by the God of War.



Our stay at this tragic camp was not of a very long duration. The Nip despatched us on the southward journey on Nov. 19. We were packed in open trucks and arrived at Kambari on Nov. 22. On the journey down, it was interesting to see the different places we had passed through on our upward journey. How changed and different they looked. Many tragic memories were again recalled as we saw the graves and their little crosses which denoted them - strewn almost the whole length of the railroad. Many were at rest in cemeteries but still hundreds lay on the sides of lonely jungle paths - isolated from view and now no doubt overgrown and latticed by jungle creepers.

The stay at Kamburi was very pleasant, food was plentiful and work was nil. Eggs and bananas were in abundance. Still the majority were not sorry to leave on Dec. 2. The first party of 700, was to go by boat from Bangkok. The remainder to return by train. At the time of my departure, there were still many hundreds who were not fit to travel. So arrangements were made for them to leave at a later date.

My party went per boat. Bangkok docks were surprisingly new and modern in appearance. The 700 men slept in one of the dock sheds, with room in plenty, for the next 6 days.

It was on the 9th Dec. 1943 that our party said farewell to Bangkok, our boat was an old English cargo steamer of some 6000 odd tons. We gathered that this ancient relic was originally sold to the Nip in 1930. Half the party was quartered on the front and the balance in the rear, or more correctly the aft. Luckily it only rained twice on the voyage down as canvas covering was only available for half the men. A mere soaking at this late stage did not mean a thing as we had been living in wet clothes off and on for the last six months.

Our voyage to Singapore was very enjoyable - the food and treatment were excellent. When I say excellent I mean from what we had been used to. Rafts were in plenty in case we were torpedoed, but as our luck had been so bad to date, we were fairly sure by the law of averages of reaching Singapore safely.

We were unescorted the whole way except for an occasional aeroplane, who gave us a nonchalant look on a couple of occasions - then quickly turned tail and away.

All the men who were in any form of good health enjoyed the trip down and were sorry when Singapore was reached on Dec. 14. We remained on the boat until the 16th, when we disembarked and were taken to Changi.

I will always remember our appearance as we compared ourselves with those who remained at Changi. We were as clean as salt water would make us - but to outward appearance dirty. Our clothes were infested with lice and our bodies in many cases covered with scabies. If not covered we were 100% infested with the complaint.

A final summary of the trup found us to be - out of the original 7000, who went north in our party, only approx. 3500 returned alive - every second man died. The 3500 deaths were due to cholera, dysentery, malaria, beri-beri, blackwater fever, typhus, pneumonia, blood poisoning, death due to amputations and many others by their own choice.

Of those who returned alive many will never recover from the effects of their privations and trials that they experienced in these God forsaken jungles of North Thailand.

The Changi troop could not do enough for us on our return. Sterilization and disinfestation plants were soon under way and within a week we almost felt clean. Many went immediately into hospital and the balance were put in isolation for the next month or so.

Xmas came and passed, and so we entered the year 1944 - hopeful and thankful that we were lucky enough to escape death in its many ugly forms up north.

Changi life was very much the same as our first four months stay and the later period when we returned from Bukit Timah from our first working party. Concert parties and entertainment were wonderfully organised. Some form of entertainment was on every evening and life for us who were not used to it was very pleasant.

Food was very short and meals consisted of rice and vegetables with 1 or 2 ozs. of meat occasionally - however, it was enough to keep body and soul together - more the soul than the body; but after all, this in our present conditions was the main thing.

We were given quite a lengthy rest on our return, it would have been of a longer duration only Nippon exerted pressure for more working parties and so we complied with his wishes and to work more men did go.

Our work this time took the form of building an aerodrome. Working conditions were not too bad, as a matter of fact child's play as compared to what we had been used to in Thailand. At least on this job we were helped by a few mechanical devices such as "Bulldozers" Steam Shovels and Rollers and a railroad system for carting sand. The hours were reasonable 8 A.M. till 5 P.M. and later altered to two shifts namely 8 A.M. - 2 P.M. and 2 P.M. to 8 P.M.. Work mainly consisted of emptying and spreading sand skip. After two years of pick and shovel work - manual labour had lost its terrors for the majority of us.

Food was and always will be our major problem so long as we remain P.O.W.'s. The rice ration "see-sawed" from 12-16 ozs. per day with vegetables about 6 ozs. Meat or fish worked out about 1-2 ozs. every second day and this made up the grand total of our "Daily Bread".

Our Menu varied very little. Breakfast was a pint of plain rice gruel. Lunch a pint of Mash, consisting of rice and vegetables with a little Palm Oil mixed through if available. Tea was always the best meal of the day - usually a pint of thin stew, pint rice and a couple of fried or baked "Doovers" a la carte patrons were not catered for in our camp.

Nippon still paid us the princely sum of 15 cents a day. With this the smokers bought tobacco and the non-smokers bought fruits, nuts, sugar, Gula Molacca and other sundry items. As each month of the war passed, so did the prices in the canteen rise. Prices were as follows:- Coconuts 75 cents previously 5 cents Paw Paws 60 c. previously 15c. Sugar ~~3~~3.40 lb. Gula Molacca \$1.80 lb. Peanuts \$4.00 lb.

Tobacco when it was available went to \$1.50 per oz. (originally 20c. oz.) and cigars varied from 10.15c. each. So as can be seen 15c per day bought very little.

So work in camp went on, varying very little as the days passed. Workers on the Drome rested one day a week and those who remained in camp, work was found for them in the good old army style.

A great deal of excitement and speculation took place when the Nipponese announced that all P.O.W.'s had to vacate Changi Barracks and move into Changi Gaol. Formerly the gaol held all the Internees of Singapore. They in their turn went to Bukit Timah.

The date given to commence the move was the 13/5/44 and to be completed by 30/5/44. The move meant that we would lose all our so-called comforts, not only this, but that the space allotted for our living quarters would be vastly reduced. However, seeing that our Lord and Master gave the order it had to be obeyed - to say nothing about him being our Meal ticket. The move in all was a tremendous job, hospitals were also included. 1000 men from the main hospital were to go to another part of the Island called Crangi. In addition to this, another hospital of 500 beds was made outside the Gaol Walls.

Finally on 13/6/44 every Man-jack was quartered in the gaol area. Sleeping quarters could have been much worse but the lack of space was the main difficulty. Originally the cells were built to quarter one man (native) and into the one man space we were forced to put three and sometimes four.

Cooking facilities were very difficult as the one kitchen fed approximately 5,000 men, where as previously each unit was able to have its own cook-house.

Naturally, the meals served out were tasteless and unappetising. However, when food is scarce, we all found out that bulk and not small tasty articles are the main thing.

And so another five months have passed since I wrote my last epistle of events. For me the time spent quite pleasantly; practically the whole period I worked on the gardens. These have been an absolute god-send, as all the vegetables produced are for our own consumption. The daily ration from this source works out about half a pound. Their issue being in addition to our usual Jap ration scale. The work was interesting, and to my surprise, I developed quite a liking for the work mainly because I was given an area of about an acre to look after. This, no doubt, was the reason for my unexpected interest.

Our variety of produce was very limited as the soil was poor and fresh goodness in the way of fertilizers were not available in sufficient quantities to rejuvenate the soil after each crop was produced. Surface crop such as Bayam and Amaranthus were our main source of supply and supplemented by Tapioca and sweet potatoes to a lesser degree.

We worked five days a week from 9 - 5 o'clock and on two half days namely, Wednesday and Sunday - not that naming the days makes any difference to us because all days in a gaol are the same. The gardens were all within a mile from the gaol and amounted in all to approx, 25 acres. The average monthly yield has been 40 tons. Work on the aerodrome is still progressing and working conditions are very much the same. From experience the gardens are the heaviest work, as practically all the work done by each individual, I mean the amount, is voluntary, with little or no Jap. supervision. All the men put their backs behind the job - no doubt with the thought in mind that the more produced the more they eat.

With Xmas 45 only a little over a month off, our Xmas dinner looks as though it is going to be very plain as many of the food stuff that were available last Xmas have reached such prohibitive prices as to be beyond our means. Peanuts are \$ 12.80 per pound nearly two pounds Sterling (£2) and Gula-Molacca over \$ 5.00. This is the Malay Substitute for sugar. These items against or compared to our monthly pay of \$7.50 is self-explanatory.

At present our main trouble is lack of tobacco. In the past, to a certain extent everyone has been able to procure one way or another sufficient to smoke - but like every other item Tobacco is getting scarcer and scarcer. Personally I have been able to make mine last longer because I have been mixing Paw Paw and Egg Fruit leaves with Tobacco. Our botanists have stated that Egg Fruit was originally related to the tobacco plant. In my mind, the relationship must have been very distant and no doubt many mixed -marriages have taken place during the succeeding years. However, it has done its purpose and to date I have suffered no ill effects. During the very short periods, I have smoked both these leaves without any tobacco. Egg Fruit though being my choice of substitutes. Other leaves I have tried have been Hybiscus, wild cherry, sweet potato leaves and not forgetting to try again my childhood experiments with tea leaves. Whenever smokes were scarce it is very noticeable that the men's tempers are easily raised and arguments can be bought at any old price; but while ever smokes are procurable our boredom and tempers simmer along in tolerable harmony.

Fruit with the exception of Coco-Nuts, have entirely disappeared from the canteen supplies - these are now \$1.10 their original price was 5 cents.

Last June, when our unit came into the gaol, we were fortunate enough to be quartered in huts built in one of the court-yards. We stayed in these until the end of August, when, with our luck still holding we went into tents, rather crowded, but infinitely better than sleeping in a cell, which at this period houses three and sometimes four men. With a total of nearly 5,000 within the gaol walls, living space is crowded, but with the internal organisation improving as time goes on, life is made quite tolerant.

11. Nov. 44. Not that it means anything, but today is our thousandth day as P.O.W.'s. It means only that time is passing and that after all is the main worry of "Les Miserables".

Christmas Day 1944 has passed with its passing another milestone has gone-bye-another year - maybe our last - who knows? A subject much near our heart was our Xmas dinner etc.. The cook house did a magnificent job. The one gaol kitchen cooked for nearly 5,000 men. Our breakfast consisted of a pint and a quarter of rice gruel flavoured with sugar, soya beans and ~~soya~~ palm oil two "Doovers" were also added, one baked and the other fried. Lunch a pint of Hash a fresh roll and one fried patty, both had vegetable fillings. Our tea was our main meal, the one that the cooks put their hearts and souls into. A pint of vegetables soup and five "Doovers". No. 1 with fish fillings 2 and 3 had vegetable fillings 4 and 5 sweet fillings.

The following is a list of items that the cooks had issued to prepare Xmas Day meals for 4,774 men.

Oil	147 galls.	Fish	620 lbs.	Garlic	7 lbs.	Gula Molacco	285 lbs
Rice	6377 lbs.	Cheese	213 "	Towgay	200 "	Ramboutans	547 "
Soya Beans	400 "	Vege.	9000 "	Ausuk Beans	200 "	Ginger.	10 "
Bananas	100 "	Salt	303 "	Ragi	250 "	Tea	102 "
Sugar.	282 "	Pepper	13 %				

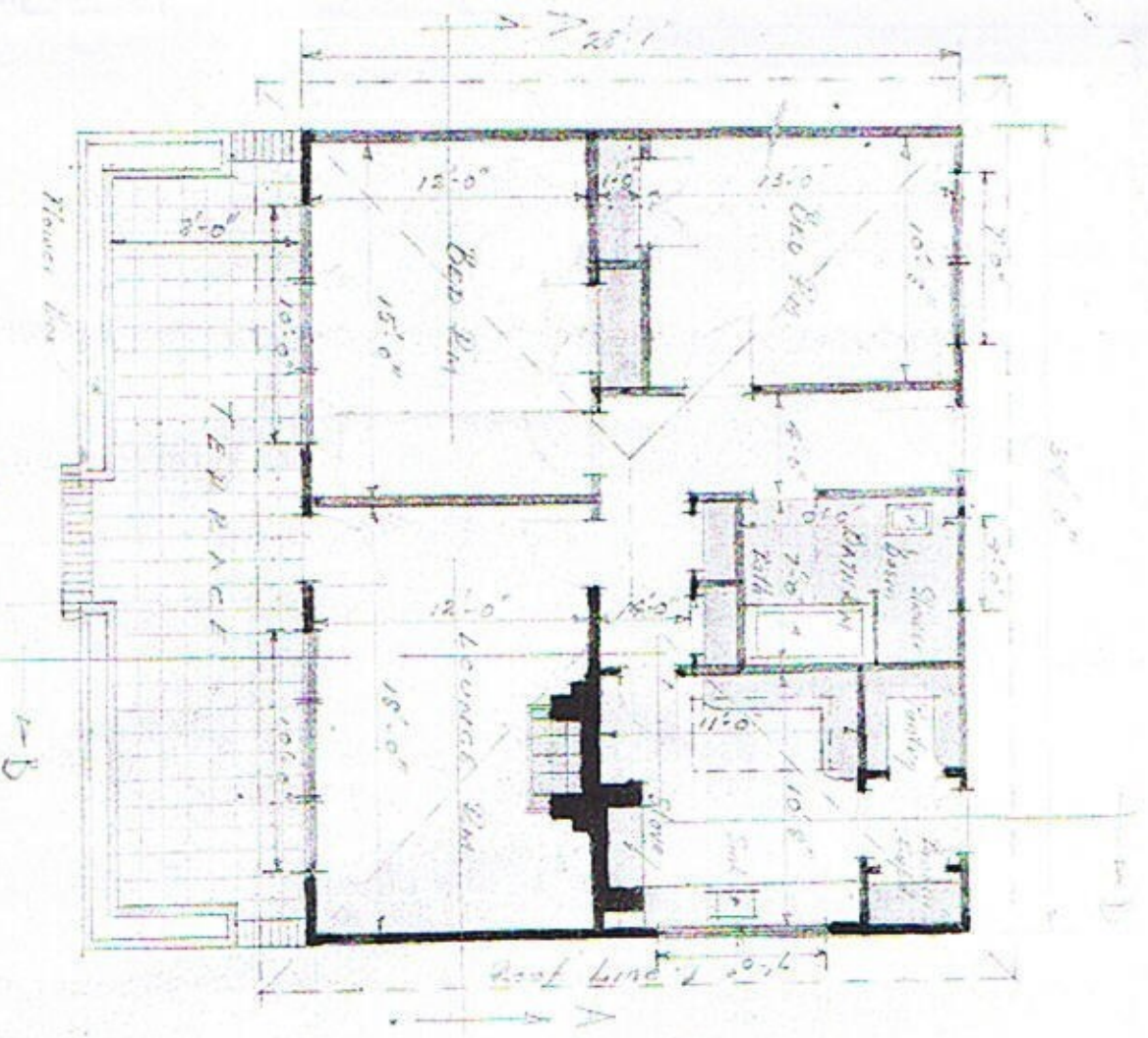
Total Articles Produced "Doovers".  
53,100 articles.

Rice Grnel. 809 galls.  
Hash 671 "  
Tea 4,000 "

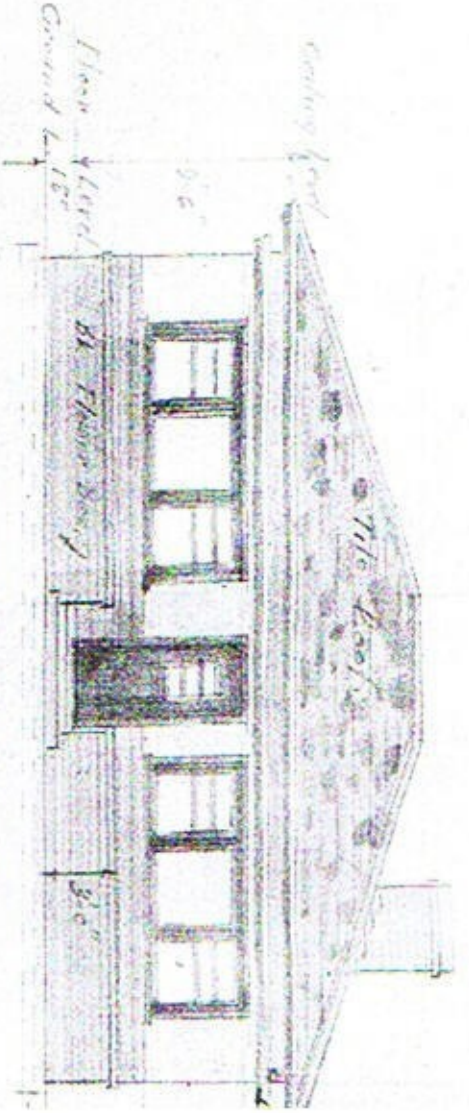
\* These amounts being nearly double to what we receive with ordinary days rations \*

***HOUSE PLANS DRAWN FOR JOHN  
TRENOWETH  
BY FELLOW POW  
ON THE BACK OF OFFICIAL  
CHANGI PRISON CORRESPONDENCE***

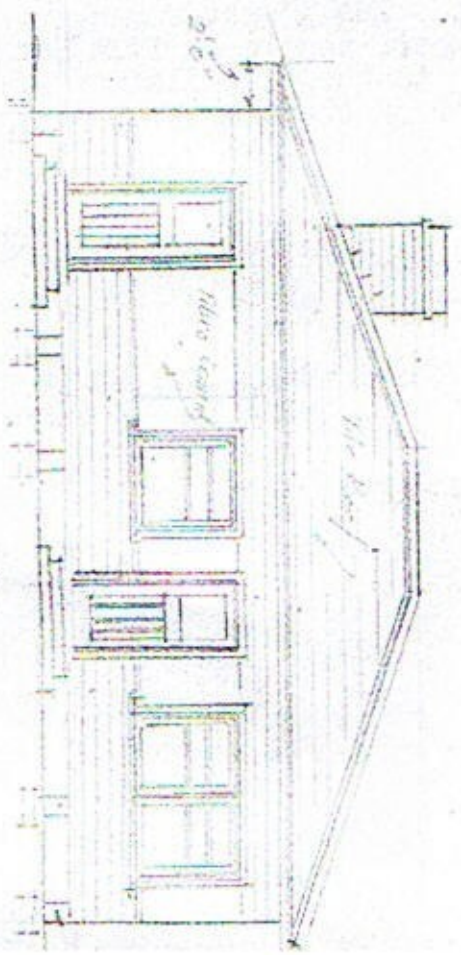
FLOOR PLAN



FRONT ELEVATION



PLAN ELEVATION



⑧  
IMMEDIATE.

Sir,

I have the honour to inform you that the Superintendent of the Changi Prison reports as follows - dated 26th: January, 1937.

" I have the honour to submit that the present medical arrangements for this Prison are most unsatisfactory.

The A.M.O. Dr. Lau is sick in the General Hospital and the Dresser is temporarily in charge here.

Arrangements have been made for the A.M.O. of Singapore Prison to be in call in emergency but this means a delay of at least three quarters of an hour.

This morning two prisoners were removed to Prison Hospital in a state of collapse. The Dresser was unable to give me a satisfactory explanation and I therefore sent for the A.M.O. from Singapore. Fortunately, the men were not seriously ill, but I repeat I consider this a most unsatisfactory state of affairs and one which might lead to serious consequences. "

and to request that immediate action may be taken to rectify the position - please.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient servant,

*Sgt. G. L. Hancock*

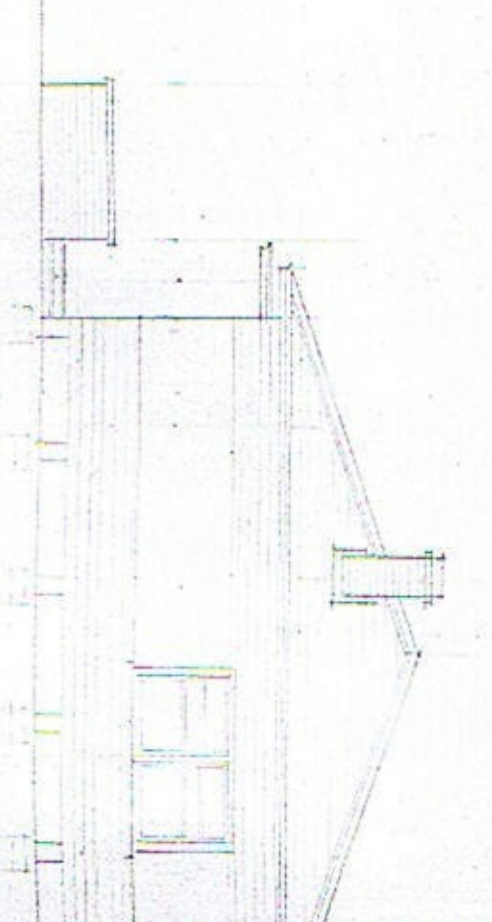
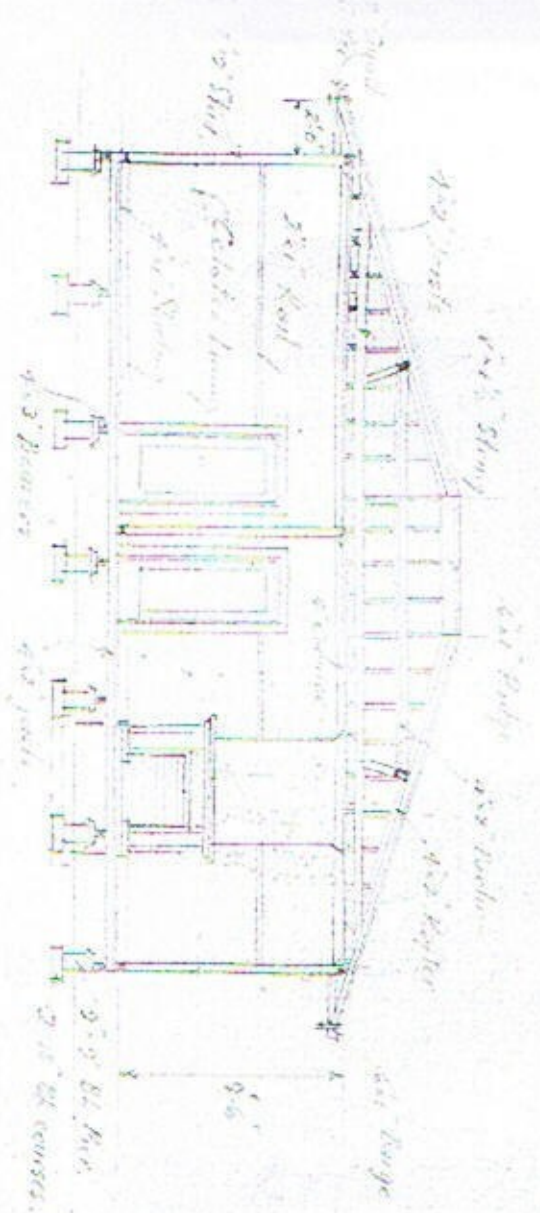
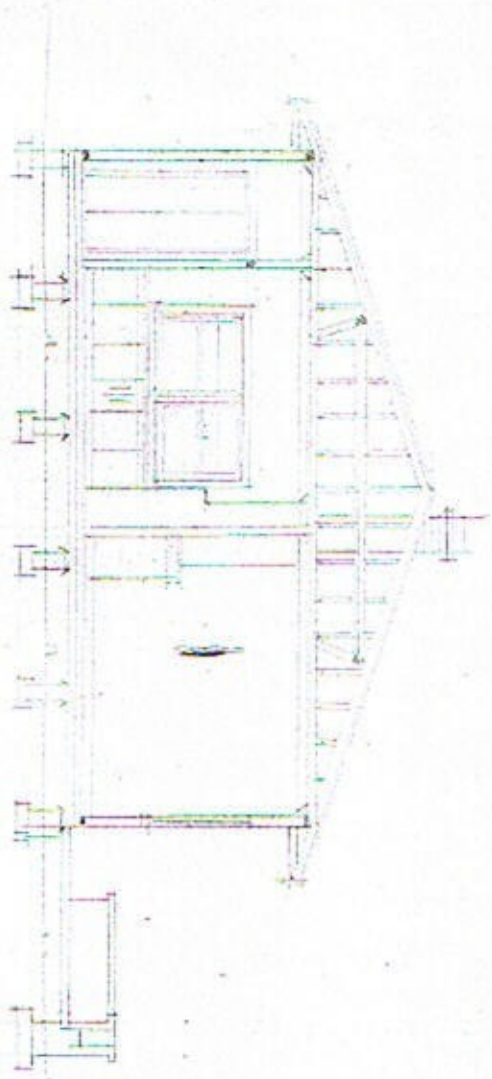
Inspector of Prisons,  
S.S. & F.M.S.

The Honourable

The Director of Medical Services,

Straits Settlements, Singapore.





9

GE/MRE.

ENCLOSURE No. 1  
 S. E. E. R. & M.  
 Paper No. 48/36  
 Singapore, 16th April, 1936.

(2) in S. E. E. R. & M. 186/35.

Singapore, 16th April, 1936.

Sir,

CHANGI PRISON.

The system of metering the water consumed at the New Prison when it is taken over by the Prisons Department be as follows :-

- (a) Total supply to be metered at the junction with main at Tanah Merah Village. ( I understand that the proposal to move the meters to a point nearer the Prison has now been dropped.
- (b) Water consumed in the Laundry to be metered for Prison records. I shall be obliged if you will arrange to fix a 1" meter during May 1936 and the rent thereon will be payable by the Prisons Department when they take over.
- (c) Water consumed at the Superintendent's Quarters to be metered separately and consumption to be deducted from the gross supply to the Prison and paid for separately, with meter rent, by the Superintendent. The ½" meter now rented by the Resident Engineer, should be fixed in a new position owing to the installation of a subsidiary tank at the roof of the quarters. Would you please be good enough to have it refixed as early as possible.

I have etc.,

Sd. ?

Senior Executive Engineer,  
Rufal and Marine.

Inspector of Prisons, S.

Forwarded for your information.

Sd. ?

The Municipal Water Engineer,  
Municipal Offices,  
Singapore.