

CHAPTER 8

Tambuzait marked the end of the first stage of Captivity. Hitherto it had been endurable and we were assured that we could see the war out under such conditions as we had encountered to date. But it was not long before we realized that, from now, things were going to change.

The town was an important market centre on the Moulmein-Ye railway. From this point, years before the war, the British had made a survey across the mountains to the south with the idea of extending the line into Thailand to connect with the main line that ran from Singapore to Saigon through Bangkok. But they had abandoned the plan as being too expensive and uneconomic.

The Japanese had resurrected the old plans and decided to construct the line as a supply route from their main bases in Saigon and Singapore to their frontline in northern Burma from whence they were hoping to press on into India and to complete the far-reaching plan of the Tripartite Axis to join up with the Germans and Italians in the Middle East. But the British stopped them on the Arakan front; India did not revolt; the Italians and Germans were stopped in the Western Desert.

At Tambuzait we found the men who had preceded us from Victoria Point and Tavoy, that is some of them. The rest were scattered up and down the railway they were building. Here also were a large number of Dutch captured in the East Indies, a few Americans and many British. Most of them had come direct from Singapore to Moulmein by sea.

And another large group had been railed into Thailand to commence construction from Bampong.

Smarting under criticism and with stern orders from higher up, the Japanese were relentless and savage. The completion of the line by a fixed date had become an obsession. Nagatamo, the Camp Commandant, let us know that, "I don't care if every prisoner dies, he will die building this railway."

Guards continually patrolled the camp in groups. As soon as they appeared everyone had to drop what he was doing, stand at attention and then bow lowly as they passed. This happened day and night. If one was not quick enough a terrific bashing ensued, often for no reason at all. The Japanese were enjoying their new power over the hated Europeans.

Attempts at escape were summarily dealt with. Just before we arrived four Dutchmen had arranged with the local natives to make a getaway down the river. They broke camp and made for the river only to be met by a group of Burmese police who were now working under the Japanese. One tried to escape; he was shot on the spot. The others were executed a few days later.

About the same time an Australian sergeant who had been at large for several weeks voluntarily returned to camp. His money had run out and he was ill with malaria. He put up a story that his memory had failed. He almost succeeded in convincing Nagatamo but one morning the guards seized him, tied his hands behind his back and shot him 25 yards from the camp within ten minutes of rearresting him.

Nogatamo, the Camp Commandant was a man of some education and culture: he could speak French fluently and refused to speak English though it was known he could do so if he wished. But he was arrogant and cruel.

His second-in-command, Lieut. Naito was also an educated man: he enjoyed classical music. But he was a drunkard and in drink was a murderous madman. When drunk he would march round the camp with a loaded revolver in his hand threatening to shoot anyone who was in his path. He shot and wounded an Australian who only escaped death by pretending to be dead. He was supposed to be well-connected at home and there might have been something to the story, for he was able to defy Nagatamo.

The two hated each other and many men were saved from torture or death by playing one against the other. A prisoner caught outside the camp, (he had been trading with the Burmese) was brought before Nagatamo, who ordered a trial, why, none knows; usually the Japanese did not bother about trials or courts-martial.

Naito was ordered to be Prosecutor. He told the Senior British officer that Nagatamo intended to have the man shot but that he, Naito, would press for the death penalty and by so doing might save the man's life because Nagatamo would oppose him.

The grim farce was carried out. Naito demanded death. Nagatamo promptly took the opposite view and let the man off with a minor punishment.

We were only a few days in Tambuzait. Then we were marched out to Camp 25-kilometre in the foothills. This had been a coolie camp but they had all died of cholera. All around the camp lay skeletons where the dying had crawled into the bush. There were shallow graves which had fallen in to reveal more remains.

At this camp we were organized into "kumis", work parties of fifty men under one of our own officers. And we were each given a numbered wooden tag to be worn at all times. One of these work parties was given permanent camp duties and was made up of the cooks, wood and water carriers and hygiene details. This was the "Buppin Katari" and into this I was drafted.

The huts were in disrepair so that was one of the first jobs. Latrine pits had to be dug immediately. Two wells were put down for, although there was a small stream nearby this drained through the hillside where lay the remains of all the cholera victims. Anyhow, it was expected to dry up in the dry season and it was constantly fouled by the working elephants who were brought here every evening by their mahouts to wash and wallow.

Next day the working parties went out onto the line. They had been set a task of a cubic metre per man to be dug out of a hill and carried in baskets to fill in the hollows or build up the embankments. This had been quite a severe task for the coolies but the Australians, British and Dutch, stronger in physique and able to organize manpower better soon showed they could do one metre easily and be finished work by two o'clock in the afternoon. This was a stupid thing to do as it turned out. The Japanese immediately raised the task to one and a half metres. There were to be times when the task was to reach three metres. Bridges had to be built: great baulks of timber cut in the jungle and hauled out to the line, though here sometimes the elephants helped. The pile-drivers were manned by long lines of prisoners on ropes, often standing chest-deep in the river for hours.

Elephants are the heavy working transport of Burma. Captured and trained for the teak timber industry the British Government had introduced strict rules as to their treatment. One day's work: two days off. A ten ton animal takes a whole day to eat and rest. 4000 elephants were brought on to the line. By the end of a year only about forty were left. The animals soon learnt to hate the Japs who used to order the mahouts off and mount the animals themselves. The mahouts, and it is a family occupation, have a special language for their charges and there is a very close association between man and beast. Of course the animals did not understand the Japs and the Japs did not understand the elephants. The Japs would then use the heavy steel "anka" with its sharp hook to enforce obedience. It often turned into a battle between man and elephant and the unfortunate beast's terrible cries of pain made one's blood run cold. Usually the Jap won, but the elephants soon learnt to distinguish between Japs and prisoners.

At first the Australians were a bit scared of the lumbering animals but soon got used to them, dodging under their bellies or round their legs to fasten the chains used to drag the heavy logs, talking all the time as they would have done to a nervous horse at home.

The intelligence of the elephant has been written of so often that one used to think there might be some exaggeration. But it is true enough. Even the way the animal would lift a foot to enable the chain to be passed under it was fascinating. And to see the performance if it was asked to go on to a bridge of which it was not sure. It would put out one foot, testing, testing. If it did not like it, it would draw back trumpeting its disapproval.

I said they soon learnt to distinguish a Jap from a white man. Quite often a guard would be lounging alongside the road as an elephant passed. Until the elephant was right alongside him he was ignored. Then suddenly the elephant's trunk would come up and a filthy mess would be blown all over the Jap. I never saw it happen to anyone else.

There was enough food at first but as men became sick they were taken off the ration strength by the Japs. "No work, no food," was the order. This meant that every man's share had to be divided with someone else.

The Japanese were terrified of losing a prisoner. We were lined up and counted half a dozen times a day. In the evening tired, dirty and hungry, sometimes we would be an hour standing on the parade ground while the guards tried to make their figures tally. And at night we had to mount a fire-picket: two men from each hut on watch. This usually meant that every few days one would have to do an hour's picket duty at some time through the night.

So it was that our first Christmas as prisoners of war came round. The Christmas so many had thought would be spent at home. Never mind: it will be next Christmas for sure.

There was no real celebration. The cooks tried to make some improvement in the food. There were some religious meetings and carol singing, it happened to occur on a rest day, (every tenth day) and the Japanese did not interfere.

So we entered 1943. We had now learnt something about our masters. There were only about a dozen guards, under an N.C.O. They acted as taskmasters but the actual construction work was carried out under the supervision of the Japanese Army engineers. There was little love between the engineers and the guards, who were mostly Koreans, anyway, and this sometimes saved us from harsh treatment. The guards were permanently allocated to our unit; that is they moved with us along the line as we moved from camp to camp.

Some of them were soon to be known as brutal sadists and were nicknamed accordingly. Some of these faced the tribunals in Tokyo after the war and were executed or sentenced to long prison terms.

There was the B.B. short for the Boy Bastard; the B.B.C. or the Boy Bastard's Cobber; and Dillinger. It was Dillinger who murdered Sergeant O'Donnell. O'Donnell, suffering from dysentery had lagged behind when his working party was returning to camp. When he was found to be absent at the evening roll-call a search was made, headed by the Japanese N.C.O. and a large party of p.o.w. O'Donnell's body was found at the side of the road. Dillinger, questioned by his own N.C.O., said that O'Donnell had tried to make an escape bid, but, O'Donnell's body showed four bullet wounds, all fired into his chest. Dillinger paid for it at Tokyo after the war.

Only one showed himself to be in any way human. This was "George". And George was the guard scapegoat, he was always in trouble for a dirty rifle, asleep at his post and being late on parade.

Yet George was the only one who could speak English. He questioned the propaganda served out to them. When Moulmein was bombed, he said, "They say there are no British planes left, What I want to know is, 'Who the Hell is bombing Moulmein.'"

And he had a sense of humour, something very rare in the I.J.A. Once he came upon a p.o.w. talking to a Burmese driving an ox-cart. Both denied having spoken to each other. George scratched his head. "Orders say prisoners and Burmese must not talk. Now who is telling lies? Someone must be punished". So he kicked the ox in the belly.

There are many stories of this kind, grim or amusing. They may be read in other books.

In our group there were two men who wrote of our experiences. Read Rohan Rivett's "Behind Bamboo" and Cornel Lumiere's "Kura".

Rivett was a war correspondent. His was the first book to appear on the market after the war. Today he is managing editor of the Melbourne "Age" and a frequent commentator on television and radio.

Lumiere was an interpreter; he was known to us Cornelius the Dutchman. We did not like him but you can read more about him in notes I have made through his book.

New Year's Day, 1943. One of our elephants died. He (or she, only cow elephants work) was something of a favourite with the p.o.w. Painted on his side was the number "1247", apparently something to do with the British regulations. But we called him "P.O.W. No 1247".

A large party of Dutch passed through the camp on their way from Tambuzait. They were in dreadful physical condition, and had not yet been subjected to the hardships of the railroad. They had come from Java crowded below under battened-down hatches. For nine days they had been chased by one of our submarines and when the hatches were lifted there were forty dead in one ship alone. They were three weeks reaching Moulmein. Of the 1600 who left Java, 400 died. They rotted in Rangoon for weeks, all the time subjected to heavy bombing by the Allies. They said they had heard that 200 prisoners were killed in Rangoon by the bombings.

Another convoy anchored in Moulmein was heavily bombed and one ship sunk, but the bomb that did this fell into a hold occupied only by Japanese troops. Only a few p.o.w. lost their lives. A few more Japanese were drowned by p.o.w. while they were all struggling in the water together.

Early in January Nagatomo returned from a trip to the Headquarters of the Japanese South-East Asia Command in Saigon. He was a changed man. At Tambuzait he stopped some of the senseless cruelty and introduced a system of pay for p.o.w., about one and a half cents a day. And with this we could buy a few little comforts. He said he was trying to get a Red Cross ship in with parcels. It never came but that might not have been his fault.

But why the changed attitude. Was he reading the writing on the wall? That he might have to answer to a tribunal of victorious Allies?

We heard plenty of news of Allied victories but never knew what to believe. But we did know that our planes were active and there seemed very few Japanese aircraft to combat them.

Early in February, in the small hours of the morning, I had had to make a visit to the latrine. There I found Captain Hence and Lieut. Ransom. We were talking quietly when through the still night air came a sound we knew well from Malayan days: a long "crump, crump". Thunder?" I said, "No bloody fear," said Hence. "That's bombing!". And so it was. They were coming nearer. Tambuzait had suffered its first attack. It was to be bombed three times before it was evacuated. And it was said that two ships had been attacked by aircraft at Tavoy.

Whatever rumours we might have heard, whatever news received might be true or not, at least we could see that the Allies were hitting back. After a whole year of serial inactivity, at last they were coming. And it was obvious that the Japanese lines of communication by the sea-route up through the Bay of Bengal was no longer safe. If ever they needed the railway they needed it now. And they drove us harder than ever. The food became worse and less of it.

With the food being reduced to a small quantity of rice, no meat or vegetables a new sickness made its appearance: beriberi and its close relation, pellagra. More and more men became afflicted with dysentery. The death toll rose. But the Japanese demanded more and more men on the railway, and more and more effort from those able to stagger out to work. When it was not forthcoming the brutal bashings increased. On March 10th the Japanese sapper in charge of a section where 200 Australians were working declared himself not satisfied with the amount of work being done. Capt. Blau tried to explain that the men were ill. The Jap struck him a heavy blow across the mouth knocking him down a steep bank, the Captain got up and came back up the bank and again tried to put the case for the men. Another Japanese sapper came running and felled Captain Blau with a heavy tree-branch. The officer tried to protect his head and save his glasses but the first sapper knocked the head off a pick and with the handle started to belabour the unfortunate Australian. The men were seething but the officers kept them in check. Any attempt to intervene would have brought the other Japs running and shooting. The unconscious Captain Blau was carried back to camp later in the evening. He recovered.

At Camp Kilo 14 conditions were, if possible, worse. Captain Mull and two others decided to make an escape bid. Captain Mull could speak Burmese, knew the country, (he had worked here before the war,) He had raised a sum of money from old Burmese acquaintances, and he had a guide. If anyone could make a success of it, it would be Captain Mull. He and two companions avoided the Japanese easily enough but they could not throw off the Burmese police who got on to their trail. One of his companions went down with malaria and was left with some friendly Burmese. The Japs got him and shot him on the spot. The other two were brought to bay and a running fight ensued. Captain Mull was killed and Serg. Bell, wounded, was taken prisoner. He was executed at Tambuzait.

On March 18th. orders were given to move out to Camp 75 Kilo., a fifty kilometre march. At least it was over a fairly good road although at this time of the year its surface consisted of a foot of dry dust. We set out very early, carrying all our gear and helping those sick men whom the Japs considered well enough to walk. The worst of the sick were sent back to Tambuzait.

On the road we passed other camps, sometimes of p.o.w., sometimes of conscripted Burmese labourers. Some camps were deserted; cholera had struck here.

We met caravans of bullock carts and long files of Burmese going, noone knew. Sometimes a few working elephants travelling ponderously along, each one holding the tail of the one in front. The leader of one of these convoys was the largest elephant I've ever seen - and his Mahout was a ten year old boy holding a swith of bamboo instead of the usual cruel anka.

The railway had been completed as far as the 60 Kilo peg and from here the work was being carried out along the foot of a 1000 foot escarpment. There were thousands of Burmese, men women and children, seated along this part of the line, patiently napping the hard limestone into ballast. Bullock wagons carried the broken stone to the rail sites. There were also large stacks of firewood being stacked for the use of the locomotives when they came.

At the 65-Kilo the road and railway made a turn inland to the east and began to climb into the mountains. We straggled into camp sometime in the night having been about fifteen hours on the road. Some did not arrive until the next day. We had marched 47 miles on a handful of rice. There was plenty of water from beautiful hill streams, but this could not be trusted; there were too many cholera camps along their banks. Every man carried a billy or tin of some kind and at halts all water used was boiled. The first thing the tired soldier did was make a little fire and boil the water he was going to drink. Although we had no matches there were fires all along the route in old burning logs cleared away for railway construction.

Camp 75-Kilo, under other circumstances would have been a beautiful place. It was situated in the hills on the banks of a lovely, gently flowing river. The huts were well built, it had been erected by a group of British p.o.w.

But in some ways it was worse than the 25-Kilo: there was the same unending toil, the same starvation diet, the same brutalities. But here the guards started the Tambuzait tactics, marching through the huts at night and making everyone get up and bow as they passed. This might happen three or four times in one night - not much fun for dog-tired men.

In April, 2,500 Burmese were brought in and given the best half of our camp. These were all refugees from the devastated North where the two armies were facing each other. A high fence was erected between us and communication forbidden, but we still managed to talk to some who spoke English. They stoutly declared that the British were winning. And there was no doubt where their sympathies lay.

One great worry about the Burmese was their total ignorance of hygiene and we feared that 75-Kilo might turn into a cholera camp.

Here at Kilo-75, or Mello, as it was named by the Burmese, the first showers of rain heralded the coming monsoon. They were only light storms at first but the inadequate roofs leaked badly, so we did our best in our "spare time" to patch them up against the coming downpours. The Burmese had several unoccupied huts in their part of the camp and they used to strip some of the attap from these and throw it over the fence to us.

Amongst them I saw an advanced case of leprosy. It is common in this part of the world; it is said there are a million lepers in India. No doubt there was more than one in the camp.

And the Burmese never seemed to sleep. In spite of working hard all day, at night there was a continuous chatter in their quarters, punctuated by occasional loud yells, as though a gambling game was in progress.

On the 13th. April the camp had the honour of being visited by General Saso who was in command of the whole project. There was much running about and saluting by the Japanese. We were lined up and inspected and the General made a detailed inspection of the camp. After he had gone we were again lined up and the "Taicho", or local Commandant made a speech.

"Major-General Sasa on his visit was pleased with the discipline and cleanliness of the camp. But on one point he was not pleased: there were too many sick men in the camp. Seeing that instructions had been given that all sick were to have gone to Repto or Tambuzait he could not understand this state of affairs. The position must be improved. It is difficult to get food so far into the railway but what food there is must go to the workers. The men who are unfit will get no food. At the 170 and 180 Kilo camps there are 2,000 prisoners and they get only rice and it is only one-third of the rice ration and there are no sick. We cannot send all sick back to Repto for there are no trucks and the sick could not walk that far. But Repto is being closed down and the sick are going to Tambuzait which is too far for men to walk, so they cannot send any men to Tambuzait.

The railway will be finished in August and it will bring food to all then so it is only for four months that we have to endure. There must be no sick men. They must go to work even if they die. If they are sick they will get no food. This is not the order of the Taicho who is very sorry for you but it is the order of his superior officers.

Japan is fighting a war for the peace of the world. She was forced into the war by the ABCD powers and had to fight. The railway is part of the fight for the peace of the world and we must help and we must endure for four months only. The number of sick must be reduced quickly to 20%. The Taicho intended to start tomorrow but he is sorry for you and it is not his order so he gives one week, till the 20th, to reduce the number of sick." As the Taicho had allowed only a handful of men to go to Repto and Tambuzait; as there were no medicines and little food, his speech did not give much comfort.

At the end of the week the sick were reduced to 20% by the guards by the simple expedient of forcing the rest of the sick men out to work. If they could barely stand out they went, and they died on the track. Every day several of them returned to camp dead. But the Taicho was able to report that only 20% sick were in camp on any given day.

The Burmese and Thais living in the mountains began to evacuate that part of the country. Cholera was raging in the villages and they were being repeatedly raided by Japanese parties to seize them for forced labour. Day after day they trudged along the road, mostly women and children, or pushed their patient oxen to the limit. There were few young men amongst them - they were in the hands of the Japs. And they left a trail of dead and dying. More than once our men, going or coming from work would find an ox-cart standing in the road, its occupants dead or dying. All they could do was to pull the cart to the side of the road, unyoke the oxen and tether them and hope that some other Burmese family would do what it could for the children or women.

The Japanese had said in their news releases: "We have released the Burmese from British oppression. Everywhere the Burmese gladly and eagerly took up arms against the hated British. We have given the Burmese their freedom."

But the Burmese used to say, "Nippon no good. Soon British come back." Once a party of Australians on the road were passed by some Burmese women. To their surprise one of the women, in faultless English, said, "Keep your chin up, Soldier, it won't be long now."

25th April, and one of those queer twists of the Japanese we never understood. An Australian, who had done nothing to earn it, was bashed by one of the Japanese engineers. Tired, overdriven he committed the unpardonable crime of hitting back. Immediately, about a dozen Japanese engineers were on to him with shovels and pickhandles. Some how he dodged most of them until the Japanese guards grabbed him and tied him up. There was a fierce altercation between guards and engineers and the prisoner was marched back to camp and put in the guard-house. We expected him to be shot. Next day we were lined up and the Taicho told us that anyone who resisted any Japanese soldier would be shot. The prisoner was marched away and beaten up, but not too badly. Then he was released. It can only be assumed that the guards resented interference by the engineers.

We were issued with some copies of the "Greater Asia", printed in English in Rangoon. These were propaganda sheets. Much was given over to the reasons why Japan was at war and the rest to the glorification of the Japanese troops. One story was that of a Japanese plane and a British being engaged in a dog-fight over Burma. The Japanese ran out of ammunition so he drew his sword, flew his plane upside down and neatly sliced off the British pilot's head. In another dog-fight another pilot also ran out of ammo but fortunately he had a supply of rice cakes.

He threw these at the British Pilot and had the satisfaction of seeing him forced down.

At the end of April (1943) Nagatamo advised our officers that we would shortly be going to Camp Kilo 113 to commence the third phase of the railway. He thanked our colonel for his co-operation and said that he had given orders that bashings and beatings were to cease. He had hardly turned his back to return to Tambuzait when a party of Australians were severely beaten up by the engineers, this time with the help of the guards, because a pile driver fell over sideways.

In May the monsoon came on in earnest. It just rained and rained. The earth in the cuttings turned to slush. But the work still went on.

On the 13th we were suddenly taken off work, Burmese taking out place. We then had to march to Camp Kilo 105. That's 30 kilometers, about 19 miles. We marched through the rain carrying or helping our sick. It took nearly two days to make it. We camped in the rain on the side of the road with no shelter whatever. Those whose boots had rotted off suffered severely for under the mud of the road was a layer of sharp, flinty stones. Again I was pleased with myself I still had a pair of boots in fair condition. These I had only worn when working in places where some protection was needed for the feet. Most of the time, like the others, I was barefooted. Our clothes were now reduced to a black G-string issued by the Japanese.

We found Camp Kilo-105 to be another native cholera camp.

CHAPTER 9

Camp 105 Kilo, or Angenaug, as the Burmese called it was full of dead coolies. We dragged out about sixty bodies and buried them. There were already many buried in the nearby jungle and many more unburied that we only found from time to time further away where they had perished in their flight.

The huts were in a bad state of repair and no protection from the now continuous rain. Fortunately there was plenty of material in the surrounding jungle. Latrines had to be dug, kitchens built, and every day graves to be dug and our dead buried.

The doctors did their best. They had no medicines, no instruments, but they worked day and night, often taking savage lashings from the Japanese when they tried to prevent their patients being dragged out to work.

The senior Japanese N.C.O. called me over. "You carpenter?" he asked. "Yes", I answered. There was no point in saying anything else. He wanted a storehouse for the Japanese rations, to be erected alongside the Japanese kitchen and the guards sleeping quarters. I asked for twenty men, hoping to get a few days easy work for some of my friends. "Ten," he snapped. So I collected ten of my mates, drew some tools from the railway stores and set to work.

Bamboo was the material for walls, attap (palm leaf) for the roof. We did a good job, making it spin out as long as we could. And the N.C.O. was so pleased he gave us a tin of cigarettes. But he did not know what a good job it really was.

At the back, where the wall abutted on to the jungle, I made a secret door by breaking the insides of the bamboo joints so that smaller bamboos could slide up and down in them and so leave an opening.

Then we unloaded the Jap stores and stowed them away in the new building. There were casks of dried fish and sugar; bags of lentils and beans. All the things we so badly needed to ward off beri beri and pellagra, scurvy and the blindness caused by vitamin deficiency.

I carefully noted the position of everything and arranged them to suit my ulterior purpose.

The monsoon was on us in full force: strong winds and heavy rain. On nights like these I left my hut and crept round the edge of the jungle to the storehouse. The noise of the wind and rain drowned any sounds I might have made.

I lifted up my secret door and crept in, feeling my way in the darkness with a cautious hand in front of me, moving on hands and knees. Into a satchel hung around my neck I stowed the things I wanted. The lentils were easy. A sharpened length of bamboo stabbed into the sacks and a stream of these valuable little peas flowed into the satchel. On the other side of the bamboo partition, by the flickering light of a hurricane lamp I could see the sleeping guards.

One night, creeping between the rows of sacks, a hand feeling the way ahead, I touched the shins of a man. I seemed to have an immediate mental blackout, expecting a bayonet thrust. For some stupid reason I made a sound that I hoped resembled the growl of a dog: some vague idea of pretending to be one of the stray mongrels that strayed around the camp.

The man I had touched retreated into the darkness. So did I: back to my secret door. Outside, against the skyline I glimpsed the figure of what looked like an Australian soldier, his waterproof groundsheet flapping in the wind. He had been on the same errand as I was. I never found out who he was and he would not have known who scared him as much as he had scared me.

I shared my booty with a few friends. About ten trips were made in the next three months and it was this thieving that kept us alive.

One night my probing had touched a cotton thread stretched across the narrow passage between the casks and sacks. I traced it to the end and found it attached to an empty tin precariously balanced. It was a trap. The Japanese had become aware that the store was being raided. I don't think I was alone but the others would have had to come in through the door. I am sure no one, not even my friends knew of my secret door. I had not told them for if they had ever been caught with the stolen goods the less they knew the better. The discovery that the Japanese knew frightened me off and I gave up my thieving.

Some time later a Dutchman was caught. He was savagely beaten, and hung up by his wrists for a day as an example to the rest of the camp. Then he was sent to Tambuzait. We never learnt his fate.

The Japanese Commandant's house had been built under a huge leaning tree for shade. When the monsoon hit it seemed that the tree could be blown down onto the house. He asked our Colonel if there were any men capable of felling the tree without damaging the house. Four Queensland timber-getters volunteered. "I'll shoot you if it falls on my house!" said the Jap.

The four men walked carefully round the tree, spat on the butt, moved back and studied it from every angle. Then they started with axe and cross-cut saw. You could have got 100-1 it was impossible. But they brought it down a couple of feet clear.

These timber men were the woodcutters for the camp. They worked alone or rather in pairs and then in the afternoon we would go out and carry the logs in for them to cut and split into billets for the fires. As the closer trees were felled they had to go further into the jungle and our logs had to be carried further. So we salvaged a couple of the deserted Burmese ox-carts and dragged the logs in on those. The woodcutters kept their saws and axes in their own possession; the Japs had long since lost trace of them. They carried them from camp to camp and bestowed infinite care upon them. But sharpening files were unobtainable from the Japs.

Doing a job for the Japs in the railway stores I saw a whole box of them. I quickly lifted two and hid them in my shorts. The timber cutters asked, "Any wedges there?" Next day I had a look and saw a whole heap of them. I tidied up the heap and put two big ones against the bamboo wall. That night I paid the store a visit. Loosened a couple of bamboos and pulled the wedges through. Heavy as they were their new owners kept them in their kits and carried them wherever they went.

This was teak country, the wealth of Burma. We felled many magnificent trees, some 120 feet high and cut them up for firewood. Here and there in the jungle we would come across great sawn stumps where trees selected by the Forestry people had been felled and dragged out by elephants.

There was a road of sorts, or rather a series of parallel tracks, made by the teak cutters, and this road ran right across the mountains into Thailand through the Three Pagoda Pass. This route was centuries old, used, not just by timbercutters but by trading caravans of ox-carts and long before that, by the armies of Burma and Thailand in their wars against each other. It is said that the Three Pagodas marks the spot where the last peace was made - a couple of hundred years ago.

About this time I got my first real bashing. I had had a few cuffs and kicks but nothing serious. This particular morning we were building a new shed to house diesel oil for the trucks and railcars. The day before we had sunk the postholes. During the night some sick p.o.w had failed to make it to the latrines and had used the post hole. The Jap in charge of our party saw it and took it as some form of deliberate insult towards him or the Imperial Japanese Army. They were always looking for, and finding insults to the master race.

He called me over and started shouting. Of course I had no idea of what he was talking about and remained silent, usually the best thing to do when this happened. He grabbed the shovel out of my hand and laid into me around the head, knocking me out and with a couple of bad cuts in the scalp. I was unconscious for about an hour. When I recovered the Jap had gone elsewhere.

A report drifted up the line that 600 men had died in one week from Cholera, mostly British and Dutch. It appears that a party of 12,00 were being brought up by train from Singapore. They had had no water for several days and in the overcrowded trucks thirst had become a torment.

The train pulled up near a Thai village and the prisoners, not allowed to leave the train, appealed to the Thais. Soon some of the Thais were running up and down the length of the train with buckets of water from a beautiful clear stream nearby.

A Hygiene Sergeant on the train did all he could to stop them drinking it but he was ignored. Within the next two weeks half of the contingent were dead. Cholera.

Cholera is endemic in Asia and there is a high death toll every year. But many recover and seem to have acquired some immunity, but many of these remain infected and act as carriers. With no sanitation they leave the germs of the disease wherever they go. The soil around villages becomes infected and remains so until the monsoon comes. Then this infected soil is washed into the streams which become heavily infected in turn. So the first weeks of the monsoon are the dangerous periods.

The villagers drink mostly tea, a large pot of which is kept constantly brewing or stewing on every hearth, so there are not as many cases as one would expect.

Ever since we had left Singapore I had been constantly drumming it into the men's heads that cholera was always present: that it was up to them whether they got it or not. On arrival in Burma they soon saw for themselves and they became cholera conscious, enforcing water discipline in their own ranks. All water was boiled and set out in drums from which water bottles were filled. A dipper was used that must not touch the water bottle and the bottle was held away from the drum so that any spilling over the bottle would not fall into the tub and maybe infect a couple of hundred men coming behind. The men were taught to consider every inch of ground surface to be infected so that any article placed thereon would be contaminated and if the contamination reached the mouth it could mean cholera.

At meal times a tin of boiling water was placed on a small fire at the eating place and in this the dixies were washed and then stowed away in kits away from flies. The months of pre-training saved "A" Force from water-borne cholera but it was at Angenau that the disease first invaded our ranks. Camp Kilo 105 cost us sixty lives from cholera, all of them caused by contact with contaminated material or flyborne, as they occurred in ones and twos over a period.

It is a frightening and demoralizing disease. A group of men would lie down to sleep, all apparently well. In the morning one or two could not be awoken: they were dead.

Every evening the Last Post was heard. Men died every day. There were no funerals: a few of the men's own mates and the padre, bugler and gravediggers: that was all. All except for one of the most savage and cruel on the line: one "Pinhead". Yet he would often quietly attend the burial and when the others had gone would kneel beside the grave and pray. Then leaving a little bunch of flowers. He would as quietly go away. What went on in that twisted mind?

The jungle was all around us. Great teak and other trees whose timber was valued all over the world. There was a forest giant whose crown was a mass of tiny white blossoms that fell in a continuous snowstorm. Another with crimson flowers whose petals made a rich carpet for yards around.

There were many wild animals in the jungle but they were seldom seen. But these animals were the natural prey of tiger and leopard and when the activity along the line frightened away the deer and bear the tigers and leopards became hungry. For these predators are confined to their own territories: they never intrude upon their neighbours. Or if they do they are driven out again. When the Japanese started bringing cattle into the camps to help out our food rations, the tigers came too. One night there arose much bellowing from the cattle corral, much shouting from the Japanese guards and a few shots. We rushed out, just in time to see the shadowy shape of a big cat leap over the corral rails.

Some became man-eaters and killed the Burmese travelling along the road. A camp of Indian p.o.w. was attacked several times by a tigress and her cub. Two Indians were taken, the animals crashing through the attap walls of the hut, killing and dragging their prey out of the camp. But the cub was apparently too young and not strong enough for it abandoned its kill a few yards from the camp.

I never heard of a European being attacked. It used to be said in Malaya that a white man was quite safe: that a tiger would not attack him for food as he was a carnivore like themselves: that a tiger could distinguish the meat smell and would leave him alone.

In June the sick and dying were so numerous that a special camp was set up at Kilo 55 and the worst cases from all the camps along the line were taken here by truck. To be sent to Kil-55 was to be sent to die but it did mean a lot to these left behind. The food had been issued on "work parade" basis and with as many as two-thirds of the total force ill it meant very little for anybody as sick received a share of ours. So for a while we were on almost full ration. Down at the 55 Colonel Coates and his staff did miracles but day and night the funeral fires burned. They were dying too fast to be buried.

In July the first trains came through from Tambuzait. At first these were only railmotors drawing a couple of trucks but as time went on light locomotives appeared with longer trucks.

These railmotors were German made and very ingeniously made. They had a hydraulic Jack at each corner and carried pneumatic tyred wheels bolted on to the sides. If needed for road work they were jacked up, the steel wheels removed, the tyred ones put on, the truck lowered and driven away to the road. They were geared in reverse the same way as forward.

With the first trains came a film unit. A propaganda film was to be made for the benefit of the neutral nations. A couple of hundred of the fittest men were issued with a complete outfit of new clothing and then ordered to march "out-to work" singing happily. But noone could make them sing and it looked as though there might be some trouble. But someone got the idea of singing the old army song, "Bless 'em all", (with words quite unprintable). The Japs were pleased, the camera turned, the recorders recorded. There was a sequel, but that is another story: it is told elsewhere by someone else.

A "hospital" was set up showing an Australian soldier reading a letter from home in a spotless bed; an attractive Japanese nurse bending solicitiously over him.

A "stage canteen" was set up, its shelves lined with all sorts of comforts. A line of men with hands full of notes queueing up to spend them. The servers behind the counter clad in spotless white coats. Another scene of sick POW soldiers: the packs of walking cases shouldered by Japanese. After it was all over the "properties" had to be handed back but quite a few things were whizzed off.

On the 28th May a card had been issued to us. This was the international:

SERVICE DE PRISONIERS DE GUERRE.

From POW No.....Name.....Nationality.....
Rank.....Camp War Prisoners' Camp - Moulmein - Burma

IMPERIAL JAPANESE ARMY.

I am still in a POW camp near Moulmein, Burma. There are 20,000 prisoners, being Australian, Dutch, English and American. There are several camps of 2/3000 prisoners who work at settled labour daily. We are quartered in very plain huts. The climate is good. Our life is now easier with regard to food, medicine and clothes. The Japanese Commander sincerely endeavours to treat prisoners kindly.

Officers' salaries are based on salary of Japanese Officer of the same rank and every prisoner who performs labour or duty is given daily wages from 25 cents (minimum) to 45 cents according to rank and work.

Canteens are established where we can buy some extra foods and smokes. By courtesy of the Japanese Commander. We conduct concerts in the camp and a limited number go to a picture show about once a month.

That card reached our relatives in Australia 13 months later.

The trains, some with quite large locomotives were now coming from the north as far the 105 Kilo and from the south to a point some 60 miles from us. The Japs were behind schedule the line was to have been completed by August. They drove us harder than ever, gangs of men often working for sixteen hours straight without food and then only being allowed to sleep for an hour or two on the site in the rain.

Where as up to now the engineers had been careful to see that no logs or rubbish was used in filling the embankments from now on they threw anything at all in regardless that in a few weeks it would rot and collapse.

Japanese troops and their supplies now began to appear, making their way north towards the front line in Burma. They made forced marches over the 120 Kilos between the rail heads dragging mortars and light artillery by hand and a few heavier pieces by mules.

We watched them go by. Sometimes a man would fall. If he were slow to get to his feet a Japanese NCO would pull him up and bash him. One quite young boy fell: his NCO grabbed his tin-hat, filled it with mud and squashed it down on the owner's head, pulled him to his feet and kicked him along the road.

In the continual rain the road was almost impassable to trucks. Along that 120 kilos they were bogged every few yards. At all hours of the night we were hauled from our sleep and marched along the road to pull out bogged trucks.

There seemed to be a lot of army stores going the other way - from Burma south. Why? Were the British driving them out of Northern Burma? Was there a threat of an Allied landing in the south?

Another Christmas came round, our second in captivity. An attempt was made to make it somewhat cheerful but with no great success although there had been some improvement in the food since the trains were getting through. Well, never mind we will be home for the next Christmas.

Then, on the 20th. January 1944 the rails were joined near Nikke. There were great celebrations and important ceremonies by the Japanese. There was a story current that the rails were joined by a golden rivet. Ten minutes later the rivet had disappeared - whizzed off they say, by an Australian.

We were given two days holiday, extra food and an issue of clothing including boots: all stuff from captured British stores. An order was given to stage a concert and in this some of the Japanese, including the Camp Commandant, Hochi, played parts. It was no great success but we made the best of it.

A few days later we were told to prepare to leave Angaungnaug; that we were going to Thailand; that "Our days of endurance in the cause of Peace were over." We gave no great credence to this but did rejoice that our sadistic guards were not coming with us. Maybe the next lot would not, they could not, be as bad.

The watchmakers patched up our old watches: expert forgers made facsimilis of 'OMEGA' faces. The Japs would give anything for Omegas. They were not interested in any others having plenty of looted ones. They got their Omegas.

And someone sold the Japs plenty of flints for their looted Ronsons. The 'flints' were pieces of galvanized wire. We had left before the Japs realized they had been tricked. Unfortunately, an Australian unit passed through shortly after we had gone and the irate Japs took it out on them.

On the 28th January we were packed into trucks on our way to Thailand. Our last sight of Burma was the Three Pagodas, on the border.

And the last of our elephants died that day: old Tusker, something of a pet and mascot.

CHAPTER 10

The train crawled into the Three Pagoda Pass. Everybody craned their necks to get a glimpse of the pagodas. Suddenly, as we rounded a bend in the line they were ~~there~~ three small stupas, very old, very shabby. There was no monastery attached; no sign or any priests.

It was all rather disappointing: There had been so much symbolism attached to them reaching down through the centuries of Burma's and Siam's history to our own part being played here in South East Asia.

Still, they did mark our departure from Burma, and that was something. None of us wanted to come back here again.

We had come into Burma by sea, along the western coast by way of Victoria Point, Mergui, Tavoy and Moulmein. We were leaving it by its south-easter land border with Siam.

We knew that the final battle for Asia was being fought on Burma's northern borders with India and China; in the foothills of the Himalayas. We had been playing a part in that battle, on the wrong side, building a line of communication for the Japanese.

Now we were going into Siam.

In the history of South-East Asia, these two countries had played a big part, along with Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. Perhaps it is time here to tell you something of that history.

The long Asian peninsula that contains those countries and Malaya was known to the Greeks and Romans as the "Golden Chersonese;" in more modern times it was called the "Rice Bowl of the World." Marco Polo and other famed travellers knew it.

Burma was probably populated by its present inhabitants sometime in the second or first centuries before the Christian era. There were two main streams of migration, one from the countries south of Tibet and Northern India and one from Southern China. There was a third great influx in later times when Kublai Khan's brother destroyed the cities of the Tai who had established a civilization of their own in the very south of China. Driven from their homes they fled into Laos, Cambodia, Burma and Siam.

In these lands they set up a new civilization some aspects of which are present to this day, such as that cult of Buddhism which replaced other forms of Buddhism, Hinduism Islam and even Christianity, although enclaves of these religions have survived, like the Christian Karens of the North.

Some of this civilization perished and its traces are found in ancient ruins like those of Ankor Wat in Cambodia.

About the time of the Norman Conquest a Burmese warrior king, Anawratha, welded all the little kingdoms into one great power: the Kingdom of Pagan, that being the name of Anawratha's chief city. This city became one of the great cities of the world.

But it was doomed. In 1287, the empire founded by Anawratha crumpled before the onslaught of the great Mongol invader, Kublai Khan. All that is left of Pagan to-day is a vast, but impressive, ruin with 5,000 pagodas and stupas: there were originally 13,000.

The people rebuilt their civilization but it was fragmented very much into the countries as we know them.

The Portuguese came in 1519. Then the British who became engaged in war with the bloody King Thibaw. They established Rangoon, although there had been an old city there in ancient time. It was, and is, marked by the famous Shwe Dagon Pagoda, the greatest Buddhist shrine in all Asia.

The 320-foot golden spire rises above its platform, 1420 feet in circumference and dominates the land from the Pegu Yona hills to the sea. Its ornamental top is covered with 8,688 sheets of gold leaf, each a foot square, each square worth \$300. In addition there are many thousands of diamonds, rubies and emeralds and even vaster numbers of semi-precious stones.

The Shwe Dagon dwarfs all other pagodas in the East and many of them are magnificent. There is one some 60 feet taller, in Nakhon Paton, Siam, but it lacks the wealth and magnificence of the Shwe Dagon.

Another old Capital is Mandalay of which Kipling sang. Kipling's pagoda is at Moulmein and some of our fellows had seen that one. We saw only a small part of southern Burma and I guess we saw too much of that under conditions that hardly endeared it to us; now we were leaving it with no regrets.

The Three Pagoda Pass marked the border. We were soon travelling down the mountain slopes into Siam: the "land of Milk and Honey", the land of Promise. We felt much as the Israelites must have felt when they first glimpsed the land of Canaan.

Along this part of the railroad the grim stories of its construction unfolded. The enormous trestled bridges erected tier on tier, built of bush timber and wire - and the sweat, and pain, and death of men.

The deep cuttings and high embankments made with an infinitude of toil and suffering. Embankments under which lay the bodies of the slaves thrown in, sometimes still alive, by the Japanese overlords because, ill and exhausted, they could not work hard enough. This side of the "Railroad of Death" had been infinitely worse than ours. Here had been coined the phrase, "A life for every sleeper."

The train pulled into Tamarkan Camp late at night. We were tired, hungry and thirsty, but we did not care. We were in Siam, or Thailand, as we came to know it better. Next morning we looked out over the River Kwai at an eleven-span steel bridge, built by British engineer P.O. Wessat this camp. It was this River Kwai, (but not the bridge) that gave its name to the film featuring Alec Guinness and Richard Holden. And it was a good film, though not fact. The shooting took place in Ceylon but the scenery was similar.

The Tamarkan Bridge was almost completed and we continued the work, but not under great pressure. One of the other tasks was the construction of a tall concrete monument "to the memory of those who died while building the railroad of peace." Such is the twist of the Japanese mind.

The Kwai is a tributary of the Meklong, (not to be confused with the mighty Mekong that flows through Siam, Cambodia and South Vietnam). At the junction of the two streams was the old fortified town of Kanburi where there was another camp and a Japanese headquarters.

The forts, now crumbling, belonged to the days when these rivers were the haunt of rice-pirates who robbed the travelling buyers of their money or their cargoes. I remember that we had in New Guinea a steamer named the "Meklong" which had come from this part of the world, where she had worked as a rice ship. Her bridge was armoured with boiler plate and there were bullet holes in her wooden superstructure.

The Meklong flows into the Gulf of Siam and its lower reaches meander through illimitable paddy fields.

Alongside the camp was a large anti-aircraft battery well sited in sand bagged pits, obviously placed to defend the bridge. Up to that time it had not fired a shot: we wondered how long it would be so.

It was beautiful country. The Kwai flowed through a plain ringed by hills that owned a multitude of colours that changed with the time of day. But purple predominated especially in the early morning. The sun rose on hills in the morning and sank over hills in the evening. And what sunrises and sunsets!

Looking at a particularly vivid display one evening someone said, "You wanta go to Central Australia to see sunsets!" The obvious answer was that nobody 'wanted' to come to Burma to see them.

But all these things were of secondary importance at the time. There was good food, the work was light, there was a concert every week. We were getting some pay, ten cents a week, but with it we could buy tobacco and soap. Every day there was good news, reputedly from the BBC. We believed there was a hidden radio in the camp, (this proved later to be true) and the local people would whisper through the wire. There was "the girl on the bike", a legendary figure that everyone had heard of, but never actually seen, who daily kept the camp informed.

Looking back, much of this "news" was genuine but by the time it permeated the camp it was so overloaded with fiction that it was valueless, except for morale building.

Then the Japanese made a supreme gesture. They released mail from the homeland, from our loved ones. More than a year old, most of it, but still mail. The Japanese had had it sent to them by the Red Cross but had not bothered to give it to us.

With all these things we soon regained our health and put on weight. From time to time other small parties arrived to join us. They looked as we had looked: it seemed incredible that we too had been as thin and worn and ill as they were.

To have been a p.o.w. is to have known men at their best and their worst. When these later parties marched in, man's humanity and compassion were apparent. There was a rush to grasp the hands of old friends; to burrow in one's kit for the last of one's tobacco or some article of food, to press it on the newcomer freely without stint.

Roy Biggs and I used to "muck in", i.e. share everything. He was out at work one day when a small party of desperately sick men came in. One of them was the man who had helped me when I faltered on the long march to Ye.

In an old tin Roy and I had about twenty cents we had been saving to buy some tobacco. Without thinking I grabbed the tin, rushed to the canteen the Japs had set up for us and bought some fruit and eggs. I took it to him and put it in his hands and watched silently while he ate. The greatest thing that could happen to a man had happened to me: I had been able to repay a debt and in full.

Roy came back from work. "There's a Burmese trader down at the wire with tobacco. Where's that money?" I started to tell him what I had done. "You don't have to explain anything to me, Mate," he said. "If you needed it, that's all. It's O.K. with me."

I These are the cherished memories.

The rains came. Earlier than in Burma but not so heavily. And most mornings were clear, the afternoons bringing in the rain with clock like regularity. But the huts were sound and we could put up with the mud.

The guards' camp became flooded so that they demanded a working party to drain it. Any such drain would have to cut through a high river bank that lay between the camp and the stream. I got the job and was given a hundred men to do it. No shortage of volunteers for it meant pay, and pay meant tobacco and luxuries.

Down on the river bank I erected a 60-foot pole of lashed bamboos with a mark at the end showing the measured height above ground. With a level made from a piece of planing and a long bottle I was able to strike some sort of line of cut and the appropriate fall.

Each day we marched out, put in a leisurely day, hurrying home before the afternoon deluge. An officer was attached to the party, a different one each day, and he, with a solitary guard, was held responsible that noone escaped

Every day the new officer would say, "What's the job, Sergeant?" Every day I would painstakingly describe what was being done. "What am I to do?", the officer would ask. "Just see that noone escapes." I would tell him. "It'll be you that will be shot if anyone does."

So he would find a shady tree and remain there until it was time to go home.

One morning it was a new and very English Lieutenant. He asked the same questions. I wearily replied, but he showed more interest than the others. "How are you going about it?" he asked. So I explained how we had set up a mark, called a "staff" on the river bank. How I struck my levels from there and thus calculated the fall etc. etc..

He listened carefully and then said, "I'll leave it to you, Sergeant."

When work was under way - the men did not need me standing over them - I joined the officer under his shady tree. He wanted to know about Australia, especially such things as the social life of the cities.

He told me he was a civilian in Malaya but had been caught up in the war as a member of the Malayan Volunteers. That was how he came to be a p.o.w.

"And what do you do in civil life?", I asked. "Oh! I'm a civil engineer; as a matter of fact I was Chief Engineer to the State of Trengenu. Did that water tunnel job, there, you know." "And you let me go on telling you how we were digging a drain? Me and my big mouth just making a fool of myself!" I almost shouted. "I 'm sorry," he said. "I didn't mean it that way. As a matter of fact I was really interested. I've never seen anyone doing a job with a bottle tied onto a piece of wood. When I had a job to do, even one as simple as that one of yours, I had about a £1,000 worth of instruments."

If we thought we were going to see the war out under these conditions we were soon disillusioned. We were being fattened up for another kill. Parades were called and men were selected to go to Japan to work in the coal mines or heavy industry to help the war effort. At first only the fittest men were selected. The Jap officer looked at me, "Too old," he said. He touched Roy on the shoulder. The selected men moved out of camp by train en route for Saigon where they were to ship for Japan. But they never left Saigon; Allied submarines were taking a toll of Japanese shipping and Saigon was blockaded. Some ships got away and were sunk at sea. One of these had on board some hundreds of p.o.w. under the charge of Brigadier Varley. The ship was torpedoed but many of the men got into the water. Japanese destroyers picked up their own people from the water and from boats and rafts, but left the p.o.w who promptly grabbed the deserted boats. The destroyers then gunned the boats. Brigadier Varley was one of those killed.

Sixteen men in a boat got away and were picked up by an American submarine and returned to Australia - the first links with the lost legion the Australian people had had. One of them, asked by Clarice if he had seen me, was able to reply that he had and at that time I was alive and well. Seeing that I had been reported "Missing, believed killed", at the fall of Singapore, this was great news indeed.

Roy and his party were brought back from Saigon and returned to Singapore. I was not to see him again till we had all returned to Australia. The news of these events showed us that the Allies were at least getting nearer. Soon we were able to see for ourselves.

Up to this time there had been very little air activity. But Tambuzait and Sampong were bombed, the last place with very heavy loss of p.o.w. life.

Then a lone reconnaissance plane began to appear, or rather, be heard, for he flew so high that he could not be seen. And at night planes could be heard flying to the South-East. They were bombers raiding shipping and installations in Bangkok.

It wasn't long before they started prowling up and down the line: great four-engined Liberators. They would pick out suitable targets and let a few bombs go. One of these targets was the Japanese Headquarters at Kanburi. Another was an engineers' depot near the same town. We could see the planes making deliberate runs, sometimes leisurely flying round in circles dropping their bombs.

If any of these planes came near Tamarkan they were hotly greeted by the anti-aircraft battery. They flew on ignoring the fire or avoided the vicinity. We wondered how long they would ignore the ack-ack or if they would ever give any attention to the bridge.

The battery was the first to receive attention. A flight of three Liberators, flying high, put in some high-level precision bombing. Hundreds of small bombs fell out of the bomb-bays as though someone up there was emptying a few sacks of coal. Then there was a continuous roar for some seconds, a cloud of dust and that was the end of the battery, all, except one gun, being wiped out. The small anti-personal bombs fell all around and into the gun pits. One gun escaped and that was a mobile one and it had been firing away from the battery position.

There were a few other desultory raids up and down the line but they seemed satisfied to blow up trains and damage intersections. They were a worrying affair for us, but we just had to put up with it. We built a cricket pitch on the parade ground, not to play on but we reckoned any British pilot would then know it was a p.o.w. camp.

The first time the camp actually came under attack was late one evening when the whole camp was assembled for Tonko (roll-call).

One lone plane came low from behind the hills the "Whispering Death" run, and was over the camp before the alarm could be given. There was one single short burst of machine gun fire. The bullets sprayed along the edge of the parade ground wounding one man in the arm - and that was all. Why? If the gunner had believed us to be Jap troop he would have got the lot of us.

The Japanese Camp Commandant then was one Noguchi, (not the monster of that name ruling from Saigon). He was known as "Wirewhiskers" because of a few black hairs hanging from his chin. "Wirewhiskers" was one of the few with some sense of humanity and, what's more remarkable he had a sense of humour. Believing that there was Red Cross Mail in Japanese hands Captain Hence, the adjutant, asked him if it was so. Wirewhiskers pondered for a moment then said, "I think Churchill send airmail." Then, too, we heard the distant drone of approaching aircraft.

The first attempts to bomb the bridge were not very successful. For one thing the bombs were too small, too light. The bridge was a massive structure. Eleven huge concrete pylons supported as many steel spans. These spans had been brought from Java where there were many such in use and in stock. Java is a place of canals and rivers so that the Dutch designed a stock sized span: one would bridge a canal or small stream. Others could be used up to any number for larger rivers. These were what had been used in this Bridge over the River Kwai.

The planes flew from India so that it is possible that up to that time the use of heavy bombs was limited. But the Allies did have bigger planes. Once we heard a dull roar, like nothing else we had heard before. The air was filled with sound. There was a rush for our slit trenches dug as far from the bridge as the barbed wire fence would allow. Then we saw them, faint specks of silver far above, maybe forty, fifty thousand feet up: obviously on their way to some bigger target than our bridge. A little cockney alongside me breathed, "Cor, bleeding Town Ha' an' a!" They were B59's the largest planes then in existence and of which we knew nothing.

So we knew the Allies were busy. But not as busy as we would have liked until the whisper went round. "The Allies have landed in France. The second front has been opened." No doubt the first news had been heard on the secret camp radio. (There was one, but we could only guess). But when obviously excited Siamese began shout to us through the wire we knew that this was more than rumour. And then the Jap guards started bashing - something that we had been reasonably free of since railroad days. This time we were satisfied this was real news and hearts lifted up at once. "Home for Christmas" seemed more likely than it had ever been.

There was a concert a day or two later. Someone (an Officer) recited, "Say not the Struggle Nought Availeth." by Arthur Hugh Clough (1819-1861) When he came to the last lines:

"And not by eastern windows only,
When daylight comes, comes in the light;
In from the sun climbs slow, how slowly:
but westward, look, the land is bright."

Then we knew it was true. If anyone knew the truth about secret radios it would be an officer. The suppressed excitement was electric.

The railway was now being used by Japanese troops and for supplies, but not very effectively. The Allies were continually wrecking it and the trains further up. Trains coming south were full of wounded; sometimes in dire straits. Often our fellows working on the line would help their sick and wounded, give them water. Their own troops, like our guards, ignored them.

At one spot some Australians were working. As usual they had a fire going to boil water drinking. A Japanese Officer approached the water tender and said, "Could I have a little water please? We have had none for three days." The Australian replied, "Help yourself, mate, and bring your coppers' water bottles too." He filled all the bottles he could. The Japanese Officer, speaking perfect English, said, "Why do you do this for me when I am your enemy?" You tell me, I have never learned to understand the Japanese mind.

Sporadic attacks on the bridge now commenced. They were using heavier bombs and did some damage. Of course we were put onto repairing it, and whilst it was out of use it was our job to ferry goods from one side of the river to the other and load them into the trains.

As soon as the repairs were completed, tests would be made at night running, first a locomotive only, then a few empty trucks and, finally, a complete train.

As soon as the bridge was in use again, along would come the Liberators and it would be on again.

Our greatest fear was being trapped on the bridge, but we usually had good warning by telephone from further up the line. When an alert came we would all go, p.o.w.s and Japs vying with each other to get out of the danger zone; well out of range we would settle down and watch the fun.

Sometimes it was not the bridge that was the target, but dumps of engineering equipment hidden in the bush, or camps of specialist engineer troops. We could never understand how the bombers knew they were there, especially when they were moved frequently. Long after we learnt.

There were a number of wild-looking, unkept Indian herdsmen in the vicinity, tending small flocks of cattle as wild as themselves. They were mostly Pathans and had been in Burma, Siam and Malaya for years. But the herding of cattle was but a sideline: they were especially trained British agents. It was they who ticktacked out the whereabouts of dumps and camps to the British. It was they who kept the Allies informed of Japanese troop movements. And not only they, but leading figures in Siam were acting for the Allies, including the Prince of the Realm. This gentleman used actually attend war councils of the Japanese. He would then retire to his Palace and dot-dash his information to the British. He was never detected in his "greatest double-cross in history" someone wrote after the war.

He had been forced to co-operate with the invaders. In fact the Allies never recognized the "Treaty of Surrender" he had signed with the Japanese and regarded his country as an active ally.

In one of these raids a piece of red-hot shrapnel set fire to one of our huts. The p.o.w. seeing their few valued possessions likely to go up in flames jumped out of their slit trenches and attacked the fire, although the Liberators were still busy not too far away. They put the fire out and salvaged their belongings.

Then "Wirewhiskers" came up running. "Australians very brave men," he said. "Where are the Korean dogs?" He found his bugler and soon the Japanese Fire Alarm was sounding. The Korean guards left their slit-trenches and hurried to the Commandant. He rated them soundly. The next day he gave us an extra bullock.

Parties were now being sent back to the Railway for maintainance work and repairs. More p.o.w came into the camp, mostly Dutch, English and a few Americans. These last were what were left of the 133rd. Texan Artillery who had been surrendered in Java. They had only been there as a token force and were the only American troops in this part of Asia. Of course there were a number of airmen and the survivors of the "Houston", the cruiser last in the Java Sea battle at the same time as our "Perth".

Another Christmas came round but this time we really did have hope. The War in Europe was over and Japan was fighting alone. The Japanese were moody and temperamental, according to the ebb and flow of battle, we thought; but I doubt now if they knew as much as we did.

The air attacks along the line increased in intensity and on March 17th 1945, as far as we were concerned, it reached its climax.

CHAPTER 11

We might have known it would happen. All the signs were there: good flying weather and the bridge was finished. The time had come for its destruction.

From time to time a few odd bombs had been dropped on the bridge not doing very much damage. These bombs did not seem to be more than 500 pounders and usually went right through the decking, merely blasting a large hole in the track. The only sure way to wreck the bridge would be to have blown out a pylon or two. Even if a whole span of prefabricated steel were destroyed the Japanese had plenty of spare spans: the Dutch had had a stock of them in Java, all of a standard size so that a single one would do for a canal or small creek and any number for larger rivers.

Nor had the Allied air force paid more than a passing attention or two to the bridge; they had been busy enough on other installations.

On March 17th. 1945. a "red alert" came flashing down the line, at 4.0 p.m., several hours earlier than usual. There was the customary helter-skelter to get out of the way.

Some of us were working on the second span, putting in decking timbers on each side of and between the rails. The final fishplates and spikes had been fastened in the day before and all night long the Japanese had been testing the line - shunting single trucks across, following it with a single locomotive and finally with a full train.

Several of us hurried back to the edge of the camp and settled into our favourite slit-trenches to watch the fireworks. Nearly an hour passed before we heard the planes and shortly afterwards we picked them out against the northern sky: twenty-one Liberators flying in a V-formation at about 5,000 feet.

They passed right over us, bomb-bays closed. "On their way to Bangkok," we said.

But a few miles south the whole formation wheeled in a wide circle and came back - almost as if they had forgotten something.

From this circle three planes detached themselves, separated, and came in onto the bridge, each from a different direction: East, North and South. The one from the East came straight towards our little trench, bomb bays open. But well before he reached us we saw the bomb tumble out, and fall onto, or somewhere near, the second pylon. The explosion was the loudest we had ever heard and the earth shook. A thousand-pounder: But there didn't seem to be much damage done.

But we had to duck again, the other two planes, coming from up and from down-river dropped theirs and they were immediately followed by others, each plane coming in from a different direction. The attack was now at its peak and terrific explosions were taking place continuously. There were clouds of dust and smoke arising from the bridge and great columns of water and spray from the river.

Then the attack died away as the big planes circled overhead re-grouping. The Japanese anti-aircraft batteries were not idle either and the sky was filled with the little black and white puffs. And their guns added to the din of high explosive in 1,000 pound lots and the thundering roar of the aircraft overhead.

It was terrific: we got out of our slit-trenches to see if the bridge was still there. The formation of Liberators was still circling waiting for the last couple of planes to rejoin. Then I saw it, and I suppose others did too: a plane coming in from the west, straight towards us, but obviously aiming for the bridge four hundred yards in front of us; flying rather low. It seemed to me that he was already too late to release his bomb. "Missed," I thought, or "Going to make a dummy run and then come back," And then as he was over the bridge itself I saw the bomb come away. I knew it would overfly the bridge and hit somewhere near us, behind us I hoped. But I didn't wait to see. I must have been thirty feet from the trench and I imagine I made it in one leap. But I'll never know.

I woke up as the sun was setting. My left leg was causing me great pain. I looked down at it; it was encased in rough splints of bamboo. And I was sore all over. But I knew I was still there.

Someone spoke to me as though from a long distance away. Bit by bit I learnt what had happened.

The bomb, a thousand-pounder, had hit the corner of the camp, about fifty feet behind me. I never heard the explosion or felt any effect whatever but apparently I had almost, or just, made the trench; maybe even dived into it. Perhaps my leg caught the blast, or, if I were in the trench had been hit by the terrific hammer blow of shock wave through the earth itself so that if I had been lying on the bottom or touching the side of the trench I would have been hit as though by a mighty hammer. Perhaps it was the latter because another man who was in the trench had his shoulder dislocated, his ribs cracked and a great bruise from hip to toe along one side of his body. He said he was on his hands and knees in the trench and it was the side of the trench nearest the explosion that moved towards him with terrific force. Two others in the same trench, both unhurt, said the trench and all in it leapt upwards and sideways. Four men, sitting out

in the open fifty yards away were dead: not a mark on their bodies. Just a little blood and fluid dripping from nose and ears. Yet every stitch of clothing had been blown off them and a hut behind them, though still standing, was just a framework.

There was a big crater in the corner of the camp. One large hut was destroyed completely and the one next to it left leaning at a crazy angle. And there had been men in those huts. Some were dug out hours later alive but others were dead. A Jap guard had been noticed earlier standing near the point of impact. Not a trace of him, not even his rifle., was ever found.

Twenty men were killed and twice as many injured. As for the bridge: five spans were wrecked, reduced to twisted masses of steel and two of the pylons were leaning over at a drunken angle.

The dead and wounded were laid out on the ground and the rest of the afternoon was spent searching for others. Of course I knew nothing about all this except what was told to me from time to time. The Catholic padre, Father Corry, knelt beside me and asked how I was. "You should burn a candle to St. Patrick," he said in a thick Irish brogue. "He must be your guardian saint."

"What's St. Patrick got to do with it?" I asked. The Padre looked at me pitying my ignorance. "Why, man, to day is his holy day. St. Patrick's day, the seventeenth of March". For the first time in my life I made a note of that date: I haven't ever forgotten it.

This Father Corry was to figure in another bombing incident along the line at a later date. Some men had been injured and when it was time to go back to the camp some five miles away the Japs said, "Leave the wounded here. They are no good any more. The tigers from the jungle can finish them off in the night."

Five hundred men promptly sat down and refused to move without their wounded. Things began to look nasty. Then two padres, the aforementioned Father Corry and a Methodist, the Reverend Mathieson, (he was chaplain of the "Perth", lost in the Bunda Straits battle,) went up to the Japs and demanded that the wounded be taken back to camp. "You haven't got enough bullets to shoot all of us," they said. The Japs gave in and the men were taken back to camp.

Father Corry and his Methodist friend came to see us every day in hospital. Although not a Catholic and as badly injured as others he usually spent considerable time with me. One day I said to him, "I'm not of your faith Father, but if ever I see your name on the notice board at St. Mary's in Sydney as preaching there, I will come in and listen to you".

"Sure, Son," he replied, "But I don't think you will ever see my name as serving at St. Mary's."

Padre Matheson, the Methodist were the closest of friends - "mucking in" together as we used to say. I often wondered if they got caught up in argument on theological dogma. I doubt it.

Both of them held services when they could and often such services were quite undenominational. Padre Corry once said, "We have no holy water here, no vestments, no books of dogma. All our roads go the same way." I

They were both fine men. So were some other members of the cloth who shared our captivity. They had the privileges of officers but such things weighed little with them. They did not have to work but they did, if it was for the sake of the men. They carried rations up and down the line, cut firewood, and attended the sick, carrying out their religious offices when they could.

Such were the things that separated the sheep from the goats. Years later an Anglican bishop and I had a slight collision between our cars in a Sydney suburban street. In conversation afterwards he asked me if I were an ex-serviceman and where I had served. I told him. "Ah!" he said, "One of my rectors was with you then. He has a church in this area. You should go and see him sometime. He would be pleased to renew acquaintance and he does a lot for ex-servicemen." I didn't answer. That particular person was not one of the "Christs of the Burma Railroad."

So it was with officers. The Burma Railroad sorted them out. Some, like all the doctors, did a splendid job for the men. Others, well we shall leave it at that.

It was pretty obvious that our airmen knew it was a p.o.w. camp at Tamarkan but it was too close to the bridge and to the A.A. position for safety, so we were glad to hear that it was to be abandoned.

Anyhow the Japs no longer needed a camp there. Numbers had been much reduced by the large parties drafted out for Japan. Only small maintainance groups were needed on the railway. There was no hope of rebuilding the bridge and the railway was being cut in scores of places elsewhere. The line was never at any time of much use to the Japanese; the Allies were now in control of the air at last.

Even to us, cut off as we were from the world it was obvious that the Allies were hitting back, hard. The Japanese were losing their enthusiasm for the war. They could see the writing on the wall.

Italy was out of it; Germany was staggering. The Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis was disintergrating. It was only a matter of time for Japan; and they knew it.

Tamarkan was evacuated. We moved to Chungkai, five miles away on the other arm of the river.

Chungkai was an old established camp and far from any military installations. Only one plane ever came near it and that fired a rocket that exploded on a set of rail points not far from the camp. We had never seen a rocket - did not know that such missiles existed.

A week after we left Tamarkan that camp was given a thorough going over by another large group of Liberators dropping anti-personnel bombs. Hardly one of the deserted huts was left standing. We had not got out too soon. Or was there something else behind this attack on the camp? Long after we learnt the story.

The Allies knew we had evacuated the camp; they knew it had been occupied by p.o.w. But they thought it might be used by Japanese troops as a transitcamp on their way up the line to the northern front. How would they know? Remember those wild-eyed Pathan herdsmen? The raid was useless: the camp was empty.

Chungkai was not a bad camp, as p.o.w camps go. But it had its irritations. For one thing it was overrun by stray dogs. In the days when the camp held 3,000 English p.o.w's many dogs had been adopted as pets. But as the men moved out, to Japan, or back to the line, or to other camps, the dogs remained for the Japanese would not allow their owners to take them. Sleep at night was almost impossible because of the continuous howling. Eventually the Japanese gave orders for them all to be rounded up and handed over. The Senior N.C.O (our officers were separated from us at Tamarkan) asked the Japs could we carry out the destruction of the dogs ourselves. Permission was granted and a mass slaughter took place. The reason for this seemingly strange arrangement was that the p.o.w's had seen the Japanese way of treating animals and could not stand the thought of so many animals being subjected to so much torture. They preferred to do the job themselves - as humanely as possible.

On May 17th 1945, or rather a day or two after that date, we heard a rumour that Germany had surrendered. This news was eventually confirmed by the Japanese themselves. What now?

We were moved again; this time further south. Except for small working parties the bulk of the p.o.w were being taken to new camps nearer Bangkok.

Our group, I on a stretcher, were taken down river on barges to Lamuan. This was also a reasonably good camp. There were about 2,000 p.o.w's concentrated here; approximately an equal number of British, Dutch and Australians with the small group of Americans from the Texan Artillery and survivors of the "Houston".

The most remarkable feature of Lamuan was its flourishing duck farm, a sideline of the Japanese guards. The centre of the camp was taken up by a large pond surrounded by a bamboo fence. In this enclosure there were thousands of ducks fed partially on some of our rations.

Every day the ducks were driven out into the surrounding fields and herded by a group of p.o.w. and brought back again at night. It was worth watching to see this return to camp. The ducks knew they were going home for the night and that food awaited them so, with a din of quacking they hurried along at as fast a pace as they could muster. As soon as they reached the gates of their compound they struggled and battled to be first in, and, also not to be last. The last stragglers were always given a whipping with light willow wands - and they all knew it!

Ducks lay their eggs at night, on the bare ground so that every morning there were hundreds of eggs lying about. The Japs carefully watched them collected and they were sold in the nearest town. The Japs were making quite a bit out of it. Of course none of the ducks or their eggs came our way, unless they were stolen and the risks were too great to try much of that.

One p.o.w had a pet duck of his own and it had a clutch of half a dozen little ones. At bathing parade every afternoon the duck and her brood lined up with their owner and solemnly waddled along in the ranks as we marched to the river. There she and her little ones plunged into the river with their master, swam around until time was up, and then as solemnly marched back into camp.

Except for "Charlie the Gig", the inquisitive recce plane flying so high above us we only heard aircraft at night and that some distance away. These seem to circle around for hours over an area to the east. But there was no bombing. Strange! But there was an answer to that too. I'll come to it later in this story.

We were not ill-treated at Lamuan but the Japs were tense, on edge and suspicious. The Kempei Tai came frequently and made sudden raids on the huts and our few possessions: searching, searching. For what! They never told us but we guessed at secret radios, although I don't think we had a secret Radio in Tamuan.

But the Kempei Tai did strange things: they would collect all the bits of wire they could find - then throw them on the camp rubbish heap from whence they could be retrieved.

There were secret radios as have been described in other accounts of the Captivity. But I personally never met anyone who had one, or rather, told me he had one. I knew Captain Hence very well but knew nothing about his secret radio until I read of it in a book written long after the war was over. And it was not until I visited the Australian War Museum in Canberra that I actually saw one.

Two British Officers were actually caught with one. What happened to them makes savage reading. No wonder they were guarded with the utmost secrecy.

My splinted leg was giving me an uncomfortable time for it became a nesting place for bugs and lice. The intolerable itching was all the more exasperating because I could not get at the little parasites. Word went round the camp, "The Farmer's got cooties in his splints. Anyone know how to deal with 'em". Sure enough, a "toban" that is, a p.o.w. acting as a servant to a Japanese officer, found the Japanese had a stock of insecticide to keep themselves free of the loathsome insects. The toban lifted a few tins and gave one to me. Some of the powder blown down the splint through a bamboo tube brought instant relief.

Tamuan was not a working camp. Most of the men were sick or had been and there were many men who had been wounded in air raids. They were all cheerful and sometimes busy making things. Chess pieces carved from bamboo and bone, and 'flint and steel' sets. Bits of old files and pieces of natural flint would strike a spark, which, caught in a tinder box of kapok glowed to a flame when blown. And many of these little tinder boxes were exquisitely carved.

Although we were not working we were given a few cents a week, enough to buy a little crude native tobacco now and again. The stuff was rank but a little went a long way. The best paper to make cigarettes was the silken inner sheath from the corn cobs that formed part of our food.

The Japs had looted or salvaged a refrigerator from somewhere, a heat-operated type. But the lamp was broken so it was thrown onto the dump. Our fellows salvaged it, made a charcoal burning heat unit to replace the lamp and got it going again. In case the Japs took it back again it was built into a double wall of the cookhouse. The very sick men appreciated the chilled soups and fruit juices.

I was now on crutches; an excellent pair made from the ever useful bamboo. Then it was soon one crutch and a stick. The stick a strangely shaped root of cane someone dug up in the jungle. I brought it home with me.

The camp itself was enclosed by a circular fence of bamboo and barbed wire. Outside that was a ditch about six feet deep with the earth from it thrown up on the outer side. The top of this embankment had been levelled off and a pathway made. Along this the Japanese, or Korean, guards patrolled in pairs.

At 50 yard interval was a machine gun post, the gun laid to give intersecting fire along the ditch. It was the most heavily armed and prepared camp we had seen. Why? We didn't know. A breakout was most unlikely. There was nowhere to go.

Towards the end of July there was some sinister activity by the Japanese guards. The machine guns were repositioned, this time with their muzzles pointing directly into the camp. The guards, while not indulging in any bashings, appeared grim and detached. "Things must be going badly for Nippon," we surmised.

In their new-found benevolence, so evident since the collapse of Germany, the Japs had allowed us to build a stage and hold a weekly concert. One evening, someone on the stage was enacting the part of Tarzan along with a very attractive Jane and with a very lifelike ape swinging across the stage. Suddenly the guards rushed the stage brutally bashing the actors. Further concerts were forbidden. The reason? "The Japanese do not like being depicted as monkeys!" said the Commandant.

Then one evening word was passed round that everyone able to walk was to go to the parade ground: the British Sergeant-Major had an important message.

In subdued wonder and excitement we piled out of our huts and onto the square. The Sergeant-Major mounted the platform, held up his hand and said: "The Japanese Commandant has just told me that the war is over."

We received his words in stunned silence: the long-awaited day had come - and we didn't know what to do with it:

Then several men came up onto the stage alongside the Sergeant-Major. They shook out two bundles. One was the Union Jack, the other the Stars and Stripes. The sight of those bits of bunting broke the confused silence. We went wild, mad.

Most men cheered - others wept. No signal was given, but we stood and sang the National Anthem as we had never sung it before. And then from the handful of Americans a brave "Star Spangled Banner." The Dutch sang theirs and altogether we sang all the battle songs we knew.

An hour or more later the R.S.M. again held up his hand. There was instant silence. We were scared we might miss out on something.

He warned us not to leave the camp. The Japanese had told him that thousands of troops were in the vicinity and any slight incident could lead to tragedy. He had already taken over the camp from the Japanese.

That night there was little sleep for anyone but there were no further demonstrations. But everyone wanted to talk and that we did.

The next day the R.S.M. instructed the Japanese to place money and transport at his disposal. He was going into the nearby town to extra and better food. That afternoon the trucks ~~came back~~ loaded with things we had not seen for a long time.

Unarmed as we were the R.S.M. hesitated to demand the disarming of the erstwhile guards. The machine guns still pointed menacingly into the camp. It was feared that any attempt to take over the military situation could lead to resistance by the Japanese and even our annihilation. One had to step carefully. So uneasily we let them be.

A couple of days later, about the 16th August, we heard aircraft. From over the tree-tops, flying fast and low came four Hurricanes, machine-guns blazing. We couldn't understand it. The war was over, or was it? Here we were being attacked by our own aircraft. There must be some dreadful mistake.

Then we saw that the bullets were not striking the camp itself, though some were uncomfortably close. But dust was rising in little spurts on the patrol path around the camp. The machine-gun posts seemed to get special attention. The Japs ran for cover.

Then there came the full-throated roar of the bombers, coming in at about 3,000 feet. "Oh, God!" we prayed, "Not again!"

But from the planes came, not bombs, but parachutes. White and red and blue, they bloomed out and dropped swiftly. The white ones were manned by men, the coloured ones by ungainly bundles.

An English voice came from the sky, above the roar of the departing planes. "Fit men grab weapons. Sick men go for cover."

The chutes were dropping into and around the camp. In a moment dark-skinned men of the Indian Army were everywhere, their first objective the machine-gun posts, their second the Japanese.

The coloured chutes were attached to rifles and light machine guns. It was all over in seconds. Not a shot was fired. The camp was under the control of our own people.

The loud hailer spoke again ordering us to assemble. We quickly did so, ringed by armed men, smiling and shaking our hands.

A slim Englishman and a burly Irishman mounted the platform. The Englishman spoke: "I am Captain Bell and This is Sergeant Kelly of the 5th Company of the 7th Indian Airborne Division. No one must leave the camp. You are safe here but there is danger outside. The war is over and it is our job to get all of you out of here. To-morrow there will be airdrops of food and clothing, medical supplies and everything else you need. There is a lot to be done and I'll talk to you to-morrow, I have a lot to tell you."

So came our salvation. There was a religious service of thanksgiving for our deliverance. Even the agnostics and atheists attended. We were going home.

CHAPTER 12

If this were a fictional adventure story it should end here. But we were still thousands of miles from our homelands; everything else faded into comparative insignificance. There was still a long way to go and so much to learn ... we had been out of touch for so long.

There was sadness too. From day to day, with that ultimate goal almost realized, men were still dying, too far gone to go further along the last easy stages: they had suffered too much. In the simple intimacy of survival their deaths cut deep into our consciousness.

Captain Bell sent the Japanese out to bring in the small working parties from other camps in the district. Then he called us together again. "The final and ultimate blow that brought Japan to her knees," he told us, "was a bomb the size of a cricket ball." (of course, this was not quite accurate but at that time no more than a handful of people knew the secrets of the atom bomb.) "The scientists have succeeded in splitting the atom. The bomb, dropped on a Japanese city, resulted in the most terrible destruction. Nothing, nobody, survived. There was no answer to it."

He went on to tell us of the progress of the war through the long, dreary years: the Normandy landings, the defeat of Germany, the war in the Pacific.

He went on: "Lord Louis Mountbatten's forces and the 14th Army have swept down through Burma. The Japanese are in full retreat. The Americans are on the outskirts of the Japanese home islands."

"I told you that there is danger outside the camp; maybe even here in the camp itself. The Japanese Army is retreating along every road. At present they are not giving trouble but there is a danger that individual generals may choose to ignore their nation's capitulation and decide to fight out their own little war to the end. If that happens before the 14th Army gets here we will be massacred. The Japanese had already planned that fate for you. The Supreme Commander, Lord Louis Mountbatten, had planned amphibious and aerial landings at several places in Thailand and Malaya, the most important at the Isthmus of Kra to divide the Japanese forces. This and others elsewhere were to have been made simultaneously on the 28th of this month, August, somehow, the Japanese intelligence learnt of these plans but they got the dates wrong. They believed the landings would take place on the 28th September, a month later.

Realizing that the prisoners-of-war might rise and join up with the invading forces they decided to kill every p.o.w. Hence the setting up of these machine guns. The signal would have been given as soon as the British forces crossed the Sittang River. But the British crossed the Sittang before the Japanese plans were complete. The atom bomb did the rest. 'Fo it you owe your lives.

Our Intelligence learnt of the Japanese plans for your massacre and Lord Louis sent a message to the Japanese Commander of South East Asia, then in Saigon, that he would hold him personally responsible for your safety. But we did not trust the Japanese, we still do not, and that is why we are here.

Someone else was to come to your help if the Japanese had carried out their plans. But I doubt if they would have been in time or in strong enough force to save you.

Up in those hills behind us is the Free Thai Army."

Captain Bell called to the stage a tall Texan in jungle greens wearing a six-shooter and a bowie knife. He introduced him: "Major Brauer, of the Free Thai Army. He will tell you more about his command."

The Texan took up the story. "For two years the Free Thai Army has been building up throughout the country with the approval of the Prince of Siam. Companies have been set up in the jungle. Here, in hidden camps, they have been equipped and armed, trained by American officers, all dropped by parachute onto concealed dropping grounds by night." (These were the 'bombers' we had been hearing night after night.)

So secret were their operations that if a wandering herdsman strayed into one of their camps he never left it again but was inducted into the Free Thai Army.

Tamuan had been under their observation for months, the this ready to move in if the Japanese started anything. Not only did they watch us from the hills but small parties patrolled the environs of the camp and even abducted p.o.w.'s who had strayed from working parties. (Several of our men had mysteriously disappeared. It was thought that they had absconded and were living with friendly Thais. Some actually did so, often as a result of a romantic attachment with some Thai maiden met on a jungle path')

Later we met some of the Free Thai soldiers, trained as commandoes and armed to the teeth. The bowie-knife seemed to be their regimental badge. They were quite unhappy that they had never had the chance to prove themselves but it was our good fortune that they had not.

On the notice board Captain Bell had put up aerial photos taken by "Charlie the Gig". Various structures were enclosed by white circles and noted: "Believed to be P.O.W. camp." Although taken at 40,000 or 50,000 feet they were remarkably clear and detailed. We were told that 'blow-up' sections could show up a footprint.

Then the "Biscuit-Bombers" came in: those grand old work-horses of the air-force - the Dakota 3's. From them tumbled bundles and bales of clothing and blankets; parachutes from which dangled long cylinders filled with foodstuffs, cigarettes and luxuries. And of all things, suspended from four parachutes a jeep for the use of the Captain.

We learnt that ships could not enter the harbour at Bangkok, the approaches being heavily mined but that Bangkok aerodrome was in use and other aerodromes being taken over daily. Meanwhile the Japanese navy had been put to work to clear the minefields. That Singapore was already clear. That dynamic personality, Lord Louis Mountbatten, was making things move. He had already set up headquarters in Singapore.

The local Thais came in crowds to visit us bringing gifts of food and fruit. It was not hard to see on whose side their sympathies lay. A Swiss business man arrived from Bangkok; he had been appointed Red Cross representative. His task was to collect from us our names and addresses so that he could advise our people where we were.

And there came to see us a Thai princess. A lovely little lady, as exquisite as a flower. Though escorted by a couple of aides in gorgeous uniforms she was quite uninhibited, running hither and thither, laughing and chatting with us so that the interpreter was hard put to keep up with her. We all fell in love with her; she was so utterly representative of the sweet, gentle side of life we had almost forgotten.

Since then I have often wondered if she was the girl who afterwards became Queen Sirikit, acclaimed as one of the six most beautiful women in the world.

Men from outlying camps filtered in. Some did not know the war was over. Perhaps their guards did not know either or had not told them. An incident occurred that was nothing short of ludicrous.

A small party of p.o.w. were brought in by a lone Korean guard. As soon as they arrived they were hailed by us and told the news. Of course, they broke ranks.

The guard, either through ignorance of the new state of affairs, or by force of habit promptly cuffed one of them and ordered him back into line. Strangely enough we, so accustomed to this sort of thing, ignored the incident. But to Sergeant Kelly it was an outrage. He stepped forward. "Just a minute, little man," he said, took the rifle from him, and promptly laid the Korean out cold.

One would have expected that some of the ex p.o.w. would have taken the opportunity to get their revenge. But they just couldn't be bothered. All the horrors of the past three and a half years seemed to have been wiped out by the magic. There was one ex p.o.w. who had been breathing vengeance for all that time and the object of his hatred was here, right here in Tamuan. He sought out the Korean, intending to give him something back of what he had received at the Korean's hands. As he approached his intended victim the latter bowed so deeply and gravely. In that one act he acknowledged the reversal of their roles. The ex p.o.w. turned on his heel and walked away.

Of course the really vicious, the Boy Bastard and the BBC. Dillenger and his ilk were arrested sooner or later and stood their trials at Tokyo. Most of the worst paid the full penalty.

The Koreans were soon to be cast adrift by their Japanese masters. They wandered around the country without food or shelter. The Thais did not want them. So they drifted back to the ex p.o.w. camps to beg a meal. They were given work all the dirty jobs that had to be done around a camp, and paid a few cents and their food.

The Japanese seemed just stunned. In 2000 years of history they had never been invaded. No Japanese Army had ever been defeated by foreigners. Hence the deep-seated legend of invincibility and the intense shock of defeat.

The only foreigner who ever made a serious attempt to invade Japan was Kublai Khan, the Mongol Emperor of China. He failed in his first attempt (1274) and his fleet of ships in his second attempt (1281) was destroyed by a fierce gale - the 'Kamikaze' or Divine wind. This was the term adopted by the suicide pilots of the Japanese Airforce in their last desperate attempt to stem the coming invasion.

Two weeks went by. Then Captain Bell received orders to transfer us to Nakompatong, a city about fifty miles away and thirty from Bangkok.

We piled into trucks driven by Japanese and with a couple of Indian parachutists as protection we set out. We had no sooner left the camp when we saw that was meant by the danger outside. Long lines of retreating Japanese stretched for miles along the roads or lay about resting or eating by the roadside. But they took no notice of us. Defeat was in their faces: not the surrender of Japan because of the atom-bomb, they probably didn't even know about that, but defeat in the field - all the way from the Arakan frontier to the Sittang River, driven back and cut to pieces by the 14th Army.

The trucks took us out of the foothills to a small wayside station where a train was waiting, carriages this time, not cattle trucks. Not that we would have cared. We were soon under way but only for about thirty miles to a wide river whose bridge had been destroyed by Allied bombers. We detrained

and were ferried across the river in native boats. On the other side we boarded another train which took us across the broad, unending paddy-fields of the region. All the way we could see the golden pagoda of Nakompatong, a slender spire reaching into the sky. Allied airmen used it as a landmark on their raiding flights to Bangkok, its golden spire being visible for long distances even in moonlight. The Japs tried to counter this by having the spire sheathed in matting. The Holy City was never bombed.

At Naompatong there was a large camp built on the outskirts of the city, the work now being done by Japanese p.o.w. These were embarrassing in their servility. To pass through their lines one had to endure a continuity of bowing and saluting that became an ordeal. Here and there a lone Indian sepoy stood on guard. He wasn't needed - the Japs worked like Trojans without any supervision.

We were soon installed in comfortable huts, medically examined, classified, organized. It must be realized that men came from here, there and everywhere: there were no records. All army identification was lost. It took time.

The British Army gave us some pay, enough for spending money in the city. The British included the Dutch and Americans in everything they did for us.

One of our first visitors was Lady Mountbatten who was in charge of amenities. She arrived by jeep from Bangkok and as those who have remembered her throughout her life know, she was immensely popular.

She stopped to speak to a young Englishman next to me. "Where do you come from?" she asked. He was too nervous to answer. She sat down alongside him and took his hand, speaking quietly she talked to him of England. He named the English town from which he came. "Oh, I've been there," she cried. "You've a lovely old pub, the Bull and Ring isn't it?"

Further along the hut she pointed to a strip of black cloth about two feet long and six inches wide and attached to two tapes. It was a Japanese "G" string and in the last year or two of our servitude was our chief, sometimes our only garment. She grabbed it and pirouetted around with the thing hanging down in front of her. "I'd look great in one of these in Mayfair," she laughed.

She went back to her jeep but the driver was not there. He was yarnning somewhere. She slid into the driver's seat and started up. As she drove off, she yelled, "Tell him to come back in one of the trucks."

In the camp a mobile bath unit with plenty of hot water. Every evening there was a concert by an 'Ensa' unit, piano and all.

The Americans were the first away. Their flying troop carriers flew into Bangkok as it was cleared. But there was only a handful of these: the survivors of the 131st Texan Artillery, captured in Java, and those of the "Houston", sunk in the Java sea. That was in the same naval battle wherein we lost the "Perth", it is a thrilling story, but best read elsewhere.

The British followed. Flown first to India, they went home by ship from there. We were told we would be flown out from Singapore as soon as the RAAF could organize their airlift.

The city of Nakomptom said to date from the 19th. century B.C. when the first Buddhist missionaries came to Siam from India. It was then a coastal town but is now about fifteen miles from the sea, the land having silted up by the Mekong River. As a city it does not rate very high but its pagoda, or "cheddi", is the highest in South-East Asia. It is named the Phrapatom Cheddi; it is 363 feet high and has a circumference of 262 feet. So it is not as bulky as the Shwedagon with its circumference of 1,420 feet. The Phrapatom took 500 men ten years to build. The first pagoda on the site was built in 290 B.C. It lasted until 500 A.D. when it was pulled down and a larger one took its place. The present pagoda dates only from 1860.

There is a story that about 700 A.D. the then young king of Siam died in mysterious circumstances similar to those that surrounded the death of the young king, Ananda Mahdol about twenty years ago. But when the son of the dead man came to the throne his queen went to the priests and told them that her husband had killed his father to gain the throne. She alone knew the secret and had kept it until she knew herself to be pregnant. Fearing that her child would be born under a curse she sought the intercession of the priests. The patricide was ordered to build a new pagoda and it became known as the Pagoda of Penance.

In 1860 it was found to be badly in need of repair and it was restored at the expense of the nation. It is quite solid and covered with tiles of a golden brown colour. At its foot there is a reclining Buddha 62 feet long and numerous smaller shrines in the beautiful surrounding gardens which cover several acres. In October and November of each year thousands of pilgrims converge on the city to pay homage at the Cheddi and other shrines. You will find a picture of the Pagoda in "Bits and Pieces from Here, There and Everywhere."

From Nakomptom we were able to send our first letters home and in this city to buy some of the exquisite silver work and 'neilloware'. The latter is the smoked silverware peculiar to Siam. Most of it is made by girls in open booths lining the streets.

Some of the men went into the city every day including a man with no legs at all. His friends used to pull him along in a little cart they had made for him. One trip, however, was enough for me. I was still rather lame.

Then it was on the train again. This time for Bangkok, over a seemingly limitless plain of rice fields. As we pulled into the railway yards of the city we could see what had been done by those bombers we had seen and heard going this way. The marshalling yards were a shambles and the river full of sunken ships. The city itself had not been bombed.

We were taken by bus to the city where a large hospital had been set aside for us. Here I met Corporal Demlo: I had not seen him for three and a half years. He looked surprised to see me. "What's wrong," I asked. "Nothing," he said, "But none of us reckoned you would survive. "Why the Hell not?" I asked. "Well," he said, "After all, you are pretty well on in years, you know."

Soon they had us sorted out. Some of the others and I, not actually sick, but all more or less disabled, were given a house to ourselves in a residential area near the hospital. An English nursing sister was in charge of us with half a dozen Indian sepoy to look after us; bring our meals from the kitchen, and keep the place clean. But they refused to dish out any food containing beef, or wash plates that had been touched by the same. The old "sacred cow" part of their religion. We did it ourselves. No trouble. But Sister almost wept in gratitude. She had had visions of trouble, mutiny and what not. It appears that she had had similar trouble before when looking after a group of Javanese Dutch. They had refused to do any menial work such as handling the food or washing the dishes. The old white colonialism didn't take long to reassert itself. The problem had only been solved by replacing the Indians by Javanese. These latter had been soldiers in the Dutch Army and had been fellow prisoners: up to now all equal in captivity. Now the Javanese had to go back to being servants of the Colonial Dutch. No wonder the Dutch found that the Indonesians didn't want them back. They no longer had a Java to go back to; Sokarno had seen to that, declaring Indonesia to be an independent republic.

Sister went out of her way to make our stay pleasant. She bullied the busy powers that were, for a bus and took us out sightseeing around Bangkok and by launch along the 'klongs', the canals that intersect the city and which have given it the name of "Venice of the East." But I will tell you something more of that later and something of Siam's history.

CHAPTER 13.

People make a city or a country, not the scenery or the architecture. That is why Bangkok is a fascinating city because its people make it so. They are proud, kind, laughter-loving and gentle.

Excepting Japan, Siam is the most advanced nation in Asia. But unlike Japan, they are amongst the least Westernized. Their culture is their own. Even Bangkok is still largely Thai - as yet, but it is rapidly losing its own identity.

There are twenty-five million Siamese, or Thais, as they like to be called. By no means a large nation in the fecund East. They are descendants of those Thais who were driven out of their homeland in southern China by Kublai Khan but there has been much admixture of race since then.

Like Burma, they were at first divided into a number of petty kingdoms, all of them vassals to the Khymer emperors of Cambodia. But in 1238 they founded a kingdom of their own and called it Sukothai and in that period they had their own king, Ramkanghaeng, who gave them their written language.

In 1350 a prince, Rmatibodi, split off and founded a new kingdom in the south and built a great city, Ayudhya, about forty miles north of the present city of Bangkok. He went on to conquer, first, the old kingdom to the north and then all the others around him. He left an empire that lasted 417 years. Most of those years were taken up with bloody struggles with the Khymer and the rising power of Burma. Eventually, in the 16th century the Burmese defeated the Thais, captured Ayudhya and reduced the Thais to vassals.

But a new prince arose, Naressian. He defeated first the Cambodians and then the Burmese overlords, in a great battle of war-elephants. The Burmese became vassals to the Thais in their turn.

But the Burmese rose in 1767, destroyed Ayudhya and killed most of the inhabitants.

But again a Thai leader appeared and drove out the invaders. That was the last war with Burma - commemorated by the three Pagodas, through which pass the armies had marched and counter-marched.

Thailand, which means "Land of the Free", has preserved its independence ever since even if the Japanese did occupy the country in 1942, it was done on a 'mutual agreement' basis,

The Europeans started coming in 1650 but the Thais never became subject to them, unlike their neighbours in Burma, Cambodia, Vietnam and Malaya.

Bankok is a city of temples, more than three hundred of them. The most famous is the Temple of the Dawn. Then there are the Marble Temple and the Temple of the Emerald Buddha. Bankok has been called the Venice of the East because its innumerable canals are its streets and highways with the River Chao Phya as its main throughfare. What roads there are in the city date only from 1860.

On these canals, or 'Klongs', you will not find the grand palazzos of Venice but the humble thatched dwellings of the ordinary people. Here they live out their lives: doing all their shopping in the Klong markets, vast flocks of boats ranging from one boy-power to heavy moterized barges, each and all packed high with goods and produce. And in sharp contrast are the great royal barges, manned on state occasions by forty rowers.

Looking at temples in Bankok is like looking at cathedrals in Europe: no matter how marvellous each one is the mind becomes confused and a dreadful boredom sets in. The rest of Bankok's architecture ranges from pure Khymer to modern western. Bankok is not a beautiful city but it is an interesting one.

Every day we had to report at 9.am to the hospital across the road. There a list was read out of the day's evacuations. After nearly three weeks my name was on the list.

That afternoon the draft was taken by army truck to the aerodrome - a desolate stretch of land outside the city. We spent the night here in barracks and next morning boarded our planes - the Dakotas as usual. These were troop-carriers: We sat in benches along the sides and our gear was tied down to the floor in the centre. We could see nothing: troop-carrying planes do not have windows.

We landed at Penang for lunch then transferred to another flight of planes and headed for Singapore, arriving in mid-afternoon. Here we were met by the Red Cross and given afternoon tea. That over we piled into buses and were taken to special transit camps near Changi.

I was hobbling along the main street of the camp when a jeep pulled up. In it was a naval officer: Roy Smith whom we had known in New Guinea. In fact he had given Clarice away at our wedding in Rabaul in 1926. He had joined up with the navy at the beginning and his job now was to pick up naval personnel as they were brought in from the north. The Navy was looking after its own. Already its mine-sweepers had cleared the channels into Singapore and the ships were coming in bringing troops and supplies and taking out the ex p.o.w.'s

There was the usual sorting out that took place at every transit camp and I was sent to hospital. Those men considered fit enough to travel were flown out or went by ship. Only the Dutch, that is, the Javanese Dutch, were left in ignorance of their fate. They had no Indonesia to go to. But the British fed, clothed and sheltered them. Even gave them some pocket money - with no strings attached.

The hospital was in the same building, St. Joseph's School, that I had seen shelled when it was used as a hospital in the last battle for Singapore. The shell-holes in the walls had been bricked up but there remained plenty of signs of its ordeal.

Some of us were ordered to be ready to fly out. Then, all air flights ceased suddenly: they had found the nurses who had survived. They were on the island of Sumatra. The planes were at once sent to bring them in. You can read their story in "White Coolies", and in Sister Simon's excellent book, "While History Passed". There were no more airlifts after that as a hospital ship from Australia took off most of the men remaining. There were only three hundred of us remaining. The authorities seemed to think we were too ill to travel. It was November, and it is true there were some very sick men; a number died, here in the last stages of their rescue.

I'll admit I weighed only 6½ stone but I was not sick. The doctors and nurses were really wonderful. These girls had been especially chosen for this job. It was not an easy one and they needed all their tact and personality to keep men there who had only one idea in their heads - to get home. Walking cases, like myself, were taken on picnics and to the island's beauty spots. But the sight of a conquered city is one no one wants to see again. The people had been half starved and harshly treated by the Japanese. Much of the city consisted of heaps of rubble, signs of the battering it took three and half years before.

The Supreme Commander, Mountbatten, paid us a visit. He sat on my bed and asked, "Where do you come from, Soldier?" "Sydney, Sir," I answered. "Bloody good place," he said. "I was there with the Prince, in 1920. You look old enough to remember."

Behind him was a craggy-looking officer wearing a general's batons. When Mountbatten moved on, this general stopped in the middle of the ward and introduced himself. "My name is Slim."

This was General Slim. Commander of the 14th. Army which had made the great drive through Northern Burma in the middle of the monsoon season, considered by the experts to be impossible. You can read all about it in his own book, "Defeat into Victory."

Years later he became Governor-General of Australia. Then I met him again at some Returned Soldiers function. I reminded him of Burma. "Marvellous place," he said. I can't agree with him. But I'm getting ahead of my story.

General Slim said to us in the ward, "The Supreme Commander has told me to talk to you. What will I talk about?" Nobody answered. "How would you like a short summary of the 14th. Army's trek through Burma?". There was a chorus of approval.

Aides were sent running for maps and then we learnt from the architect himself the story of "Defeat into Victory."

Outside another large group was listening to Lady Mountbatten telling of the Blitz on London and the Landing in Normandy.

The Mountbattens were a wonderful couple. It is a tragedy that she died so soon after. Lord Louis was a man who had everything: looks, Physique, personality. A cousin to the king, he had served with distinction in the Navy, had two destroyers blown out from under his feet. He it was who perfected the signalling system of the Royal Navy. When Hitler staged a rehearsal of Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of Britain that never came off, it was Mountbatten and a Commander Kelly who ripped into the loaded barges in the Channel and sent so many of them to the bottom that Hitler abandoned his plans.

Then he went on to command the combined operations of land, sea and air that drove the Japanese out of South-East Asia.

He had the gift of getting fractious people to work together, admirals, generals and air-marshalls. And to pick unerringly the right man for the right job.

After the war he went to India to try and settle the problems of India and Pakistan: unity or partition, the two warring states could decide on neither. Lord Curzon and others had tried in vain to get a settlement, any settlement, Mountbatten and Lady Louis won over the truculent Gandhi and the stubborn Pakistani leader (I forget his name) and in a matter of weeks persuaded them to make a decision, it was partition, admittedly a poor substitute for Union, but it was a settlement. With the benefit of hindsight we can see that union would never have worked - even partition has not solved all the problems of that troubled sub-continent.

In Singapore I got letters from home. It's a strange sensation to renew beloved contact after three and a half years, especially when one has been posted as dead.

By the middle of November we were the only Australians left, three hundred of us. It was decided that we were well enough to go but Australia had withdrawn all ships and planes to work in the Pacific sectors. But Mountbatten lent us one his hospital ships, the "Karoo", manned by British officers and nurses with Indian orderlies.

We were taken down to embark; most of our Australian nurses came down to see us off; they were to come home later. On board we ran up against British discipline. Their nurses were not allowed to fraternize with the patients. And now they were scared. They had heard so many weird tales of these wild undisciplined Australians.

In our sick bay, on the first night at sea, the night sister was sitting in the glow of a single light. Suddenly there were sounds of an altercation in the passage outside. Two of the fellows had smuggled some liquor aboard and were showing the effects of it .

The sister turned pale and got hurriedly to her feet to go and get help. But a long lean figure got out of the bunk above me, quietly strolled out into the passageway, saying to sister as he passed, "Don't worry, I'll fix it." He went out, there was a sound of two heads being bumped together, a few words of warning and then silence. There was never any trouble after that. In a few days these English girls were on the best of terms with us all.

Fremantle and Perth and the great-hearted hospitality of the West for two days. The English nurses were amazed at the goods on display in the shops: there had been so little available in England through the long years of war. They went round buying up cardigans and clothes. The Army sisters of Perth Military Hospital gave them a wonderful time.

Western Australians did a wonderful job through the war. They saw every Australian division off and welcomed them all home again.

To Albany for coal and two days there. The Red Cross and Country Women's Association were not to be outdone by their Perth associates. We were taken up to the town Hall and there were long trestle tables loaded with the rich produce of the South-west hams and poultry, fruit and cream. The English nurse near me started to cry, "What's the matter, Sister?" I asked. "If my mother could only see this:" she sobbed. She and her people had known the hardships of the blockade.

On to Melbourne and it was Melbourne Cup day. A list of Victorians who were on the "Karoa" had been published in the Melbourne papers. As I had enlisted in Victoria and had a V.X. number my name was on it. Within an hour of tying up there were forty letters, telegrams and parcels on my bunk, including a bundle of asparagus weighing about five pounds from the family of a man who grew the stuff. I gave it and the fruit and the chocolates to the nurses.

The matron of the "Karoa" was a dour little Scot. One of the men to go ashore was lying on a stretcher on deck with his wife sobbing over him. He had lost both legs. Scotty tapped her on the shoulder. "Are ye crying because he's lost his legs?" she demanded. The woman looked up. "God, no," she said, "I'm crying because I've got him back." Scotty turned to the crowd of relatives and friends crowding round. "These men are going to need every bit of love and care you can give them, you, will never know what they have been through."

Scotty and her nurses were made the guests of the Victorian Jockey Club and were later whisked away to Flemington for the day. A party of Australian nurses from Heidelberg took over the sick bays of the "Karoa" for the day to give the English girls a break.

I was down on the list for disembarkation, having a VX number. I had difficulty convincing Scotty that I came from New South Wales. She hauled me off to the British Colonel in charge of the ship, "Just what country do you come from?" he demanded. Luckily I had letters from Clarice in my pocket and they convinced him. So I was allowed to remain to go on to Sydney.

A score of my Melbourne friends had come down to the "Karoa" to meet me. They all wanted me to spend the two days in port with them. I elected to go with Roy's sisters, but was refused leave. Roy's sister bearded the Colonel. "My sister and I are both nurses. One of us has a doctor husband. We both have private hospitals," she explained. "This soldier will be in good hands."

The Colonel considered the problem for a moment. "In that case, if you accept full responsibility, I'll let him go in your care."

He never knew that the "Private hospitals" were of the maternity variety.

Roy had got home a few weeks ahead of me and when I arrived in Melbourne was away in the mountains trout-fishing. But we managed to get in touch with him by long distance telephone, and exchange congratulations at having survived. Until I reached Melbourne neither of us had known if the other had won through.

Those two days in Melbourne were wonderful but I wanted to get home. Home to Sydney where my wife and children were awaiting me. People understood. They were very quiet and patient. And they all came down to the ship to see me off on the last stage of my journey.