

**My
Soldiering
Days**

13/11/39 - 14/1/46

Snow Fairclough



"Snow" Palestine 1941

Private Milton Thomas (Snow) Fairclough 2/3 Machine Gun Battalion

I remember a few of us Moora blokes sitting on the curb outside the Town Hall talking to Gus Cargeeg of Kellerberrin re putting a squadron in the 25th Light Horse Regiment. Shortly after this, the unit was formed; our section made up from Moora, Carnamah and Kellerberrin. We eventually became "C" Squadron commanded by Major Siggers.

The first camp was at Rockingham. I recall that I got very homesick and even cried at night a few times. The camp started on the 13th November 1939 and finished on the 12th December 1939.

With war about, we were then called for another extensive training course at Melville Camp from the 10th January 1940 to the 10th April 1940. By now I had got into the groove of army life and enjoyed this three month camp.

Our old Officer in Charge, Mitchell tried to get us transferred as a complete unit over to the A.I.F. but was knocked back by the powers that mattered.

So, a big majority of us 25th Light Horse Regiment, up and joined firstly the 2nd/2nd and soon after the 2nd/3rd Machine Gun Regiment. This was a good idea as most of us were known to each other and the Wagin, Narrogin and Katanning boys were with us also. We got to Northam in June 1940. Ted Lyneham was our C/O and we were known as "D" Company. Headquarters and South Australia were "A", Victoria was "B" and Tasmania was "C". After some training at Northam we were sent by Trans Train to Adelaide to finish training as a Unit with the two South Australian and the "B"

and "C" Companies. Beaut trip on the train as civilians waited on the tables, good tucker and fun and games. I believe that, later, the troops went over in cattle trucks.

Had embarkation leave, and joined a big convoy made up of our hell ship "Ile de France" on its first trip since being sabotaged. Sewage used to come out of the taps, and the floor (deck) under our hammocks on "D" deck used to have sewage inches deep every morning.

Also in the convoy to the Middle East were the Queen Elizabeth, Queen Mary, New Amsterdam and the Mauritania.

I remember standing at the rear of the ship at night and seeing all the phosphorous in the water behind the propellers. Too broke to play two-up.

Got to Suez, down the Canal to a place called Eh Kantara where we had a bloody good feed supplied by Pommy blokes.

An Aussie publicity officer joined us for the trip down to Gaza in a train we reckoned had square wheels because it was so damn rough. The rot he told us was terrific. Don't eat the melons that the wogs sold us as they had little square holes cut in them and then they peed in them to make them heavier. He told us not to trust any wog in any way, as they were professional thieves.

He reckoned an Aussie mob on guard was camped under a big high "Bells Tent". They had just changed guard but when the next change came around, the wogs had pinched the tent.

We trained at Gaza for a while and I found quite a lot of stuff from the First World War, still lying around.

We had a route march out to the Mediterranean one day for a swim, and as I defy all laws of buoyancy, Eddie Saleeba tried to teach me to float and do some swimming strokes. No luck. But then discovered that I had forgotten to take off my wrist watch that Mum and Dad had given me as a going away gift. It was a Rolex and luckily it kept going OK. Bloody Japs later got it anyway.

Had a series of tests in Gas training drills, mustard, phosgene, I remember. The rumour then was that Hitler was going to take Turkey and come on down through Syria and Lebanon to the Middle East and join the Vichy French in Syria.

So, early June, we were on our way up to Syria to have a dash at the Vichy French. As usual, we were short of components for our Vickers Machine Guns, especially condenser cans and the muzzle attachments.

We camped overnight at an evacuated Froggie campsite, which had bits and pieces of everything around, so they must have left in a hurry. We were warned not to eat any food or biscuits as they could be poisoned and other items could be "booby trapped" by the German officers who were with the Froggies.

Gordon Roberts and I were scrounging around and found an old First World War Vickers that the Germans had used. Lo and behold, the muzzle attachments, which I saw, and the rusty condenser cans looked pretty similar to what we needed. Gordon went for the can and I settled to get the attachment off the old gun.

I got a good grip and turned it and a hell of an explosion occurred. I nearly shit myself and dropped straight to the ground as we had been taught. Then, I found out that our bloody Artillery was behind a rise to our left and let a salvo go at the Froggies. That was my "Baptism of Fire".

Later that night, we had to move up the mountains to get to our positions. Dark as buggery, our mine experts leading us through the mine fields. Hands on the bloke in front's shoulder, all steps the same measured step distance. I asked the mine bloke what pressure would be needed to send off a mine. He whispered back, "Well, mate, you know the thickness of a French letter, about that much". That scared shit out of me too as I thought being so short my steps might not be as long as those taller chaps.

Eventually, we got to our position and got our "L" trench dug ("no noise please"), bedded down the tripod for our Vickers, set it up in the general direction and waited for dawn. Just before dawn the Froggies opened up their artillery on us. We had dug in around an old olive and fig grove. Bloody bombs, shells and noise and stuff going everywhere, I stood up in our trench and yelled and screamed profanities and abuse at the Froggie bastards. Sandy and Twiddle dragged me down again. Then we got a bead on their positions and could return some of ours.

Being No.2 on the gun, I had to ensure that belts were free running and that no stoppages could occur. But, getting 600 odd hot used shells down the tunic makes me a bit testy re the Vichy French. When their Artillery had stopped and it was lighter, I took another look around and saw shells like mushrooms stuck up all around us – unexploded, which apparently were First World War stuff and the percussion caps were not working. Luckily, it was one to us.

Froggies had their light artillery mounted on rails and ran them out to fire, and then back into caves afterwards. Our few aircraft couldn't locate them.

Eventually, the "Perth" came along the coast and pounded hell out of their positions and as somebody described, "shifted the hill".

I went up with Flash Hall on the motorbike, on a recce and there were big black Algerians dead, everywhere. Flash wanted to knock out their big gold teeth. He was a Moora mate from way back.

A couple of Vichy aircraft attacked the "Perth" which sent up lots of Bofor shells which were nicknamed "Flying Onions". The planes dived through them but got no hits on the "Perth" but the ack ack didn't knock any planes out either. As we were on the coastal section, we had a grandstand seat for this event.

We were just behind the 2nd/16th at Damour which the French defended strongly, but the 2nd/16th did overcome them and the "Syrian Skirmish" as it was called, finished on the 12th July 1941 when they capitulated. We were to remain in Syria and Lebanon as a garrison force on standby, waiting for future events from the European War.

I, particularly, had a bloody good time over the next few months as I'd had a real lucky run at the two-up games in camps and particularly the big one in Beirut. Had kit bags full of Syrian dough. A dollar was 2/10 (Aussie) in those days.

I had a lot of leave – Tel Aviv a few times, Cairo, Baalbeck, Aleppo, Holms and Jerusalem, old and new city.

I remember one night on guard with old Gerry Throssel and a Pom officer riding a white horse from North Somerset Yeomanry, I think. Gerry yelled, "Halt, who goes there" and there was no answer. Again he yelled out, again there was no answer so he fired a round into the air. Guy says "Robin Hood" which was the password for that particular guard but Gerry was as deaf as a post and didn't hear it. After the officer reported it, Gerry was sent home to the "toothless and useless" as he called it. He actually cried in my tent over being sent back. In passing, he told me in later years that when he got back to Moora, he had the greatest period of adultery ever

experienced. Try as I did, he never let on who the woman was or if the hubby ever found out.

I was billeted out in Tel Aviv a few times when on weekend leave, with Jewish families and once with a Russian Jewish family and only the two kids spoke English. Bill Monks got into a decent sort of blue in Haifa one night and was lucky the mob didn't do him in. I didn't go to Haifa, as it was a pretty rough joint. One Aussie who had caught a dose from a pro called "Midnight" went back after treatment with a grenade and said, "You shared yours with me, now share mine". He chucked the grenade in and there were a couple killed and some injured. Lucky bugger was discharged from the Army and sent home to Australia.

Another time, I'd had a letter from Mum and Dad knowing that I was close to Beirut. They had a friend, a chemist, called Said Samaha, who had asked them to get me to go out to the University and try to find some of his relatives and sort of say hello from Said. Eddie Saleeba was also going out to try to find some relatives or friends and he had more luck than I did. I found the language problem hard at times.

After a big night at the two-up, I'd split up money to my two big "bodyguards", Tiny White and Allan Middleton and we would all go different ways back to the camp. I had a compartment in the top of my drivers cap I wore on leave in which I put all the big Syrian notes or occasionally Pommy Sterling Pounds. When we got back to the tent, we'd empty out all the cash onto the floor and wax it up.

Another thing these two characters used to do and bet on, was to each get a primus stove. We were issued with them in Syria for cooking in our tents, as it was so cold. It snowed right down to the ocean at Tripoli, coldest since 1912. Anyhow, Tiny and Allan would start pumping up the primus until one burst. Winner takes all! I used to get out of the tent and how they were never injured beats me.

Down south of Tripoli (Syrian one) there was an old Crusader Castle which Sandy Cunnington and I explored and had a photo of us taken in the slits from where the bows and arrows were fired.

Our time at the monastery at a place called "Fih" was pretty good. Had my first beer there one night after bartering my issue beer for Cadbury chocolates and Gordon giving me half wog, half Abbots as a pay off. We had big shit pans along the rooms for peeing in, as it was so icy outside. Anyway, after a few blocks of chocolate and this bloody beer, I was very sick in one of those pans.

Woke up next morning and ran my tongue around my mouth to find that my false teeth were missing. The pee cans had all gone and been dumped in a huge concrete tank on the hill. Much cajoling and much money later, I got Sunny Smith who was on Pioneer duty to get into the tank and find my teeth. I boiled them in a billy for a while and they were as good as new.

Just Announced ! Japan enters the war on the 7th December 1941.

We were packed off back to Palestine to Hill 69 Camp where we started training for desert warfare – right on top of snow and ice. What a contrast! All our trucks and kit bags were painted with the equivalent desert signs. Then, on the 30th January 1942, we got another order countermanding the previous one. So, it was back onto the square wheeled train through Eh Madjal, across the Sinai desert and arrived back into Eh Kantara on the Suez Canal. Owing to the suddenness of our orders, we were only allowed to take a rifle and a personal bag with us. All our trucks and machine guns were behind us and also our big kit bags in which I had packed all my Pounds Sterling as I had cashed in all the Syrian dollars earlier. Never heard of it again either but as it turned out, the Japs would have got it anyway. Also, had a camera that Mum had given me and lots and lots of leave photos.

Digressing a moment. Bill Monks did get a couple of items back out of his bag. Someone in Darwin sent him the boxing medal he had won on the Ile De France going over and also his Brownie Camera.

Off from Eh Kantara towards Suez, the bloody engine broke down and we were stranded for 6 hours. It turned out later to be a shattering happening for us as when we eventually got to Suez, we found that the ship we were meant to be on, the Mauritania, had just left heading for Australia.

We were all on the wharf awaiting the only ship in sight, the Orcades, to take us on board and Sergeant Arthur Withnell called for six volunteers to guard the gear on the wharf. As usual, we believed in the "never volunteer" code, so he said, "you, you and you" etc. While we were all ferried on board the Orcades, those six blokes got home to Australia as old Captain Fox, our skipper, said his orders to sail meant to sail and he wouldn't wait to get our stuff aboard. A lot of the nurses also only had what they were wearing plus a small bag. This was February 1942.

Out into the Gulf of Suez and into the Red Sea and on to the Indian Ocean. Zigging and zagging all over the place in case of mines, we had no protection at all – no air or sea support.

We arrived at Colombo on the 9th February and left next day. No leave. Going over, we had a few days leave there and saw quite a few interesting things. Learnt about the barter system the hard way. Had a beaut "Rice Tahfai" meal at the Shepherds, I think it was – about 38 courses were brought in. Gordon, Sandy, Bill and I lapped it up.

We were shocked to find that we were not heading south to Fremantle but took off in an easterly direction. Some said, India, for sure. Now, we were escorted by HMS Dorsetshire, but after a day she went and a Dutch cruiser took her place. I ran a book on where we were going. I won and should have had a skinner book as no-one backed Sumatra, two had Java at 10 to 1, two had India at 12 to 1 and Australia at 6 to 4. Sumatra was not backed but I paid up on Java.

On the morning of the 15th February 1942, we anchored in the harbour of a port called Oosthaven in South Sumatra. Captain Fox announced over the radio that Singapore had fallen to the Japanese by unconditional surrender. "I and you and my ship are now in the front line of the war". He said he was a sitting duck for an air attack and wanted us off as quickly as possible.

We were ordered to disembark at 3.30-4pm. Bloody lovely. No machine guns, no mortars, no grenades, over half of us had nothing and some had only a bayonet. Officers had a pistol but only 5 rounds of ammo. What a balls up! I thought, here we go sacrificed to the "God of War".

Brigadier Blackburn, our chief, had gone ahead and contacted some Poms who were dumping Bren Carriers in the sea and said that the aerodrome at Palembang that we were supposed to be going to protect, had been taken by the Japs at 4 o'clock that afternoon. We had been standing in the pouring rain for 6 hours and were then told we had to get back onto the Orcades before he sailed. Ferried out in pitch bloody black, climbing a rope ladder back up and I was shit scared of falling back into the sea, as I couldn't swim.

The rain stopped, we got bully beef and biscuits, and told coats on, coats off, and Buck Peters said coats off and threw his overboard. He and Scorp Stewart were always against authority.

Took off soon after back through the Sundra Straits where soon after the Perth, Houston and Den Trump were sunk, and we got back to Batavia on February 17th.

There was a confab of Dutch, American, Aussie and Dutch silver tails and it was decided we would be offloaded as a token gesture to the Dutch. We disembarked on the 18th February. Still no arms and there were 710 of us from the 2nd/3rd Machine Gun Battalion. Ted Lyneham was elevated in charge of the whole unit and Brigadier Blackburn was made Commander of "Black Force". That was us – 2nd/3rd Motor Transport (bloody gang of crooks and criminals, I reckon), British 3rd Hussars and the Yankee Battalion 1/131st Artillery.

Weary Dunlop was put in charge of the 2nd/2nd CCS (Casualty Clearing Station) units.

On the 20th February 1942, Blackie had managed to get two Bren guns and a few assorted rifles, a few bayonets and a very few Dutch grenades. "Whacko, look out Nips, here we come!"

Once again the Intelligence Officer came around to tell us the following gems.

- The Japs couldn't use their weapons for prolonged fighting, and then they fought with bamboo weapons.
- They really didn't have machine guns. They whirred around those things like you get at the shows that make rat-a-tat noises.
- Their aircraft, the Zero, could only fly in a straight line because if it turned quickly to the left or right, it fell to bits.

What a lot of bullshit and he was paid to do it. The Zero was a terrific plane, their machine guns were accurate, ask Charlie and Buddha, and they certainly endured jungle fighting pretty well, too.

Our platoon got the job of protecting the Komorjan Bandoeng airport at Batavia. This was supposedly a civil airport. There wasn't an airworthy plane anywhere, as everything had been bombed or machine gunned to bits and only one long runway was useable. Sandy, Bill and I were on guard shift this night and had done a round of the area and decided to go to the far end where there was a small Kampong village.

About half way there, we heard planes coming and the bombs hit where we had just left. Bloody coconut palms and stuff was chucked high in the air. After a little discussion, we hid the rifle and got a rickshaw into the village. Sandy, who we nicknamed "nine a night Norm" in Syria was soon into the mak-mak place. They had little slits cut in the atab (cane) walls where you could watch what was going on. Sandy had gone for the lot. Bill had a dash, but innocent little me – well my memory fails me now.

When we got back to the drome Sandy was in the middle of the runway washing "Percy" with soap and he started to get a dinkum horn again and he yells out, "where's that bloody rickshaw". Oh, to be as fit as that. A KLM plane landed and asked if we wanted to go home. Wonder if he made it.

Next day, Wavel, Schilling and Tex Poorten had a meeting in a big rubber plantation where we were told we were all going to fight shoulder to shoulder etc etc. But, of course, they flew out on a plane straight away, 26th February.

The Dutch Army including their darkie subjects was over 25000. My old Granny would have beaten the lot of the gutless wonders. I have a lot of admiration though for the spirit of the Dutch women who defied the Japs at every turn. I've seen them belted down, get up and spit in the Japs face again. They tried hard to give any assistance to us that was possible while we were on Java.

On the 1st March 1942, we were moved to Western Java to a place called Leuwiliang which was about 15 miles from Buitenzorg which is a lovely city.

We established ourselves each side of the road (East-West) over a high bridge on the Tycanten River. Our two Bren guns lined up on the bridge for when the Japs came across. Some idiot Dutch engineer blew up the bridge. Bloody Japs for miles around, then knew where our force was housed.

On the 3rd March, Dutch Intelligence told Blackburn that no Japs had landed on Java. That was bullshit, they just wouldn't fight.

Soon after, Jap mortar shells were all around us. Lethal things, chop all your lower limbs about. We dug in, bones coming up. I asked Gordon whether he thought we were in some sort of Chinese cemetery and he said, "They're dead, mate, just keep digging or so will we be". Brigadier Blackburn now, through our own Intelligence, found out that on the 1st March, the Japs had crossed Sundra Strait and landed on North West Java. Huge mob of them. Another lot was at Batavia and another at Surabaya. Blacky won a Victoria Cross in the First World War and I think that he thought that with these blokes, he could get another one.

Three officers of our "C" Company were sent out on a recce to see if there were any easy crossing points on the river for the Japs. They never got back – either killed or captured.

Early next morning, 4am, had had no sleep, bloody rain, rain, rain. Japs attacked again. Their screaming and yelling coming across the river was blood curdling. What little fire power we had saw them back off again.

Again, the next morning, mortars and yelling and screaming. I was amazed that they hadn't called for air support to fix us up properly but luckily it didn't happen. Charlie Chapple injured, Buddha also and one officer of "C" Company was injured. So far, we had had 7 killed and 28 wounded.

Suddenly Blacky was told that the Dutch mob who were supposed to be protecting our North flank had pissed off a day and a half ago. So, we were now under threat from that direction as well. If we had only had our lovely Vickers Machine guns with us there, as it was pretty open being mainly tea plantations, we could have held out indefinitely.

But, as it was, we were in a hopeless possie without any support so Blacky decided to fight a rear guard action through Sukabumi, Bandung, Garoet and down to Surabaya on the coast and hope our navy could do another Dunkirk and lift us off the island.

On the 7th March 1942, the Dutch officially capitulated. The Pommy Commander then ordered all troops including the Aussies to surrender.

Blacky had other ideas. He argued heatedly and tried by radio to get a message to Prime Minister Curtin but despite all efforts, couldn't get through. Reluctantly he gave the order at 11am next day to lay down arms. Make everything unusable, damage anything and everything that the Japs may be able to use.

This was a most humiliating, despairing time for us. I was angry and felt that we had been betrayed. If only that engine had not broken down for 6 hours in Egypt, we would have been home in Australia.

We were ordered to form a group near a tea plantation called Arinem. We called it "Capitulation Lane". Six of our blokes were clothed out, we had a muster of money.

Harry Whitten promoted and they hoped to get a boat off the coast and get back to Australia. All were executed later.

Marched on through jeering natives to Leles where we were housed in an old school. Pretty basic. Then marched to a place called Garoet with a much bigger school and found this quite a reasonable camp. All sorts of things were done to combat boredom. I did a course of bookkeeping to trial balance with Jim Law. Did Shorthand (Pitman) with Dave Topping, a Queensland journalist. Tried French language but couldn't hack it. Most of us learnt Pidgin Malay. Food was mainly rice with bits of assorted vegies occasionally.

Nicely settled there and thought that it wasn't a really bad war after all, but new mobs of Korean Guards and Jap Officers took over and beltings galore occurred from then on.

Next move to Bandoeng, which was a really big area, and with Weary Dunlop in charge of the whole camp, it was soon organised and running as smooth as silk. Had sports day every Saturday, all nations participating. The Ambonese chaps were beaut little chaps and good athletes. The Manadenese from the Celebes were real Jap crawlers and most of them did turn over to the Japs early in the show.

I remember the hop, step and jump. Weary was two foot taller than the Ambonese, and he took off, big hop, huge step in mid air and only had his Jockey undies on and out pops Percy and balls before he lands for the jump. He was yards and yards in front of everyone else's mark.

I ran in the 75 yard sprints but was miles out and so different to the battalion sports in Tel Aviv where I won the 75 yard dash coached by Norm Hurley who Dad had backed to win the Moora Gift one year at about 10 to 1. He won it, too.

I also broke my false plate just days before we left Bandoeng. The Dutch dentist was as slow to fix it as they were to fight so I had to leave without my plate.

6th November 1942. Under Weary, about 1000 of us Aussies marched out and caught a train to Makasura Camp. Bloody awful tucker after Bandoeng, just rice, 90% water and no salt. Next day, we got steamed rice, little square of whole meat, and seaweed and a cup of weak tea. Wondered why the sudden improvement in tucker.

30th December 1942. We continually had turd inspections by supposed Jap doctors. They gave us a bit of cellophane but most of us had to use a banana leaf made like a funnel. Waited in the sun for three hours and then told the inspection was off, chucked them away. Two hours later, a Jap Major came and yelled turd display again. Some wit said, "second turd on display" as a play on words for 2nd/3rd on display. Jap had a bo peep at them, knocked back 100 and said that we, the other 900 were going for work party. "Going to be like heaven", for us, he said.

Eleven o'clock at night, "tenko, tenko" again and we got 3 injections. Back to our bunks at 2am. Tenko, tenko again. All men on a 1½mile march to a train and wait, wait again. Eventually we got to Tanjungpriok.

Taken to an old tramp ship, real rust bucket, Jap name "Usu Maru". They sprayed us with a disinfectant going on, poor miserable bastards we looked as we mainly wore only a "Jap Happy" loincloth and no boots or shoes. The holds had been divided into shelves about a metre high. We were packed in like sardines. Imagine my delight when I found a set of Jap water wings, which never left my neck thereafter during the voyage. Mostly, all of us had dysentery of sorts, along with all the other usual ailments.

The Japs guarded the steep steps onto the deck and we were only allowed out of the hold to go to the toilet. The toilet was long planks fastened to the ship and going out over the sea. If you really did not need to go before you got out there, it was soon scared out of you when the sea was rough. There was always a long queue up the steps and always excreta cascading down the steps from the blokes in front who hadn't been able to hang on long enough to have their squat over the ocean.

Weary came down while the Japs were stacking us in with their rifles. He got silence and told us how best to arrange ourselves in the low shelves. Sit up, knees parted and bent up, next bloke in between the knees etc. He finished by saying, "No farting, please". Some hope. We finished with 400 of us in the hold measuring about 25 yards by 12 yards.

We were also instructed not to try and contact other POWs in other holds. But whilst walking the plank we did find out there were a lot of 2nd/40th boys from Tassie there. They had been caught on Timor nearly two months after Singapore fell.

On about the 11th or 12th February, we got to Singapore. We were taken to Changi where we were amazed to see all the blokes there were fully dressed. The 2nd/4th Machine Gun boys had big army boots and were fully clothed. We were named Weary's "Java Rabble", a name that these days is worn with pride.

Weary and the Camp Commander Black Jack Callaghan had a blue when he wouldn't give us any gear to wear, and in fact we got bloody pumpkin and green wood to cook it with. After the war, this bloody Callaghan bloke was commended for the way he handled Changi. Weary did lay an official complaint after the war.

Peter Moate and I walked through the hospital section and I saw a bloke in traction, bandaged from head to foot. Looked a real mess. His name was Fairclough. I introduced myself and found that we were not related. He was from Victoria Park. When I asked him whether he had been hit by a land mine or was a mortar victim, he said, "Oh, no. I did this playing baseball"?

On the 19th January 1943, 625 of us Java Rabble with Weary in charge and taking two other doctors with us, Dr Corlette (The Gangster because he had a big scar on his face) and Dr. Moon who was a gentle bloke, gynaecologist from Sydney, set off at 6am.

Got to Singapore Station. There was a train with 22 big steel enclosed wagons. We were again packed in like sardines. All metal walls, no windows and the doors locked.

About 4 hours later, the train stopped and the door opened about a foot. An interpreter said that peeing only was allowed but not through villages along the way. Our floor was pretty messy by this time anyway. At dawn, for the next two days, the train stopped and we were allowed out for a bog.

No food so far for the trip, frayed tempers and morale was pretty low. At midnight, the train stopped at a place called Gemas and whacko, there was a meal of rice, weak soup and a cup of tea. By this time we were hungry enough to eat shit with sugar. When we got to Kuala Lumpur, I remember it had a long, long platform and we had to work like niggers loading stuff for the Japs.

Off again, up the Malay Peninsula. The old train was flat out at 30 miles per hour up towards Thailand. It was hell, locked in the steel trucks, bloody hot and everyone getting cranky.

Arrived at Bampong. All out, tenko, tenko again. Bloody Japs and their counts. We reckoned that they used to count our legs and divide by two. Would take 20 minutes

for them (always two) to get the number right. Earlier on when we had to learn their lingo to count and drill etc, we used to yell anything as long as it was loud. But, they eventually woke up and beltings sort of stopped our fun.

1 – Itchy, 2 – Ni, 3 – Son, we used to yell scratch it for 3.

Packed in again and still standing room only in very smelly trucks. Rumour was flying that were headed for Western Thailand and the hells of the jungle. Day and a half later, we still had no food and we stopped at a place called Tarso.

Weary was furious and beleaguered every Jap he saw there about feeding us and eventually food came. Rice, weak soup, and real stinking fish which for some reason the Victorian blokes called Modern Girls. I never did like the Victorians anyway. I never left a grain of rice. I think it was the 24th January 1943.

Next day, we went about 12 miles further into the jungle. Here we were met by Jap Engineer Officers. We were marched down extremely steep terrain to a camp called Konyu. I don't know about "can you", but we learnt later that is should have been, "you will". It was close to the banks of the Kwai Noi River and there was a bunch of Pommy POWs there, apparently having come up from Changi earlier.

We were belted every time we were caught talking to the Poms. They had had many deaths there and were not really organised. They didn't even boil water before drinking it.

Marched about 1½ miles further up the jungle and "all men stop", said the Japs. Nothing but jungle everywhere, bloody huge teak trees and bamboo clumps as big as houses with spikes 2" or 2½" long and damn poisonous. Rain forest stuff everywhere. We were given old primitive tools and told to start getting material and build ourselves a camp, cookhouse, latrines etc. We had to walk back to Konyu each night for our tucker.

Few blokes had building skills but soon we had guardhouses built, then the kitchen, then the huts and finally, the "thunder boxes". Big holes about 12 feet deep with bamboo slats across to squat on.

Amazing stuff, bamboo. We soon became quite good innovators and lots of utensils were made. The big clumps were hard yakka to fell and green bamboo snakes dropped all over us as we got the clumps down. Some blokes used to cook snakes and mix them with rice. The only time I ever tried snake was in one camp where the Japs had shot a big type of cobra and had it draped over a pole in the middle of the parade ground.

About 2 feet of the tail end disappeared overnight and there was hell to pay. Our rations were cut for days but no one owned up to it as, for sure, he would have been executed. Anyhow, Gordon had got a bit of it and he, Bill, Sandy and I tried it. One said that it tasted like poultry, one said fish, I said it tasted like snake and spat mine out. Gordon used to go crook at me when I used to sort out the mice poo and maggots from my rice pap. Eat it in the dark, Snow and then you will get all the protein, he said.

After a really hard slog on a very hot day, Weary got permission from the Japs for us to go to the river for a swim or a wash. The latter for me and couldn't remember the last time the body had received a wash. Some blokes dived and caught big clams which were cooked and cooked and cooked and still tasted like leather to me. Being short of fangs didn't help, I suppose.

Just over three weeks it took us to build our camp, working dawn to dusk. We had guard houses, kitchen, ovens from clay, 3 big huts and 2 thunder boxes. Felt really proud of our efforts.

Next morning the Japs said, "All men ready," and off we went again. All that work for nought but it was experience gained for later camps we built. Marched for about 2 hours through more jungle to a place called Hintok. This was my nemesis. So close to death and saved each time.

We had two camps here, the Hintok Road and the Hintok River camp. This was the start of the horror that was to be the "Burma Railway". I won't go into all the savage beltings and occurrences that I endured as many blokes have written and tabulated them since the war. We were lucky in as much that a few of us Moora blokes had managed to stay together through the interminable camps, marches, jobs etc. Gordon Roberts, Jim Morgan, Hurtle Martin, Eddie Saleeba, Carl Hansen, Norm Harvey, Norm Cunnington, Bill Monks and Clinker Jenkins. We learnt later that Len Clinch had gone to Sumatra. Whenever possible we helped each other out. Norm and Clinker died of cholera in this area.

We worked 18 hour shifts each day, marching between 1-3 miles to the work place and during the monsoon season, the mud was nearly knee deep. Rain bucketed down continuously.

I was on the trestle bridges, "Pack of Cards" bridge (it kept tumbling down), embankments, rail laying, fettling the sleepers with heavy pick things and to the notorious Hintok and Compressor cuttings. I was a rock roller there which was a bit easier than hammer and tap which killed a lot of blokes. Also, occasionally got a job of getting Nip stores from places up steep grades where a steel cable had to be hung on to so as when loaded with the big basket with a bamboo pole through it, we could carry the basket between us. I remember a rumour on one of those trips hearing that U.S. President Roosevelt had died.

I had malaria sixty odd times, chronic amoebic dysentery, beri beri, happy feet and was debilitated. Weighed about 6 stone.

Weary, Corlette and Moon were fabulous with the little gear they had to work with and it must have played hell with their minds deciding who they thought would live if given scarce medicines.

The Japs were real sadistic bastards. I have been bashed with heel of the hand, bamboo, wooden clogs and rifle butts, and face slapping was a common occurrence.

Just a couple of incidents I will report. I had been put on the "single slat" bamboo bed with chronic amoebic dysentery (40-60 motions of blood and mucous per day, sometimes more). The single slat was isolated from the rest of the bed space so that those sleeping would not be awakened when the dead body was moved. A Jap guard, called "The Lizard" who was responsible for getting the number of men for the work parties was a real bastard.

He looked at me and said, "you fit" and proceeded to bash me with the rifle butt off the single slat. No wonder my bloody back is so crook these days. Anyhow, I was felled and crawled out to the parade ground. Weary was arguing about who was unfit for the work party and when he saw me crawling along the mud and The Lizard screaming, "you fit", he came over, towered over the little Jap and put his big hand on the Japs head and pressed down hard. He said, "I am a doctor and this man is not fit for work and he is definitely not going to work today". He turned to me and said, "Stay there, Snow, and don't move". Much more screaming and yelling and I thought that this was it and I would be shot for sure. But I did not go to work that day and Weary put me back in the hut.

Similar thing another day but after getting the rifle butt treatment from The Lizard, it was agreed I'd have "light duties" in the camp at the Jap huts. I was still having

about 60 motions each day and no control of my bladder at all. Also had malaria and beri beri.

My job was to heat up water for the guards and cooks to have a bath in, which they had in sort of round wooden staved kegs. Like a larger version of the old 18 gallon keg cut in half. I had to get baths ready and then pour the warm water over them. Most times they were into saki as well.

After a while, I said, "Itchy mai banjo", which meant one man toilet. They just laughed and carried on. Next thing, blood and mucous all down my legs and I peed straight into the bath.

It was on then. Got hell bashed out of me and was knocked out. I woke up sore and sorry and found a sliver of bamboo in my penis and my anus was jammed with Jap Happy and bamboo. I was too stuffed to move and thought "this is it", and I thought what a relief it would be.

However, one of my mates from Narrogin had come back from his 18 hour shift and asked if I had died when he saw that I was not on the single slat. When told that I had been put on light duties at the Jap huts, he came looking and discovered me. He carried me back and cleaned me up. Gordon came in later and said he'd put some money in my canteen fund the officers ran with the 4cents a day we were paid. No work, no pay. I'd had a crook spin and was desperate. Gordon said, "Snow, I'm working, you're not, so you need it". We used to get extra duck egg or bit of goolwa (sugar) if one had the extra in canteen. The Officers were paid by the Japs but it was always months behind and as the officers didn't actually work on the railway, they had a different compound and it gave them something to do working out who had what. At that time they also had a higher payment which Weary had ordered they put $\frac{3}{4}$ of, in the canteen account to trade eggs and other stuff with the boat traders.

Another time, near death's door and a drug called Emetine was the only thing that could effect amoebic dysentery and give you a chance of living. I had earlier had one small dose on Java and one at Hintok Road camp. Dr. Corlette came in and saw me and told me that he had just been to see Weary who was also suffering from dysentery, and Corlette had saved a 30ml needle to help Weary. But Weary said that he would be alright and asked that Corlette give it to another deserving case that he knew for sure had amoebic and not bacillary dysentery, as then it would have been wasted. May and Baker (M&B 693 Sulpha drug) crushed tablets were used on bacillary dysentery.

Old Dr. Gangster as we called him, said, "Snow, you are going to get this needle" and he put it in my buttock which he then patted and said, "There you go, there is 100 ticals (Thai dollars) in your bum, now". In just two days, I was back at work and down to the normal 10-12 motions per day.

Dr. Corlette told me that day that the strain of deciding who lived and who died was very stressful on him. He said that he had even injected distilled water in some chaps to boost their hopes of pulling through. Some even did.

I remember another time, I must have had a death wish or something. I was craving for something sweet and goolwa was very scarce. Another POW who had got some round sugar cakes with peanuts in from a Thai boat trader gave me one of them and bang up went my motions another 30 odd per day. When Weary saw me later and I told him what I had done he wrote on my medical slip, "dietetic indiscretion". Tiger Payne also came and slapped my face for being stupid.

The initial swath we cut through the jungle was on very steep slopes and the Kwai Noi River could be seen about 1000 feet below. Had to be like a bloody mountain goat to avoid slipping down the slope. We had primitive axes, wedges, chunkels,

picks, machetes, crow bars, spikes and little "tankers" which were little elongated baskets for carrying smaller rocks in. Still had only Jap Happy for clothing and no footwear.

Food was totally inadequate for the work we were doing particularly for the hammer and tap blokes. In May, the bloody monsoons started and there was mud feet deep everywhere. We'd leave at dawn and get back at dark. Quota of work was given and had to be done before we were allowed back to camp. Conditions were shocking. One sadistic bastard we nicknamed, Molly the Mad Monk used to just bash us unmercifully and for no apparent reason, other than for his own pleasure.

In Hintok and Compressor cuttings, we rock rollers would go in after the hammer and taps had belted holes metres deep through hard rock and the charges laid and the explosions finished. I often worried if all the holes had gone off, as Japs were buggers of counters. We would roll all the big section of rocks out of the cuttings and down slopes. Then, the smaller stuff went into tankers and we'd stagger a line to make bases for the embankments. Sometimes, by the time the basket had been thrown across 30 blokes, only a couple of stones would be left. If you were the unfortunate on the end of the line and the Jap saw it, Whacko!

I remember one embankment we had about $\frac{3}{4}$ finished and I was carting baskets of red earth up on top of the stone foundations. I suppose the slope would have been about $37\frac{1}{2}$ degrees angle at the time. Eddie Saleeba's brother-in-law, Doug Carter, a big bloke, got to the top of the embankment. It was monsoon bucketing down and he put his bum in the basket and slid down to the bottom. He got a few face slaps but said, "Snow, it was worth it".

Towards the end of May, a Jap Major turned up to inspect the camp and Weary got into his ear about the meagre rations and told him that the work we had to do was killing people. The Major went up to the guard hut and the engineers hut. There was much yelling and screaming particularly from the "Boy Bastard" who was the engineer in charge of our Hintok section. About a week later, our ration situation did improve with even a bit of meat and vegies. Weary later said that the Boy Bastard had been pocketing most of the money allotted for our rations.

Since the War, both Molly the Mad Monk and The Boy Bastard were executed as a result of the War Crimes Tribunal Hearings. Should have been more of them, I reckon.

Hintok and Compressor cuttings were about 50 feet deep and 100 yards long. Hewn out of solid rock by about 100 hammer and tap and about 130 of us rock rollers. (That's why I like jazz??)

The main reason there were survivors, were Weary, Corlette and Moon in our case and like doctors in other camps. Having good mates to stick with you, the will to live and a good sense of humour. Without those, you had no chance.

Gordon Roberts, I particularly thank for my being alive today. Starting from Java, he acted as a sort of Quarter Master for five of us who pooled anything of value that could be traded for money or food. Watches, pens, wallets – anything that sold.

On Java, he had tobacco tins in which he dished out the sugar and salt to each of us, and he traded and kept up supply. Unfortunately this arrangement was not possible on the railway. I remember Bill Monks and I would get our sugar and would have a big slap up rice feed and then try for more sugar, but never got any.

Up on the railway, he put his money in for me to get an extra egg or something to keep me going. He washed the shit off me after he came home from work shift and

generally mothered me. There was also Norm Cunnington who made his goodies last longer than anyone else. Stan Warren was another chap, and also Bill Monks.

Unfortunately Stan was sent further up on the line towards the Burma end and was killed when stray bombs hit the POW camp. After the Japs lost air superiority they built a lot of camps next to rail junctions. Our people used to bomb the junctions but unluckily, a few hit the wrong target.

Sunny Smith and I were on a Food Party for Japs up from Hintok. I can't recall the name of the camp where bombs had dropped. I saw two Dutch chaps, one with about a saucer shaped piece cut from the back of his skull and could see his brain. He was still alive. Another had his right leg amputated in an angle from groin to just above the knee. I remember that there wasn't much blood about so guess he had been moved. Doubt if either lived.

At last our section was finished and the sickest of us were taken down to Thailand to a hospital at Tamuang. This was heaven compared to our jungle camps. Doug Smith and I were together. He, Snow Golding and I used to talk about racehorses and who had won what, when we had yasme (rest) periods.

Anyhow, Doug and I were under a little Scottish Dr. called Clark. He was very good to us and we soon started to pick up again. One day he came in and examined us and said, "Snow, you had better have your duck egg ration increased for a few days." Then he said to Doug, "Smithy, you look as though you need a bit of exercise so get a rake and broom and sweep up all the leaves around the Hospital".

Many years after the War and each time Doug and I would meet, he'd say, "Snow, you're looking poorly today, I'll get you a few duck eggs".

Soon moved on to Nakom Paton where we did some rail work and general odd jobs but nothing too bad. The Japs called for two carpenters one day. Jim Morgan put his hand up and said, "Quick Snow, I'll show you what to do".

At that time, our Air Force was bombing hell out of all the rail junctions and bridges on the isthmus. The Japs used to truck loads of sulphur from Malaya through Thailand. Jim and I had to make little flat topped trucks, and make wooden flanged wheels for them. What was happening, was that when a bridge was blown up and the train was caught on one side, we'd have to put a wooden bridge across the river. Then, the trucks we made would ferry the sulphur across and the sulphur would be reloaded onto a train on the other side of the bridge. That was quite a good time as never got a belting there.

Worked at Tamarkan where originally the bridge on the River Kwai was built of timber but was then replaced with a steel span one.

Called out at 3.30am one morning for an emergency and about 40 of us were loaded onto rail trucks and went up towards Burma again. Feeling most downcast. We discovered that a Jap train heading north and loaded with freight, had three trucks which somehow uncoupled (we thought sabotage). As the train was nearly at the top of a very steep incline, the three uncoupled trucks careered backwards, picked up speed and came to a sharp corner where they tore up the rails and then derailed. There had been a few Japs in one of the covered trucks who had survived. The open trucks with rail lines, fish plates and sleepers apparently had a lot of Asian and Tamils who had been conned into working for the Japs. They were badly mangled with lines, sleepers etc. We got a lot of the bodies out and buried them. Worked all day, no food supplied.

Next, about 300 of us, including Nabiac mate, Elliott McMaster were sent down the isthmus through Ratburi and Chumpong. Our aircraft did over the junction, came

around in waves of 9 and we ran in between bomb drops. We'd see the bombs leave the plane, we'd count and fall flat, mouth open. Norm Kinghorn from Geelong was with me there. When we got to the paddy fields, I was like a little mosquito flitting about.

The Japs issued an order that no POW was to go more than a metre away from the guard during an air raid. Someone yelled out, "How can you get within a metre of them as they are fitter and run faster?"

We would have to clean up the mess. When the strafing up the line came, the planes were only about 150-200 feet above us and you could see the blokes in the plane. They used to drop leaflets before strafing so we usually got them thrown over the fence by the Thais, and we would know that tomorrow would be strafing.

At the junction, engines would be overturned, rails ripped up and bloody bomb craters took us weeks to fill in. We used to pig sty sleepers and use bottle jacks and rail lines as levers to get everything back in place again. Amazing what enough manpower can do. The rail lines were about 18 feet long and weighed about 170lbs. They were good levers. We used the same sleeper pig style and bottle jacks to lift the end spans of bridges that were blown up.

A temple alongside the junction was destroyed and the huge Golden Buddha, the biggest in the world was OK.

Left Chumpong for Bangkok in open trucks and heard that Pommy commandos had rounded up Japs and sent them on to Bangkok.

Couldn't understand why we were still under guard and got off at PENCHBURI. Still doing odd jobs for the Japs, carting lines and sleepers in heaps. Thai people walking past saying, "war finish, war finish". It was about the 18th August 1945. Still, we were under guard but we knew something was in the air as the Thais had control of the junction and we saw a train truck of white women go past without guards.

On the morning of the 28th August 1945 (my birthday), a few of us were lying across the line with head on one rail and feet on the other and we heard crunching coming towards us. Thought it was Japs so we scrambled up and lo and behold, it was Major Wearne. He was an infantry officer who had been with us on Java. He told us not to do anything stupid and try to kill all the Japs we could see, but after what we had endured, just hang fire.

There were truckloads of Japs going through to Bangkok, apparently a commando mob from the hills and the Pommy commandos were rounding them up and sending them through. I did hear that a few of our blokes got uniforms and went out to isolated Jap places and took watches and anything of value and knocked them off. I did hear that Sunny Smith may have been involved but he never admitted to it.

Next morning, we were herded up and marched about 10 kilometres out to build an airstrip for the rescue planes to pick us up. We did the strip in three days and big Liberators were flying low and dropping stores to the few Yanks there. I went and lived with them for two days. They were bloody good blokes. I'd had a craving for tomato sauce so they said ketchup and gave me a bottle of it. I drank it straight out of the bottle but it went straight through me. I asked about tinned fruit and the same thing happened – in one end and out the other.

A Yank Major stood on a box and said that there wouldn't be a Yank in the area after "tomorrow", and early the next day, the first of the planes came in and loaded them on. My two mates wanted me to go with them. Next, the British planes came and took all the Poms. Same old story, the Aussies last. I'd gone down with malaria again so was stretchered onto the Dakota with five other cases and luckily we had an Aussie crew. They zipped down over little islands with coconut palms and nice

beaches. Headed into different clouds to show us the difference in interference with flying. One big black lot of clouds tossed us about and I thought, "Shit, not now after what I have been through".

Down to Singapore, endless filling in of forms and questions. Gracie Fields had a concert for us outside. It poured rain and the lighting went out. She called for a dozen jeeps to shine their lights on the stage and she sang right through the concert.

Eventually, after being fattened up a bit, I got to 6 stone 13lbs and we boarded the "Highland Brigade" to come home. Freedom still really hadn't become a realisation to me. Somewhere, I did write a little piece called realisation just after the 28th August.

Arrived at Fremantle and there was a bloody huge crowd on the wharf. Looked for my parents and saw Lela Fairclough (cousin) holding up a big banner with FAIRCLOUGH on it. Mum was with her. Also, Laddie White, another relation who had joined the Police Force, was there.

Tearful reunion all round. Laddie had got the loan of Belle Gladstone's big black Buick to take us home. I think Belle had a big hat shop in Perth. At that time Mum and Dad were living at 1304 Lord Street, Perth. My brother, Colin, had been up in the islands during the War and Dad was sergeant in a Horse Transport mob at Karrakatta.

When we returned, many people thought we had come through our many years of imprisonment very well, but they didn't know about what we call "The Survival Code" that we had acquired to use to control our emotions. We had to hold back rage, fear, disgust at being regularly abused by ugly ape-like guards and seeing our mates suffer the same indignities when the normal reaction would have been to retaliate in no uncertain manner. For many of us these feelings are still deep within us and we find it hard to express the unforgettable fears and stress built up inside during those terrible and awful years of captivity. Many personalities have changed, and unpredictable behaviour is common. Most of us only discuss the funny or humorous side of our captivity. The bond between us survivors is so strong that many marriage partnerships have broken up, I believe because the partner considered she was second in line to the POW bond. Personally, the bond with me is as strong as steel, come what may.

Article provided to Lt Col Peter Winstanley AOM RFD JP by Milton (Snow) Fairclough in 2002. Subsequently, in 2006, Snow agreed to it being placed on the website, The article was typed by Ann Millard when she and her husband Richard were residents of Esperance. They had met Snow on a trip to Thailand. Richard is the nephew of the late Captain Phil Millard- Medical Officer to the 2/26 Battalion and later to "D" Force when it went to Thailand. The Millard story is on the website too."