THE LOST YEARS
1940-1945

Francis John Giles was born in Broken Hill, New South Wales on 10 February 1902. He served in the Australian Imperial Expeditionary Force for a period of 189 days until his discharge on 8 May 1921.

He later enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) on 10 December 1940. He was posted to the 2/5 Field Hygiene Section and sailed for Singapore on 27 January 1941. Whilst in Singapore he was promoted to Sergeant and subsequently appointed a Staff Sergeant.

Following the capitulation of Singapore on 15 February 1942 he became a Prisoner of War. He was moved as part of “A” Force to Burma in May 1942 and toiled there until the line was completed late 1943.

John wrote an account of his experiences under the nom de plume “E. Mauri”. The account is very revealing of conditions and incidents prevailing in his area.

The account has been kindly provided to me by his son, John Giles of Baulkham Hills, Sydney, New South Wales.

14 Col Peter Winstanley OAM RFD (JP) email pgwinstanley@cambraiunsettlement.com.au
THE LOST YEARS.

1940-45.

F. Mauri.
1970
"The Lost Years"

"Yes, I have lived; Nor can any unkind fate take from me ever the gifts of that former hour."

Petronius Arbiter. (Author of "The Satyrican". Time of Nero.

"For I have lived with men and walked with kings."

(Quote ?)

"God be thanked, whatever comes after, I have lived and toiled with men."

Kipling.

F. Mauri
1970
FORWARD

I have called this narrative "The Lost Years" because it is a period which most of us who shared it prefer to forget.

But there are some things that we can never forget, strangely enough those things are the best things. Nature kindly lets the grim and the horrifying memories fade.

I once asked a fellow ex-prisoner of war did he have any regrets that he had gone through it. He replied "I would not like to have to do it again but looking back I now realize that I learnt more about my fellow man in those few years than I ever did in my whole life before or since."

"And what I learnt has made me both humble and proud; more tolerant and understanding."

"I feel that I have been through some cleansing fire that has burnt out the little petty things, the half-conscious bigotries and the futilities of personal ambition."

And I think this is so.

Not only did we learn more about each other, about human beings in general but more about ourselves. And after all Socrates said "Know Thyself".

We learnt our own capacities for courage or the lack of it leaving us with an inward pride or shame we could never discuss with another.

We learnt just how far our compassion for another could go; what sacrifices we could make. And having learnt this of ourselves how much tolerance we could have towards those whom we felt did not reach our own standards.

We learnt to what heights of courage, compassion and self-sacrifice a human being could go; and that these virtues were not always present in those where we most expected them.

Because of these things we did learn to be wary of judgement on our fellow beings, our own fallibility being often too obvious to ourselves.

Perhaps the philosophy of it all was (quote)

"The simple intimacy of survival"
CHAPTER 1

The long patrol, three months away in the deep valleys and high mountains of New Guinea, left me out of touch with the fateful march of events in Europe. (See the last chapter of "Pacific Odyssey").

But at the mouth of the Waria River on the Morobe coast the launch "Roamer" was awaiting me with the news that Britain was at war with Germany. Since the Munich affair in the previous year we had been expecting it.

Our particular concern was not so much Germany on the other side of the world but Japan, the third member of the Tripartite Axis, poised in the near north. Just what would she do?

In Salamaua, preparations were made for emergency evacuation of the town: each dawn we looked out to sea, expecting to see a long line of grey warships flying the "Rising Sun", or to hear the whine of the first shells heading our way.

Most of us had sent our families to Australia during the Munich crisis, those who had not done so lost no time now. A volunteer unit was already in training to a plan of guerrilla resistance from the surrounding jungle. Dumps of food and ammunition had already been hidden in the hinterland.

The young and fit men were enlisting but I (not so young) was rejected: too old, they said, and besides, I was in a "reserved occupation". But there was plenty to do: training an ambulance unit composed of those rejected by the army. It was also my job to supervise the health and hygiene of the concentration camp being set up for the aliens in the district, for there were many Germans and Italians amongst us. The former were mostly Lutheran and Catholic Missionaries; they had been under secret surveillance for some time.

The old Catholic priests gave no trouble; most of them liked Hitler as little as we did. Months before their Dutch bishop had placed a list of his priests and lay-brothers on the Administrator's table, "I can vouch for those on the left side of the page", he said, "Most of them have been in New Guinea all their lives. They know nothing and care less for the politics of Europe. They take their directions from the Vatican City not from a beer-cellar in Munich. But those on the right side of the list I cannot vouch for; they are young priests from Germany who talk too much of 'the Fuehrer' and the new future of Germany".

Needless to say it was these last who were arrested and interned. The ciders once mentioned by the Bishop were allowed to remain with their flocks. A pity this was so: when the Japanese came most of them met a terrible fate as "traitors" to the Axis.
There was no doubt about where the Lutherans stood. For years they had swaggered into the towns with their greetings of "Heil Hitler!" and the raised fist: rather disconcerting to our mild-mannered little postmaster to be addressed, "Heil Hitler, good-morning. Six three-penny stamps, please. Heil Hitler; good-morning; thank you. Heil Hitler."

On my journey down the Waria I had met a miner, Joe Cassell. "Have the natives told you that the Germans are coming back?" he asked. "No," I replied. "Well," said Joe. "You had better make a few enquiries, even on the Papuan side of the river."

Joe had heard these stories and the natives had told him they had been so informed by one Sinsenmeyer, the Lutheran missionary at the mouth of the river.

I followed up his hint and found it was true; the Papuan villages were especially worried. They had always been British, long before the 1914-18 war which had resulted in the transfer of the people across the river to Australia under a mandate.

I went back to Joe. "Send a report into the District Office," I advised. "Better still, write it out now and I'll take it with me."

"But I've already told the D.O.," said Joe. "And all he did was laugh at me. Suggested I had developed 'miners' madness' and was going troppo."

But he did give me a long report.

Down river I called on Sinsenmeyer and tackled him directly, "Have you been telling the natives that that the Germans are coming back?"

"No," he replied, "I have told them nothing. They know. It's true, anyway. Isn't it?"

I didn't bother to answer.

Back in Salamaua I handed in Joe Cassell's and my own report to the District Officer. "You've been too long in the bush," he said. But he kept the reports.

A few days later a giant Short-Sunderland flying-boat settled on the harbour. On board was Eric Feldt, now a Lieut-Commander, but formerly one of our own Assistant District Officers, who had left the navy years before to join the Administration staff. Now he was back in the Silent Service as an intelligence Officer. Perhaps he had never left the Navy.

I met him again that night at dinner with Doctor and Mrs. Sinclair. He strolled over to me, a glass in his hand and with an air of slightly drunken stupidity, "What's all this nonsense you and Joe Cassell have been talking about down on the Waria?", he asked.

I exploded. "Nonsense, he damed," I yelled, "Here's a
bloke, a German, name of Sinsenmeyer, trying to subvert the natives, not only on our side of the river but over in Papua. And you fellows take it as a joke!" I turned to walk away.

"Steady," said Eric, "Maybe it's not a joke; but in wartime people see spies and fifth-columnists under every bush. But tell us all about it."

So, still simmering, I told him.

The Sunderland winged off. But a few weeks later was back and this time she stayed. From Salamaua went out a score of patrols by land, sea and air. And then at a fixed hour on a fixed day they pounced - every German and Italian in the District. Sinsenmeyer was especially honoured; the Sunderland with Eric Feltd himself flew down to Morobe.

Sinsenmeyer declared that his wife was too far advanced in pregnancy to be moved. A guard was placed on them and the Sunderland flew back to Salamaua to collect Doc Sinclair and take him down to Morobe. "Fiddledsticks," said the Doc, after carefully examining the lady. "She's got weeks to go."

So Sinsenmeyer was brought into the camp behind barbed-wire and his wife joined the other wives in the Salamaua Hotel as guests of the Government.

Then came the rest of them. The Italians were easy. Most of them declared they hated Mussolini. "Last time I saw the Fascists," said one. "They were chasing me down a street in Genoa, firing bullets at me."

But there were young Australian-Italians, born in Queensland, who had never been to Italy. They had been under observation for years and their names were on a 'Black-list' compiled in Australia. For in North Queensland towns like Innisfail, largely Italian in content, Mussolini's agents had been at work forming Fascist societies. Many peace-loving Italians had been forced into these by threat of bomb, gun or knife. Some of those who had refused were killed, others tortured.

We kept Italians and Germans separate, there seemed to be little love between them. The former were no trouble although it was harder to maintain a reasonable standard of cleanliness and hygiene in their quarters.

On the other hand, the Germans were defiant and truculent. They still persisted in their "Heil Hitler" and clenched-fist salutes all of which we choose to ignore. They complained at every opportunity but did keep their part of the camp scrupulously clean. Obviously they had some form of internal discipline amongst them.
The food for the internees was prepared by the local hotel and brought up by van. It was my job to oversee its collection and distribution. The Germans did not complain but the Italians quite politely pointed out that they were unused to our heavy meat and vegetable menus. "Could we prepare our own?" they asked. There was a good stove in their quarters and they suggested an arrangement.

With the money allowed for their meals they would buy such meat as they required at the town freezer, spaghetti, macaroni of special bread from the bakery.

All these goods were readily available; the stores had long supplied the Italian community with their special requirements. The cost actually worked out at less than contract meals from the hotel.

So it was arranged. Each morning I would take two Italians into the town to make their purchases. The guard-commander held me responsible for their security. And he insisted that on these trips I carry a revolver which he presented to me. "Shoot if they try to escape," he instructed.

That damn revolver was an embarrassment indeed. Down town by friends jeered at me. "Be careful, Mauri, or you'll shoot yourself."

The wives of the internees were housed in the hotel and under no restraint. Some of them were Australian girls. They were allowed to visit the compound twice daily but could only talk to their husbands through the wire.

From the first day of our shopping missions I got the request from my two prisoners, "Could I speak to my wife for a minute." So I used to sit on the hotel verandah while Primo and Giuseppe "spoke to their wives" in private. Half an hour later they would emerge from their wives' rooms with sheepish grins and we would go back to camp: Mission Accomplished.

So it was that I practically limited my prisoners on "shopping fatigues" to the married men.

Little things like this procured a good relationship between the Italians and ourselves. The evening before the ship was due that would take them all to Australian concentration camps, the Italians invited the guard commander and myself to dinner. The guard commander could not see his way to accept but raised no objection to my attendance.

The internees had put on a special dinner for the occasion and I was presented with a pair of pipes "for looking after them." Their leader jocularly remarked that he hoped "When you are on the inside looking out and we are on the outside looking in, we will be able to treat you as well as you have treated us."

The next day the ship came in and the internees went aboard. The Germans were defiant to the last, standing up on the barge, clenched fists raised, singing the "Horst Wessel" song.
On the same ship went all those young men who were now part of the army.

Note:— Eric Feldt became one of the organizers of the "Coast Watchers". He wrote a book of their activities under that name.

With the German nationals out of the way Eric Feldt called in one day to say, "I know you and Joe Cassell were a bit het up by the way we received your information on Sinsenneyer. Well, if it is any satisfaction to you now we can tell you that your reports were of considerable value. But we could not let you think so at the time. Suppose we had, and you had got to talking about it in the pub, word of our interest could have easily got back to Sinsenneyer and his kind.

Once they knew we were watching them they could have gone underground or even made a break for it. A Jap ship could have taken them off at any time, or some of them. And we don't know what the Japs are going to do. We are not at war with Japan but if ever we are these members of the Axis would be invaluable with the influence and knowledge. Some of them might have been tempted to make a break for it; remember Dettner? So let us say we are sorry we treated you so badly. No doubt you thought us pretty stupid also."

Note:— Dettner was the German at Morobe when war broke out in 1914. He was friendly with his opposite number, the British Resident Magistrate across the river, and it was from him he learnt of the imminence of his arrest. He fled, with his police into the mountains and remained there until the war was over. The British did not even know he was there!
CHAPTER 2

1939 came to an end. In Europe the war went on with the tragedy and miracle of Dunkirk. But little happened in the Pacific. A German raider or two appeared, sank shipping and laid mines, probably operating from Japan or one of the Japanese-held islands north of the Equator. The Short-Sunderlands shadowed our shipping lines. The people of New Guinea and the Islands carried, on always with an eye fixed on that northern horizon beyond which the third member of the Tripartite Axis sat on the fence, watching and waiting.

Towards the end of 1940 I was released from the Administration on extended leave but advised that I was over age for service in the armed forces. So I joined my family in Australia and set about pulling a few strings.

In Brisbane I met Sir Raphael Cilento, my one-term chief in New Guinea. He promptly gave me a letter to the Director of Army Hygiene at the War Office, Melbourne, suggesting to Colonel Holmes that I might be of some use to him.

In Melbourne I presented myself to the Director, "Just the man I want," he said. "There is a report that malaria has broken out amongst troops at Katherine River in the Northern Territory."

"But, Sir," I said, drawing myself up to my full five feet eight and a half inches, "I don't want to serve in the Home Defence. I want to serve overseas."

The Colonel smiled. "You fellows are all the same. You could probably do a good job in Australia and be a bloody liability overseas. I wash my hands of you. Go and see Lady Mackenzie."

As it turned out Colonel Holmes was probably right.

Lady Mackenzie was the widow of a famous Melbourne surgeon whose life interest had been the conservation of Australian fauna and flora. His work is commemorated and continued in the 'Sir Colin Mackenzie Wild Life Sanctuary' in the hills outside Melbourne.

Lady Mackenzie, a distinguished doctor herself was in charge of the recruiting and organizing of Army Medical Services and as Health and Hygiene were part of that activity it was to her I was sent.

The lady was kind, understanding and sympathetic. "Don't let the Colonel get you down," she said, "His bark is worse than his bite. I have a job for you, on overseas service if you want it that way."

A new unit is to be formed - the 2/3 Field Hygiene Section. A similar unit is already operating in North Africa, but a second is needed.
"So far, we have not found an officer to take command but when we do you will be able to meet him, and if he wants you then you will be in. Meanwhile hang around. Leave your telephone number and I will let you know."

For three weeks I filled in time around Melbourne, living in a rented room in Spring Street. Then one day the message came: "Report to Victoria Barracks".

There Lady Mackenzie introduced me to a tall, lean, quietly spoken Captain Ron Greville who was to be in command of the new unit.

"I'm not yet even in the A.I.F. myself", he told me, "but in the militia, so let's both go downstairs to the Recruiting Office." We did, and so we became part of the A.I.F.

Captain Greville's job now was to recruit the personnel of his new command, travelling round the various camps, picking up a man here and a man there, looking for men with some experience of sanitation and hygiene in civil life, or in the trades required; construction, sheet metal work, concrete and brick work.

I went to Royal Park, a transit and holding camp in a Melbourne suburb, next door to the Zoo with the roaring of lions and screeching of monkeys to wake us up every morning. Royal Park was an 'open camp', the men were free to be away from camp from 6.00 p.m. until 6 a.m. unless rostered for some camp duty. Guardhouse and the permanent offices were manned by the 'Old and Bold', veterans of the First World War, now too old for service overseas.

Assigned a corner of a tent in 'C' Company lined with a pellisse and blankets I was left very much to myself except to attend early-morning roll-call and dodge the Duty Sergeant looking for 'spud-barbers' camp-cleaners', and other fatigues. He caught me one day. "Do you like music", he asked "Yes," I replied. "Well, go and help move the piano from the Sergeants' mess to the Y.M.C.A. Hall."

This idle period did not last long. The Captain came in with half a dozen recruits, said, "Find a couple of stripes somewhere and look after these blokes." "What will I do them I asked". "Just keep them out of mischief," he replied.

A few days later he was back with another half a dozen and this time he had some news: "The war office is sending a young sergeant from Darwin, a Permanent Army man. He is to be second-in-command and will look after the Orderly Room, Quarter-Master's job and Administration generally. I don't know him; have never seen him."
Some of the dozen men now in Royal Park were promising material, some not so good. But the next time the Skipper arrived he had with him several really good men for the work it would seem we would have to do.

There was Roy Biggs, a health inspector from a large country town and Ogier a master-builder, Demlo an industrial chemist and Collins a plumber, Johnson and Nash, the last a commercial artist. All were keen but at his stage it was difficult to see where each man was to fit in.

In due course there arrived the 'Permanent Army' sergeant, one Louis Atkinson, aged twenty. We did not like him at all: his youth was against him and he had that dreadful complex of so many Permanent Army men: that they alone could win battles; that the amateur and the civilian could never become soldiers.

"I'm not a soldier," growled Biggs one day having been told by Atkinson to 'straighten up and try and look like a soldier - if that's possible," "I'm only a civilian in uniform," went on Biggs, "Trying to do as good a job as I can with what knowledge or skill I may have brought over from civilian life."

The unit was at last complete: a small one indeed, only an officer and thirty men with an attached group of six A.S.C. drivers under their own corporal to handle our vehicles.

To Biggs, Ogier and myself fell the task of making up the three teams. Ogier had to choose and train his tradesman to run up buildings, build incinerators, greasetraps and latrines; working in wood, brick, concrete and sheet-metal. Biggs had to train men in food inspection, hygiene in kitchens and camps the safe disposal of wastes. I wanted men who could be taught to use a microscope, capture and identify disease-carrying insects and eradicate them and their breeding places. Strangely enough there was no provision for the equipment needed. The Permanent Army never expected to operate in malarious lands.

Then began a hectic period of Army Schools, basic training and weaponry, for although our job was scarcely that of fighting, like engineers, signallers and pioneers we could be called upon to defend our positions and ourselves in actual service.

Actually we surprised ourselves: the whole unit was infected with a degree of responsibility and each man felt he had a definite place in the scheme of things.
The Skipper was a horse doctor—veterinary science graduate. He had joined a cavalry unit of the Militia to look after the horses. When the cavalry switched to motor transport he was out of a job. So he studied Army hygiene—not hard to do in his case for vets and doctors have the same basic grounding in biology and associated sciences that are indispensable to the study of preventive medicine. Anyhow, he knew his job.

My own particular interest lay in the prevention of the tropical diseases, mainly malaria. There was an excellent school of Tropical Medicine in Sydney and it was suggested that some of us should do a course there. (I had already gone through a seminar there in 1928) but the Army would not hear of it. Nor were they very interested in Tropical diseases at all. "You will never need all that," said the Army and who said you would be going to the Tropics."

As a matter of fact, the Army had something there: the Eighth Division, of which we were to be a part was very much recruited from older men who had felt they had become personally involved after Dunkirk: a case of 'now we are all in.'

The War Office, with a view to a possible Japanese invasion on Australia's other Divisions already far away in North Africa had ideas of holding the Eighth back as a reserve Division for defence of our own shores.

Then the progress of events in Europe and ominous movements in the Far East (or Australia's North) affected their decision. In early February we were sent on pre-embarkation leave and it was obvious that we were going overseas—somewhere, but none knew.

The Skipper came into the hut and called me. "Find yourself another stripe and pack. You are going to Sydney on to-night's train with the advance party."

Some hundreds of men and officers boarded a special train that night at Spencer Street Station.

An advance party is made up of personnel from each unit that will be embarking. Their job is to go ahead of the main body to see that all is in order for the troops to move in and then to await the arrival of their units to guide them into their places on the ship. At that stage not even the advance party knew what ship or even from what port it would sail.

"Join the Army and see the world," say the recruiting posters. Do it by troop train and you do it the hard way. A packet of sandwiches and a water bottle to last a journey of 36 hours. (the ordinary express takes twelve) The train pulled into sidings to let other more important trains go through. It was the next night before we reached Wagga Wagga. But here the station was crowded with people, handing out food and drink. What wonderful people they were in those country towns, God bless 'em.
We calculated that we would arrive in Sydney next morning. On the strength of this I scribbled a telegram to my wife asking her to try and meet me at Central. This I gave to an elderly lady and asked her to send it off from her local Post Office. She shot away at once, eager to do something, and the last I saw of her was a wave from the platform exit.

Another night on the train men sleeping in luggage racks, on the floor and in the corridors.

Sure enough my wife was at Central - the only one of all the relatives who would have been there if they had known. The men were lined up and we were marched out to where a line of trucks awaited us but providentially a vacant taxi was at the end of the line. I pushed Clarice into it and jumped in myself. "Follow those trucks," I told the cabbie. They moved off and we followed until the convoy pulled up at the other end of the city - outside the offices of the Cunard Line. "Ah": we said, "Now we know." But only a couple of officers got out to go into the building. They soon emerged and the convoy moved off again but not far this time, only to Man-O-War steps and out in the stream lay the "Queen Mary". Also over in Woolloomooloo Bay we could see the masts of two other ships, The "Mauretania", and the "Aquitania". The latter a very old ship but at one time the fastest merchant ship afloat and for many years holder of the 'Blue Riband' of the Atlantic. A roll call was held here and some of the party again embussed and drove away to Woolloomooloo but most of us awaited a line of boats towed by a naval pinace. With a quick farewell we boarded the boats and were on our way.

The next four days found us busy at our jobs. With a deck plan of the ship we found our units, quarters and then tramped along miles of corridors and up and down stairways on every deck, memorizing assembly points, orderly rooms and boat stations. With 7,000 men aboard only a certain number could move about at one and the same time and then along different times. Each unit had its timetable for physical training, lectures, weaponry and other classes, not to mention recreation, sporting events and film shows.

Until my unit arrived I messed with the sergeants of the light anti-aircraft unit which manned the guns during the ship's stay in harbour. This same unit had performed this task since the outbreak of war, only to be marched back to the Showground when each ship sailed. Then the out-going troops took over. These men resented their garrison duties and repeatedly requested to be allowed to go on overseas duty.

One Sergeant said to me, "If you want any letters posted ashore I'll take them with me when I go." I took him at his word and started writing.

All this time the "Queen Mary" was supposed to be invisible. No contact with the shore, no mention of her presence in the harbour ever appeared in the Press.
The four days passed. One morning the great steel doors in the ship's side were opened and gangplanks run out. Ferries loaded with troops closed in: the Eighth Division was embarking. Then had come by trains from Victoria and Queensland, from country camps in New South Wales. The trains had arrived by cover of night along goods-line tracks to harbour wharves and the men transferred to waiting ferries to be brought out to the troopship. No sign of all this must leak out to the enemy. Well, if the enemy could not see for themselves everyone else could. Sydney Harbour was lined with crowds of friends, well-wishers and relatives. The water was crammed with small boats of all sizes and shapes.

In due course my unit came aboard. Atkinson took charge so I led the Skipper up to his cabin. During my advance party duties I had found the steward who would be looking after Captain Greville, and, being wise in the way of stewards, had slipped him a pound note with the request that he look after my boss. It paid off. Ambrose, of all names, was not hard to find. The Cunarders were manned by their own Royal Merchant Navy crews, and were on charter to the British Government. The only Royal Navy men aboard were a couple of Signal officers and the crews of the large anti-submarine guns on the bow and stern.

Ambrose was quick to get the Skipper a shower and a pot of tea while the other officers were still milling around. The Skipper said, "Do you think you do anything for the nurses," So Ambrose went along to find the stewards who were in charge of the nurses' quarters and got them organized. The girls were really grateful after a long train trip and bad night they needed something to restore their morale.

I had met one of these nurses at a party in Melbourne given by Roy Higg's sisters. I whispered to her, "If you want to write a letter to your mother I can get it ashore." Later I called for her letter and was handed a large bundle. She had told everyone of the other girls.

At the last breakfast next morning I met my ack-ack sergeant. With embarrassment I started to explain. He laughed, "It happens every time."

Out on deck the officers were still coming aboard. The stewards were waiting for them. "Carry your port, Sir?" Before the officer could answer it would be taken from him, carried the few yards to the cabin and put down: the steward waited expectantly. If no tip was forthcoming he would say, "The gentleman usually gives me a half-a-crown, Sir."

Amongst the stewards busy on this racket I saw a familiar figure. It was Harry, one-time bar-steward on the Burns Philip ships I had known on the Island run.
In those years of peace I watched him practise his most profitable tricks on new-chum travellers in a dozen ships.

There was the sixpence change stuck to a wet tray that defied prising off and compelled the embarrassed customer to say, "Have one yourself, Harry."

Or the lonely sixpence held aloft in the crowded bar-room and Harry asking in a loud voice: "Whose change, gentlemen?" He always kept it.

And the handful of silver change plonked on to the table, if checked it was always a shilling short. To the customer who had the temerity to call Harry's attention to it the old chap would produce the missing coin from one of his many pockets and, with a look of surprised innocence on his face, say: "Sorry Sir. No intention of course."

Coming down from the islands we tipped him generously. Going back we were broke and baron fields; but his service never failed us and more than one old hand, unable to buy a drink, would hear a whisper in his ear: "If you're short of a few bob, Sir...."

I waited my time. When Harry's last victim had been disposed of I came up behind him. "Harry - ," I said reprovingly.

He knew me at once, though I was but one of thousands of other Rankers. "A treat to see you, Sir," he beamed as we shook hands. "Hope you comes back safe and sound, Sir." Some young officers smiled at Harry's "sir" to a ranker. I smiled too. I knew they would be poorer, if wiser, men before we disembarked.

He asked: "Where are you in the ship, Sir?" I told him. That night Harry appeared after dinner with two buckets of ice-cream for my men. And next morning with two buckets of tea. We were the best looked after unit on the ship.

When the time came to disembark the boys put in a few but each for Harry. He wouldn't take it. "Any friends of my gentleman 'ere, are friends of mine," he insisted. To me he said, "Both my boys are in the navy, Sir. I want to do my bit, too." Then with a wink, "The ice-cream I pinched from the Officers' Mess."

It took two days to embark all the troops into the ship. During that time there was a great circle of small boats surrounding the vessel, many bearing large placards on which were written the names of loved ones on board, people trying to get a last glimpse of husband, father, son. Naval and Water Police kept them at a distance but notes and letters sealed in tins and bottles were thrown from the ship. Small boys in canoes were the most efficient at salvaging these last efforts at communication. I don't doubt that every letter found its destination.
Each sunset a launch came out over the water; an elderly lady standing in the prow singing, old songs and new. And could she sing! Someone told me that she was or had been a very famous singer. Now, in the evening of her days she had found a way of "doing her bit". Probably in all the days of her fame she had never had such an appreciative audience.

A wonderful morning in February, from Garden Island Naval Depot slipped the lean grey shape of the cruiser "Canberra". Then from Woolloomooloo Bay emerged the "Aquitania" followed closely by the "Mauretania". They turned towards the Heads.

Beneath our feet the decks of the "Queen Mary" began to shudder; on the forepeak the anchor crew were busy: we were under way.

Escorted by hundreds of small craft we fell into line. The shores and headlands were crowded with waving people. We were on our way - and so much for security.

A giant Short-Sunderland took off from Watson's Bay in a smother of spray, rose in the air and flew out to sea: the eyes of the convoy.
CHAPTER 3

South and South-East the ships steamed, gathering speed in formation, each ship a mile apart and the "Canberra" a couple of miles in the lead.

Night fell and passed. In the morning we were still heading Southwards, all day and that night the same. No turning westwards into Bass Strait.

The air grew cold — and we had only light tropical kit. Most of us recalled the "Ancient Mariner":

"The Sun came up upon the left,
Out of the sea came he!
And he shone bright, and on the right
got down into the sea.

And now there came both mist and snow,
And it grew wonderful cold:  
........

It was not quite as bad as that; there was no snow but there were both mist and cold.

A morning broke and there was the sun astern and another great ship in the convoy, the "Nieuw Amsterdam", crowded with New Zealanders. We had made a rendezvous somewhere south and east of Tasmania. We had gone right round the southern end of that island: the Bass Straits had been mined by an enemy raider and two small cargo ships had been sunk. No risks were being taken with the convoy.

The weather was fine, the sea moderate, but the great swell that rolls unimpeded around the world in the "Roaring Forties" made itself evident. We could see the other ships slowly rising and falling to the sea. To us on the "Queen Mary" it did not seem that we were pitching to any extent; but a ship a quarter of a mile long takes a long time to move in her full length. However, the troops felt it: they went down in hundreds with seasickness.

The ships' kitchens were never idle. As the last of the men filed out from breakfast the cooks were getting ready the midday meal.

At Fremantle we anchored out in the stream, only the "Maoreutania" berthing to pick up the Westralian contingent. Then it was to sea again and northward this time.

A day out we learnt our destination - Singapore, but only the "Queen Mary". The others were bound for the Middle East via Bombay where they would tranship to smaller vessels for the journey through the Red Sea and Suez.
The sunsets of the Indian Ocean are famous. The second one out of Fremantle lived up to its reputation and as the western sky slowly changed from gold to red a dramatic movement took place in our convoy under it.

The "Queen Mary" slowed down to almost a stop and the three other great ships formed into line astern and came up to overtake us at speed, passing on the starboard beam at a distance about that of the proverbial "biscuit throw", the cruiser "Canberra" in the lead. We on the "Queen Mary" had received orders to man the decks and cheer the troops as they passed. As each vessel drew level we gave a rousing cheer to the dense wreck of khaki on their decks broken here and there on the upper deck by the scarlet capes of the nurses. And we asked ourselves a silent question, "How many of those men would come home?" No doubt they were asking themselves the same question about us.

Another lean gray shape appeared out of the gathering dusk - the cruiser "Durban" of the South African Navy, to be our escort on the rest of the way to Singapore; the "Canberra" continuing on with the main convoy.

As soon as the other ships had turned westward the "Queen Mary" began to put up speed; up to this time we had been steaming at a rate to keep down to that of the slowest of the other three, probably about twenty knots.

For a little while the other three ships and their escort stood out silhouetted against the flaming sunset and then they were gone. Soon we were racing through the sea at full power, 32 knots being the "Queen's" cruising speed, and the vibration under our feet let us know she was doing it although it was not apparent by just looking overside. But ahead we could see that the "Durban" was throwing up two huge bow-waves.

The troops were settling in on board; no more sea-sickness and plenty of training activity; not to mention entertainment such as films, concerts and boxing tournaments.

There was some inconvenience: fresh food soon became short and there was never any fresh water other than a drinking ration. We washed and showered in salt-water, helped a little by an issue of salt-water soap. Our clothes, ourselves, were soon sticky with salt. It must be remembered that the two "Queens" were designed for the Atlantic run in peace time, only a four-day voyage and carrying only a third the number of passengers that they carried as troopships. Nor had they been built for service in the tropics, where they were extremely uncomfortable. There was no air conditioning but enormous canvas airshafts were let down to the lower decks so that, with their high speed there was some ventilation.

Later in the war these two ships would be carrying 14,000 men, Americans, across the Atlantic on each trip. Those men were just packed in with little movement possible. What a prize for an enemy submarine! but their safety lay in their speed. No submarine built could get near them and they could do the last 400 miles, the danger area from Focke-Wulf aircraft, in darkness.
Actually, about the time the "Queen Mary" was parting company from the convoy a pall of anxiety and fear fell over the Australian Cities. A rumour, probably spread by fifth-columnists, swiftly ran through the streets: "The Queen Mary" has been sunk in the Indian Ocean by an enemy raider.

Strangely enough Clarice never heard it, one of the few people that didn't. The first she knew of it was when an official denial was broadcast over the evening news service, and the next day when the neighbours began calling to offer their sympathy for the worrying time she had had.

One evening Atkinson, Biggs, Ogier and I had a lucky and interesting break from routine. We were standing at the starboard rail of the boat-deck, enjoying the privileged hour accorded senior N.C.O.'s each evening when we were allowed on that deck normally reserved for officers.

From behind us we heard a broad Clyde-side voice: "Enjoying the trip, Serjeant?" We looked around, it was the Chief Engineer. Soon we were pleasantly talking, but Atkinson, who had plenty of cheek, asked, "Would there be any chance of seeing the engines, Sir?" The Chief was taken aback a bit but he must have been in a very good humour for he invited us into his cabin, outside of which we had been standing. Inside, he poured us each a whisky and said, "My Fourteenth is an Australian, like yourselves. We took him on at Melbourne. I am going to let him take you down and show you the works. But you will have to promise to tell nobody, nobody. Just imagine what would happen if it got known, especially amongst those more privileged by their rank than you are. Everyone would be in on it. So keep it dead quiet under your hats."

So speaking he picked up the telephone and sent for his "Fourteenth" who soon arrived and we were introduced. "Take these sergeants down below and show them the works", the Chief ordered. The "Fourteenth", looked a bit surprised but merely replied, "Yes Sir". "Good-luck", said the Chief as we thanked him and were led away.

Our guide led us to a lift and down we went. "Forty feet below the waterline," he said. As we emerged from the lift a red light appeared. Our guide explained that we were now in an air-lock and all this part of the ship was under increased air pressure. The light changed to green and we emerged to find ourselves in one of the boiler rooms. "The increased air pressure is to prevent a blow-back of the fires," our guide said and led us to the nearest boiler. Here a stoker was tending an oil nozzle which was injecting fuel into the fire-box under high pressure. Through a blue quartz window we could see the inferno inside.

From the boiler room we were taken to the auxiliary power room humming with generators and pumps, scores of them. In one corner stood a large tank with another tank floating in it. This was the fireguard system from which pipes ran all over the ship to thousands of sprinkler nozzles.
NOTES ON THE "QUEEN ELIZABETH", SISTER TO THE "QUEEN MARY", AS RECORDED IN AN AMERICAN MID-WEST NEWSPAPER.

The rudder of 100 tons nearly equals the tonnage of the "Mayflower."

Three railway locomotives could run abreast through one of her funnels.

One of her anchors weighs as much as 10 average sized automobiles.

Her generators make enough electricity to meet the lighting needs of a city of 150,000 people.

Keyed to lower bass A, her sirens could be heard 50 to 100 miles away.

She has three acres of deck space for recreation.

It takes half a million pieces of china, glassware and silver to set her tables.

It would take 80 railway coaches to haul her crew and all her passengers when full.

Her linen cupboards carry 364,000 towels, sheets, tablecloths, napkins and pillow cases besides other items.

On one round trip she may use five tons of ham and bacon, 60,000 eggs and 50,000 lbs. of potatoes.
If one nozzle somewhere on the ship is melted or broken pressure is released and is detected by this apparatus. From here all the sprinklers in that area are brought into action immediately and automatically.

The Control-room was quiet and peaceful. Only half a dozen officers and men here, watching a multitude of dials, big and little, touching a lever occasionally.

Down in the turbine-room four great shafts turned, each about two feet in diameter and four turbines on each shaft, each spinning in its casing under the thrust of high-pressure super-heated steam from the boilers.

"Fourteenth" told us all the figures: revolutions, horsepower and the rest but I have long since forgotten them. And there was one special generator and set of dials for the de-gaussing device. The Germans had invented a magnetic mine which exploded when an iron or steel object passed near it. The British countered this with a 'degussa' named after its inventor, one Gauss. Around the ships hull, up near the top deck was wound a thick cable, into this was fed a faint electric current, sensitively controlled, which destroyed the magnetic field of the ship, and such mines could not be activated.

The "Queen Mary" carried a couple of guns, probably four-inch, for use against submarines, one on the fore peak and one on the stern. These were manned by navy men. But she bristled with light anti-aircraft defences, Vickers and Lewis machine guns, the latter mounted in pairs on tripods. Troop gunners looked after these and daily carried out practice. A couple of dozen toy balloons would be released from high up on the foremast and the gunners would try to shoot them down as they drifted rapidly past the ship. Their efforts were not very successful. But a well-known brigadier would wait in the extreme stern of the ship and, as the balloons fell into the the water aft, would put them with a long-barrelled revolver, doing a lot better than the gunners.

Brigadier Maxwell, of the 27th, was a doctor in World War 1, in command of a medical unit. But between wars he took to soldiering as a hobby, became an infantry officer, and was now in command of a brigade. And he had only one eye.

We arrived off Singapore Island in mid-afternoon. A wing of fighter aircraft swept overhead and two destroyers raced out to meet us, passed on each side at speed, then turned astern to come back and take up their positions on each beam. We steamed into the Johore Straits and along them to the great Naval Base, the air torn by a loud cacophony of hooters and whistles from craft lying in the Straits. A right royal welcome to be sure. And in the Singapore papers next day and over the air it was announced that 12,000 Australians had arrived, the advance guard of many more to come, they said. Not till long after did we find that this was all an attempt to pull the wool over the watching eyes of Japanese Intelligence: to make them think there were many more troops in Malaya than there actually were.
The farce was to be continued all through the next year, right up to the time that Japan struck. Thousands of troops would be moved in long convoys along the roads only to return to their bases by train or some other route. I doubt if the Japanese were deceived although it did take them a whole year to make up their minds. But it was the position on the European front they were watching in particular that of the Russians. When they did strike it looked as though the Russians were doomed. No one, not even the Allies foresaw the brilliant defence of Stalingrad and Moscow nor the stubborn resistance of Leningrad.

The "Queen Mary" tied up at the Naval Base and on the wharf waited elements of an Australian advance party to guide us to our barracks scattered over the Malayan Peninsula. The first shouted greetings from ship to shore consisted mostly of "How's the beer?" This seems to be the matter of greatest moment to Australians arriving in a new country. A funny thing about beer most Australians are very conservative. No beer is any good except that of their own particular State with marked predilection even for certain brands.

The main brew of Malaya is, or was, "Tiger", and our fellows condemned it at once in no uncertain terms. So the canteens started importing beer from Australia, "Swan" brand from Western Australia, much to the delight of the Westerners, but the Easterners would have none of it. By this time, for want of anything better they had taken to drinking "Tiger". By the time "Swan" and "Carlton" and "Resch" had arrived they had acquired such a taste for "Tiger" that they would have nothing else! However that was all to come. For the moment disembarkation was the order of the day and in the swift-darkening tropic dusk we filed off the ship. At the gangway each man received a paper bag containing sandwiches, block-cake and an apple, to be his evening meal on the train. We marched a short distance to a long line of railway carriages and settled in. Soon we were on our way to various destinations up-country so we saw nothing of Singapore city this time.

Malaya flashed by the windows, in darkness most of the time broken only at long intervals by the lights of a small town or the fires of a native village, or the dim lights of a labour line. Impossible to form any idea of the country-side.

In the small hours of the morning we pulled up at a small station - Port Dickson. Here we left the train and lined up on the road. Our kit was loaded on to trucks and we set off on foot. An hours march along a pitch dark, but well surfaced road and we arrived at a large complex of well-built barracks, those of the Malay Regiment, vacated by them and handed over to us. Here we found cots set up with, we could scarcely believe it, sheets! On to those we tumbled too tired to explore our immediate surroundings.
Next morning we awoke to find ourselves in new and strange surroundings quite alien to anything most of the men had ever experienced. Serried lines of rubber trees came right up to doors of the buildings, each tree with its little porcelain cup to catch the bleeding latex. beyond the rubber lay the jungle, spread over the low hills and from them came the raucous screams of gibbons and monkeys not to mention bird calls completely new to us. For a few days everything was of intense interest, the men scarcely noticed the intense heat and humidity.

Port Dickson, on the West Coast, was really an ideal spot. In fact it had something of a reputation as a holiday resort. There was good swimming, although the sand was black. Across a wide strait loomed the mass of the great island of Sumatra. This was Malaya. A little green book was issued to each of us telling something of the geography and history of the peninsula, and a pretty good coverage of native life and customs. It was full of warnings of what to do and not to do in dealing with the native people, Malays, Chinese and Indians, and of course, a great deal about security.

I have long since lost this little book but from other sources have collected something of its contents.

Malaya is the long peninsula jutting down from Indo-China, whose northern states are Thailand and Burma; whose southern tip is the island of Singapore, separated from it by the narrow Strait of Johore. To westward, across the Strait of Malacca lies the big island of Sumatra and further south, beyond Singapore the islands of Java and the Indonesian Archipelago which swing away to the south-east to adjoin New Guinea and Australia. The whole area is known as the East Indies.

In early Palaeozoic times all this was an extensive land mass. Then parts of it began to subside leaving the chain of islands we know to day. This breaking up and separation of the landmass had important effects on the migrations of man that were going on at the time. The earliest known group, the Negritos, were cut off from Asia and each other and so survive in isolated groups: the Sakais of Malaya, the aboriginals of Australia and other groups in between.

The highest part of the Malayan peninsula is the Main Range which forms its spine, is some 300 miles long and 30 to 40 miles wide. In places it rises to 7,000 feet. Between this range and the coast is a narrow coastal plain averaging about twenty miles in width often edging into the sea as a walter of mudbanks and mangrove swamps.

Rivers in Malaya are short, run swiftly in their higher reaches, sluggishly through the coastal plains and are subject to severe flooding in the monsoon.

Generally, thick forests and undergrowth cover the land but settlement has resulted in some quite large areas of padi field and lalang grasslands. Lalang is a coarse grass
growing four to six feet high which often takes over when the forest has been felled, burnt, cultivated and abandoned. Then of course immense areas have been given over to modern plantations of rubber with coconut palm and oil palm running a poor second and third.

Into this part of the world 7,000 Australians found themselves precipitated. New food, if they got away from their own imported stocks, new fruits like the intriguing durian and the delicious rambutan, a climate they found oppressive, except the men from North Queensland and a jungle vegetation, which if they ventured into it seemed dangerous and threatening; full of equally dangerous and threatening animals. It was an unpleasant adventure to walk along a jungle track and find a spoor belonging to some large cat, and if accompanied by a Malay guide to be told that tigers "don't usually attack white men, they stink the same as other meat eaters. And Tigers don't attack leopards do they?".

Our own snakes, taipan, tiger, black, death adder and brown are feared enough, especially by the city lads. But to be told of the little krait whose strike kill in eight minutes flat of the hamadryad or king cobra, who, if his mate is killed will follow the killer for days to kill in revenge; of the giant python who can crush a man like an egg. All these stories of the fauna of Malaya found ready and not-so-sceptical listeners.

Then the ever-present fear of death from those invisible but lethal diseases, cholera, malaria, dysentery and a host of other less lethal but more disfiguring diseases. One slight slip of the established drill and precautions and you had it! Add the smells of drying fish, unsewered villages and sweating bodies in the kampongs and towns; the stench of rotting vegetation in the jungle and a foetid mixture of other odours from no one know where; and it was not long before Malaya loct any claim it may have had to being "charmingly Oriental."
Now here are a couple of snake stories that might not be amiss at this juncture. These appeared in the "Bulletin" and are reproduced just as they were published.

"Frank Mauri": Erect on a few inches of tail, hood expanded, a vicious black cobra held the middle of a Malayan highway while the whole transport of a brigade ceased. A brigadier and his staff captain aligned and gave orders for the thing to be destroyed, but no sound stick could be found in the rotting jungle. All the field officers had suggestions, but none of them practicable. A driver of a lone A.S.C. utility coming from the other direction took charge of operations. "Stand clear," he called, and rushed the snake with his vehicle, brake-locking the wheels so that the head and four inches of the body were torn off. Even then the head sank its fangs savagely into a rifle butt.

In the next issue of the "Bulletin" my story got this answer:

"Old Priller": That yarn about a defiant cobra in the middle of a Malayan road holding up the whole transport of a brigade while m.c.o.s and troops searched round for a stick to clout it with - the snake being finally disposed of by some bright spirit who charged it with a utility truck (E. 19.3.4?) - fascinates me. Wasn't there a man in the whole flamin' unit good enough with a rifle to shoot the thing?

And here's another:

"Frank Mauri": Four members of an Eighth Divvy battalion were playing poker in a Malaya jungle camp. An hour earlier they had been listening to a lecture on the district's venomous snakes. Dusty, with an eye on the substantial jackpot, arranged his cards. Something touched his shoulder. He looked round - straight into the wicked eyes of a King-cobra trying to read his hand. Dusty's yell and dive for the door broke up the game. It was the b.s.m. who stuck a bayonet into the 14thf, of devility.
CHAPTER 4

The Malacca Straits, between Malaya and Sumatra, have always been one of the important sea-roads of history. As long ago as 150 A.D. Roman ships came this way from the Red Sea going as far as Tongking in what is now North Vietnam. The Strait was used by the Chinese coming from the East by Indians and Arabs from the West and more recently by the Portuguese, the Dutch and the English.

The Malayan Peninsula was known from Roman to Medieval times as "The Golden Chersonese" and long before the advent of the Portuguese was a famed land of gold and precious jewels, not to mention tin and spices. Ptolemy wrote of "the Golden Chersonese" in his geography and that work was surprisingly accurate; there was no better account by a European writer until the 16th Century.

It was this sea-route that made Malaya— or rather Malacca, so important. For it was the alternative to the ancient caravan silk route across Asia.

By 300 A.D. this Roman enterprise had collapsed. Not just because of the barbarians' invasions at home, but because Rome could not get enough gold, and only gold was acceptable to the Eastern traders. They were not interested in the products of the western world.

China could not fill the gap from the far East because that country also fell on evil days and was plunged into the long civil wars of 200-600 A.D. Darkness fell over the great trade routes and, as far as Europe was concerned, it was so for many centuries.

During this era the Indian culture took over the Indo-Pacific Peninsula and Indonesia. Many groups of peoples drifted in from the North and West mingling to form an admixture of Tibet-Mongoloid and Western Indian. Their descendants have been called the Proto-Malays. They formed the New Stone Age settlements in this part of Asia.

They were followed by new waves of immigrants from Southern China who brought iron weapons and soon drove the Proto-Malays out or assimilated them. It is from this mixture that the present-day Malay is descended.
As can be expected such fragmentation, isolation of islands and mixture of races resulted in a vast diversity of languages but, by the accident of Portuguese settlement in Malacca a trading lingua franca became universal; that is the Malay language of today.

These early settlers were probably animists and ancestor worshippers but when the Indian influence became strong Hinduism was introduced and after that Buddhism. The two religions flourished side by side until the advent of Islam at the end of the 15th century, about the same time as the first Europeans, (like Marco Polo) since Roman times visited the area. Malacca became the centre of Islam and from there it took over the whole of Malaya and Indonesia. Only in the island of Bali did any trace of the old religion remain; and that Hinduism, where it remains to this day. But of course, among the immigrants, Chinese and Indian, Buddhism and Hinduism, reappeared.

During this time the political scene changed and rechanged. Powers such as Funan and Java rose and fell. Malaya changed hands over and over again. In between the rise and fall of greater warring dynasties little local chiefs lost and gained power. But Malacca, as a centre of trade, retained some sort of autonomy and grew in wealth and importance.

In 1509 came the first Portuguese, one de Sequeiros, who did not meet with a joyful reception at the hands of the Muslim traders. They attacked his fleet but he got away.

Two years later d'Albuquerque fleet anchored in the Malacca roads. By 1518 the Portuguese controlled most of Malaya, part of Sumatra and heavily fortified Malacca itself, this last became the Eastern fortress of the Portuguese Empire. It lasted one hundred years - until the coming of the Dutch.

The Dutch defeated the Portuguese fleet in 1606 and took over their Eastern posts but not without constant trouble from the English who followed close on their heels wherever they went. The most persistent were the sea-captains of the English India Company but owing to a lack of a far-sighted and vigorous policy, the meagre resources of the Company and lack of support by the Dutch. In 1619 the English fleet was defeated and the Dutch established their own monopoly except for Malacca where the Portuguese held out until 1641. When it fell to the Dutch it was refortified and held as a tenuous outpost, Batavia being the headquarters. During all this time Malaya was torn apart by quarrelling chiefs and the petty war of contending Sultans.

In 1776 the American colonies revolted against the English and the Dutch took the side of the rebels. England immediately declared war on Holland and destroyed the Dutch fleet in the North Sea.
With the loss of the command of the sea the Dutch East Indies languished, native sultans and chiefs rebelled and the English had a finger in every pie. With the conquest of the Cape of Good Hope it was the British who now controlled the seas and the Eastern Routes. The British allowed the Dutch to remain in Java and a few other ports, but only till 1816.

When the Napoleonic Wars broke out the British were seeking Dutch friendship against the Trench. So in 1816 they gave Indonesia and Java back to the Dutch and allowed them to return to Malacca.

(Apropos of this story I am reminded that at the close of World War Two when with the Dutch we were prisoners in Thailand a Dutchman said bitterly, "I suppose we will never be able to return to Java now that the British have liberated it from the Japanese." "Don't worry," said an Englishman, "We gave it back to you once before. Remember?" But the Dutch did not get it back. Sukarno saw to that.)

The British did retain the Cape of Good Hope, Ceylon and Penang and in 1819 Stamford Raffles, by treaty with the Sultan of Johore acquired Singapore Island, then inhabited by only a handful of Malay fishermen.

In 1824 the Anglo-Dutch Treaty decided the respective spheres of influence of British and Dutch which remained in force until the Japanese invasion in 1941. At the time of the treaty the Malay States were in a hopeless condition, disintegrated by endless wars, by Siamese aggression and the unprecedented immigration of the Chinese.

The British made treaties with Siam and introduced the Pax Britannica to Malaya. They also suppressed piracy and the slave trade.

By the end of the century the Peninsula was organized into the Federated Malay States, the Unfederated Malay States and the Straits Settlements. This was the political situation at the beginning of the war in the Pacific.

Thanks to the firm and just rule of the British since 1874 - a man's long lifetime - Malaya by 1939 had successfully undergone her Industrial revolution and, as the world's greatest single exporter of rubber and tin, had become wealthy and contented, with the highest standard of living of any Asian country. For the first time in her history malaria and other diseases had been brought under control, The Malays, then constituting over half the population of the country, seemed secure in their claim, backed by British protection, to be the indigenous people of the country; the Chinese seemed content with conditions which enabled them to make money without the fear of losing it by unjust taxation, and they favoured a system which left them so great a degree of independence. The war which broke out so many thousands of miles away seemed remote and unreal to Malaya, and doubtless most people thought it would affect them as little as had the First World War.
And yet, as we can see now, this security was precariously balanced. A little country, the size of England, had no fewer than three types of constitutions, and clearly this state of affairs would not conduct to decisive and concerted action in the event of a great emergency. There was no such thing as a Malayan nation; this concept may have appealed to some minds in 1939, but the mass of Malays continued to think of their own individual states and of their own individual rulers as the objects of their loyalty.

The loyalties of majority of Chinese and Indians were centred elsewhere. The Malayan races showed little initiative in preparing for the future. No doubt it seemed to them in 1939 that there was little need for worry, and they could safely leave their future to their paternal government.

The Second World War, however, and explosive doctrines such as Oriental Nationalism and Communism made the continuation of the old order impossible. It was inevitable that after 1945 that the Malays would demand an active and responsible share in the government, and that the Chinese, who had contributed so much to Malaya's economic welfare, would not for ever continue to be regarded as foreigners in their adopted country. It was also made plain that a more broadly based system of education was needed to bridge the gulf that separated Malaya's races, and to help in the formation of a common culture.

But all this was in the future when we took up our positions in Malaya in 1940. Nor were we interested. For us it was a question of "when" not "if" Japan would attack. Our job was to prepare to defend the country.

And so we went into an intensive programme of training for battle in a strange environment. That is the A.I.F. did. Gordon Bennett, our Major-General in command recognized, from his study of the Japanese methods in China, that it would be war, not of static fixed defences but of penetration and infiltration through the jungle. His British fellow generals and higher command did not see eye to eye with him but, sticking to his own plans, he set up our training along these lines.

The infantry learnt to patrol through the jungle; to fight away from roads and towns; to look for the enemy in the rear rather than in front. Day after day they trudged through the jungle while most of the British and Indian troops did their training on the parade grounds.
CHAPTER 5

As we moved around the country and met more and more of the people we found a curious apathy and ignorance of peril. The attitude was, "It can't happen here."

The British civilians continued their social life as though there was no dread threat from the north although a Malay Volunteer unit was formed and trained.

There was a dreadfully snobbish attitude amongst the civilians: only officers were admitted to the clubs and decent hotels and other ranks were never invited to any social event connected with the war effort or not. Russell Braddon, in his book, "Naked City" gives a shocking account of his own experiences.

There was a story told of the Selangor Club, the last word in posh exclusiveness, the meeting place of wealthy planters and mining engineers. With the advent of British troops membership was extended to the officers but not to the "Other Ranks." One of those officers was incensed when he saw a private enter the sacred precincts. "Get out, my man," he bellowed. "Don't you know that only civilians and officers are allowed in here?" The intruder smiled, "Pardon me, but I am the vice-president of the club. I have just come from a parade of the Malsayan Volunteers."

Even our own officers, especially the junior ones, smarted under the condescension of the British officers. The civilians were even more aloof and there was little contact between them and the A.I.F. at any level. There was some exchange of officers and senior N.C.O.'s and they got on very well in each other's messes, but socially, outside of the army, no. A Tommy sergeant joined our mess at Seremban. We certainly learnt some of the more sophisticated angles on soldiering and hoped to teach him something in return.

On return to his regiment his C.O. asked, "I hope you have profited by your stay with the A.I.F., Sergeant?" "Oh yes, Sir" replied the Sergeant, "It was expensive but those Aussies sure taught me how to play poker."

We were lucky to find an exception to the general rule. During exercise in a large rubber estate we met an English doctor who was in charge of the health of the native labourers on the property. We told him of our difficulties in learning anything of malaria control since our arrival in Malaya.

He promptly invited all of us to the estate for a series of field-days and showed us the standard methods.
Then he went further: he introduced the Skipper to the Director of the Institute of Health at Kuala Jumper with the result that the Skipper himself, Corporal Johnson and myself were invited to do a crash course at the Institute. There we really did learn something and Johnson evolved into a very good microscopist. Practical field work was acquired by working with the Health Services in Johore, led by a kindly old Indian doctor. By April we had learnt most of the drill.

I, personally, had to do my homework all over again. Very little of the experience acquired in New Guinea was of use here. For instance, there was only one recognised vector in New Guinea, Anopheles Punctualatus. In Malaya there were a dozen all different in habits and habits. And Punctualatus, though prevalent, was not a carrier. Why? I don't know.

And the others were tricky. A Maculatus, the worst, was not found in jungle country, (that had one of its own). If the land was opened up for planting and the sunlight admitted Maculatus appeared in large numbers and decimated the labour force. This little brute liked clear, slowly moving water in bright sunshine especially the seepages along hillsides. Control was by cutting contour ditches along the seepages, putting in drainage pipes or even rubble or brushwood and filling in again. Where the ditches emerged into a creek various simple oiling contraptions could be installed and automatic rise-and-fall flushing devices to hold up the flow of the stream and then send a wave of water rushing down the channel — something the larvae didn't relish.

All the other mosquitoes had their own distinctive breeding habits — one even liking pot-holes in rocks on the sea-shore where spray from the waves mixed with rainwater. Here weekly spraying with oil was the only answer other than cementing up the holes.

Almost all control was levelled at the larval stage, that is in water. Against the flying adult mosquito little could be done other than to wear protective clothing, smelly skin applications and the careful use of mosquito-nets, and best of all to remain in protected areas between sunset and sunrise. Obviously this last would not be possible in active warfare and then protection depended almost entirely on suppressant drugs like atabrine which prevented the malaria germ in the blood from fulminating and causing fever.

In April 1940, Intelligence reported a large convoy was heading South from Japan. "This is it," we thought. But it turned out to be the Japanese occupation of Nainan, off the South Coast of China. Ostensibly part of their war in China it deceived noone.
So the troops were moved out of barracks to "War Stations". These were camps in, or near, strategic areas. These camps were sometimes in small towns or if not in fairly healthy parts of the country. In any case they had long been prepared by the Civil Health authorities and were "protected" from malaria-carrying mosquitoes.

Around these camps were the "Battie positions" into which troops would move when hostilities were commenced. Most were secret - just marks on maps. Others were part of the coastline where enemy landings might be expected. In the latter fortifications had been constructed during daylight hours; weapon-pits, trenches, lines of fire, barbed wire and minefields. Over these areas the artillery had checked their ranges.

But they were not protected from malaria; that was our job. While hostilities were still in the uncertain future it didn't matter so much: the troops worked there only in daylight and returned to their protected camps at night.

Equipped with maps showing these battle positions we started work. Our activities were based on two important factors; first, the mosquitoes' range of flight was limited to one-and-a-half miles, unless driven by a strong wind. So that if all breeding places inside a circle one and a half miles in diameter were eliminated or controlled, the centre of such a circle would be theoretically safe from malaria.

The other factor was that the life of the adult mosquito is no more than three weeks so that if all larvae were destroyed within three weeks, after that time no more adult flying; malaria-carrying mosquitoes would be found in the circle after that time. Incidentally, only the female mosquito bites and transmits malaria, but she must have a feed of blood before she can lay her eggs on the surface of the nearest suitable water from which the larvae are hatched. The mosquito only transmits the malaria bug, taking it from one human being to another although the germ undergoes drastic changes in the insect's stomach and goes through another series of changes in the human's blood, it's all rather complicated.

There were three phases in putting an area under control: a survey, destruction of all mosquito larvae and their breeding places and testing.

First the survey. From the periphery of the camp site we would move out along a radius line of one and a half miles, carefully searching for likely breeding places, taking specimens of any larvae found numbering the samples found and marking the maps accordingly. As many radii as necessary were covered to check every foot of the ground, depending on the nature of the country.

Next, our commercial artist in civil life, drew those maps and filled in the information as we brought it to him on a master map. These last were really works of art: the officers at the institute admitted they had never seen anything as good.
The larval specimens found were handed over to Johnson who, with the aid of illustrated charts provided by the Health Institute, identified them, a complicated process based on the arrangement of tiny hairs on the larva’s head and body.

The results were marked on the map so that when completed it clearly showed the danger spots. The oilers moved in, men from the unit who would occupy the site and maintain protection after we had gone. Working parties from the same unit cut the contour drains, under our direction.

Three weeks from the destruction of the last larva found came the testing time. This involved spending a series of nights on the spot — a job I usually did myself.

A net tent about eight feet square was erected, inside that a stretcher fitted with an ordinary net. At sundown I would retire to the tent, hitching up all sides to leave it wide open. Then I took shelter inside the smaller net equipped with a flashlight, an alarm-clock, and a number of large test-tubes containing chloroform pads. Also a service revolver just in case of a visit from a prowling tiger or leopard. Not that there would be any time to use it if a man-eater pounced. But we could always be guided by the local natives. If they said there were no tigers in that area there would be none.

Every hour by the alarm-clock, I would rise, drop the sides of the tent and search for adult mosquitoes with the flashlight. They would be found resting on the walls, trapped inside, after being attracted by the smell of a human. Only Anophelines were taken, they were easily distinguished by their typical mode of resting, standing on their heads. The "Pile-drivers" as they were called. A separate tube was used for each side of the tent: north, south, east and west. The tubes were then marked with the time and records made of such conditions as wing and cloud.

Next day Johnson examined the specimens and identified them from his charts. In the case of adult mosquitoes each species has distinctive markings on the wings. If he found any of our unwanted species it meant more tracking and destruction of their breeding-places. Not until we were certain that the area was safe did we report it as such.

If the camp site was within one and a half miles of a native village adult specimens found would be sent to Institute at Kuala Lumpur. There the insects stomachs were dissected out and examined for the malarial germs and if found the civil authorities would descend on the village and do their own work there.

The job complete it would be handed over to the unit concerned whose own hygiene men would maintain the oiling and other measures required with an occasional check from us, or if their had been any cases of malaria full scale tests would be made.

Eventually we had all our areas under control and could report that units could move into them with safety.
One failure occurred. Some ten days after the troops marched out the Brigadier sent for me. "You reported the Artillery's battle position to be clear of Malaria," he said. "Now their Medical Officer reports twenty percent casualties already with malaria. How so?"

I was shocked, but asked could I go and see for myself. "Certainly," he said. "Take my car and driver."

We sped to the Artillery position. But it was not any place I knew nor on any map given to me. I found the C.O. and told him it was an unprotected area. He called the adjutant and the story came out.

The Regiment had gone to its originally arranged site, which my team had dutifully cleared of malarial vectors earlier. But the Artillery commander found it to be unsuitable, for one thing, a deep ditch prevented the quick movement of the guns in and out of the camp.

One look and the C.O. condemned it. "Find another place," he ordered.

They did - about two miles further along the road, bang amongst swarms of malaria carrying and malaria infected anophelines with a native village near by to provide a reservoir of infection. Within a week the men were going down with malaria. Had the Japanese attacked at that time there would not have been enough fit men to fully man the guns.

I went back to the Brigadier and reported. He himself went back to the Artillery. What was said I don't know but within an hour the Regiment was on its way to the original site and was putting half a dozen bridges over the offending ditch. We even had to watch what they did to prevent interference with some of our anti-mosquito measures.

Elsewhere there was no trouble. Odd cases of malaria did occur but in every instance this had been picked up outside the camp: on leave or on some essential night task elsewhere. Even a successfully persistent A.W.I. merchant was caught this way. He had sneaked out night after night to visit some Malay friends - for reasons best known to himself. His absences went undetected until he went down with malaria and as he could not reasonably have become infected in the camp, the soup was spilt.

It was not all work. There was regular leave to Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Malacca. Singapore did not appeal to me; it was not Malay but China for they constitute 75% of the cities population and half the remaining twenty-five percent are Indians, Europeans and a sprinkling of other races. I had seen as much as I wanted of China in Hong Kong and Shanghai a few years earlier. Besides having to spend one's leave in an Army leave barracks living on the Army food is not a holiday. Other Ranks could not put up at any decent hotel - they were reserved for officers.

Kuala Lumpur, the Federal capital and political centre was
quite different and one could spend quite a pleasant time there.

"K.L.'s quaint architecture is startling to say the least. It deserves to be listed among the modern wonders of the world. It has been derided as "Victorian Moorish", and it was designed by an architect with delusions of grandeur or was an administrative mistake, because it is large enough to serve Tokyo or New York. It is a museum collection of domes, towers, arches, columns, pinnacles and little twisting exterior staircases. It looks like a maharajah's palace or an overdecorated fort or tomb from somewhere around the land of Kublis Khan. It is the Taj Mahal redesigned by a commercial artist, the tower of London given a facelift by a Muslim master builder from Bagdad. It is anything you like to name - and its purpose is to serve each day a few slow trains which meander into its vast vaulted interior and never seem to come out." This is quoting Mckle - and just about describes it.

K.L. is not an ancient city but it has always been a place of some importance as a centre of Islam. And the Malays are the gentlemen of Malaya. In that city one felt amongst friends. Only one or two hotels were out of bounds and one could walk into one of the others and drink coffee with Malays who might be fishermen or the illegitimate sons of Sultans. Some of these must have rubbed off into the British there. It was the only place where an English lady spoke to me. She did ask if I liked Malaya when she found herself seated at the same dining-table. In Singapore she would have asked for a table elsewhere.

Under the arches of one of the government buildings sat the letter writers at their little tables. They were professionals as old as the characters and script they wrote. They have been writing for the illiterate of Asia since writing began.

Malacca is an ancient city, as old as Malaya itself and the history of Malacca is the history of Malaya. I dragged poor Roy Higgins around the place, out to the Port of St. John, and tried to make him see what I saw: Portuguese in heavy armour defending the place with their primitive cannon against the hordes of Islamic warriors. The ruins of the ancient churches where the Portuguese tried, and did for a while, to convert the infidel to the Church with a sword in one hand and a cross in the other. But the Dutch took over and their zeal was not for religion but for trade. But there is still a spot in the ruins of the ancient cathedral which always has flowers and candles: the spot where the body of St. Francis Xavier rested for a while when it was brought from China to Goa.

And the great limestone caves of Batu with Indian and Chinese temples inside and smaller caves running off the deep ones in which "Holy men" fasted. A wide flight up steps lead up to the caves and during religious festivals the devout climb them on their knees.
Our other activities, apart from malaria prevention were camp hygiene and water discipline. In a country where cholera and dysentery were endemic men had to be trained to take the utmost care in matters of hygiene and to drink no water unless boiled or from an uncontaminated source — and of these there were none unless under the care of civil or army authority.

The engineers set up water-points with pumps, wells and spear-points all over the country side, for town supplies would be precarious sources of supply if war broke out. Biggs and Demlo (our industrial chemist) checked every water-point in Johore for the role of the A.I.F. was to be the defence of Johore, from coast to coast.

Our work meant long hours and much travelling but from a soldier's point of view it was a wonderful job; no camp duties, no parades, no guard posts; as free as the air! A job that was interesting, and, best of all, could show results.

The troops themselves showed a remarkable interest. Officers and men crowded into our primitive laboratory to look at mosquitoes under the microscope. It was not necessary to make attendance compulsory the men looked forward to those we gave.

So by the 7th December 1941 we felt we had done all we could in the preparations for war.
December 7th., 1941, and almost simultaneously Pearl Harbour went up in flames, Malaya was invaded, Singapore bombed and the Phillipines attacked.

Except for what he hears on the radio, the fighting soldier knows very little of his war except for what goes on on his own immediate front. He does not even know why he is ordered to do this or that. If he survives till after it is all over he can read scores of books that attempt to explain everything. Rather late in time he learns of incredible blunders, lack of preparedness and complete inefficiency. It’s all history then.

We were somewhere in the jungle near Mersing, on the East Coast of Malaya, when the news came. We immediately evacuated our camps and took up positions in preparation for attack. For several days nothing happened on our front but we did learn that the 11th. Indian Division was being beaten back at Kota Baru, 400 miles to the north, near the Thai border.

We heard all sorts of stupid stories put out by the Propaganda people: the Japanese suffered from night blindness, their small calibre rifles were ineffective, that as a nation they could not stand up to a great European power. Well, they did, for a while as history proved.

Their planning was highly efficient, even long before the war broke out. For one thing, they had built up a strong fifth column amongst the Malays. We found our field telephones cut as fast as we put them down; ground signs, such as laundry laid out to dry, or patterns cut in the long grass, guided Japanese bombers to our fuel and ammunition dumps. For years Japanese photographers and mappers had measured and photographed every bridge in Malaya. When our engineers blew them up the Japs replaced them with portable, prefabricated sections they had brought with them.

There were some good stories. How the Chinese (?) cook of an Officers' Mess resigned on the 7th. to turn up after the capitulation as a Japanese officer. One of the best came from the northern sector. A Don R., heavily goggled, bent low over the handlebars of his Norton-Motorcycle as he roared past the outer sentry post on a Malayan road. But the second post, warned by telephone from the first, was waiting and the Don R. rode into a hall of bullets.

British uniform, English motorcycle and lots of confidence, he could have been one of ours, but he was a Jap. In his pocket were maps showing the disposition of our troops.

He had made one mistake: slung across his back he carried a rifle with a fixed bayonet. Don R.'s carry pistols.
The role of the Australian 8th Division was the defence of Johore, that large native state lying just north of Singapore Island across the straits and connected to it by the man-made Causeway.

The 22nd Brigade was responsible for the defence of the Eastern sector, the 27th of the west. Connecting the two was the Kluang Road.

For the year before Pearl Harbour we had been building defences along the beaches of this sector and carrying out intensive jungle training. From Endau to Mersing the shallow waters of the South China Sea were planted with barbed wire. There were miles of barbed-wire entanglements inshore and acres of minefields with excellent fields of fire laid down for rifle and artillery fire. These beaches were the expected landing areas for the Japanese if or when they should invade Singapore, actually the Japanese left the Mersing-Endau coast severely alone although it was only thirty miles from Singapore, and made their initial landings at Kota Bahru, Four hundred miles north from where they had to fight their way down the full length of the Peninsula. Why? Because there intelligence calculated that to land on the Endau-Mersing beaches would cost 50,000 casualties. So they left it alone and all our work was wasted. Or was it? Probably not; it made the conquest of Malaya that much harder.

A few Jap troops pushed down the coast from Kuantan. There was no road but they trudged along the beaches. They tried to cross at the mouth of the Endau River but the 20th Battalion's "C" Company stopped them so they worked their way inland and crossed further up in the jungle and came down behind "C" Company. Some of them got into our minefields but these did not prove as effective as we had hoped. Many of the mines had been set off by pigs and monkeys and many more rendered useless by heavy flooding.

Most of the time we did not know how many Japs there were or where they were. They avoided out patrols and left little sign. We had no aerial reconnaissance except for the "Endau Coffee Pots". These were two old, unarmed civilian planes belonging to the Singapore Aero Club. Twice a day they made a run up the coast looking for landing barges or junk. Twice a day two Japanese fighter bombers made a similar run, looking for what they could see over the lines. One morning happened the inevitable. They met. It was all over in a minute. A few bursts from the Japs and the little Aero's went down. We did hear that both managed to make forced landings and that the same pilots survived, though one was badly injured.
These two Jap planes gave us our first casualty in this area. Felix, "C" Company's cook was dressing a beast out in the open when he was spotted. One bomb blew up and killed him wrecked his cookhouse.

More and more Japs infiltrated down from the North. The Battalion withdrew from its forward positions and fell back on its main line along the Morsing River. The pretty little town of that name had been evacuated and demolition squads levelled it to the ground. In doing so they had fractured the water mains and stand pipes from which most of the brigade was drawing its water supplies.

I took a party up the hill to the reservoir behind the town to shut off the main valve and run some temporary piping down to the road.

We found the hill occupied by an Observation Post from the 10th Artillery. "The Japanese are coming down the road," said the officer in charge. Then, "They are putting a field gun on the top of Bald Hill." He passed me the binoculars and I could see they were being very busy and had their gun almost in place. "Hang round and you might see something," said the O.P. I did. He spoke briefly into the telephone. A few seconds later the guns barked from somewhere behind us and a few seconds later Bald Hill erupted in a cloud of smoke and dust.

Late that night the guns opened up again in pouring rain. Guessing that the Japs would shelter in the huts across the river the gunners had laid down careful range sightings. I had seen these guns ranging on targets such as oil drums in the sea. They could land a twenty-five pound shell on a sixpence.

The next days there was some exchange of fire across the river but the Japs made no attempt to cross when they found it strongly defended. This was their regular pattern. Probe out the defences but never make a frontal attack on a strongly held position. Move away and when a weak sector was found, even if miles away from the main force, then attack and sweep round behind the defenders. They even let off firecrackers to give the impression of large numbers.

Again we retreated to avoid being cut off. "C" Company of the 10th behind us caught the Japs trying to cut the road. There was a sharp engagement and "C" Company found itself surrounded and suffering heavy casualties. Only a creeping box barrage sent down by the artillery got them out of that one.
Continually harried by their low-flying aircraft we called in the Bofors, mobile anti-aircraft guns. We had no planes by this time. They had all been shot out of the air or destroyed on the ground. There had been only a few and they were antiquated Buffaloes. The rest of the British Air Force was busy elsewhere and some shipments of new up-to-date aircraft sent out to us had been unloaded at Singapore only to be put back again and sent on to our Russian Allies at Vladivostock. But the Bofors, a crack gun crew who had gained their experience in England, shot down two before the Japs broke in that they were there. After that they were much more cautious and flew higher and did less damage. Their main targets were the 25-pounders but these were well hidden and heavily camouflaged with green branches. Every night the gun crews dragged away the wilting branches and put fresh ones over their beloved guns. The Japs heavily bombèd our old camps but they were empty - merely rows of forlornly deserted tents.

Over on the West Coast the enemy was making rapid progress towards Singapore after their landings at Kota Baru and Kuantan, and their drive across the Thai border. Our 19th left us to add a little strength to the 27th Brigade on the west coast at the Johore border.

When the Japs reached this sector that got a real shock. Ambushed they took a mauling, our gunners blasting their tanks over open sights. (We had no tanks; the British authorities had said they would be useless in that country. The Japs didn't agree.) The 27th Brigade held them up for a few days but then the old story was repeated. The Japs broke off got round behind our lines, much of it by seaward landings from barges and boats captured at Penang. So the retreat was on again.

As we on the West Coast could not afford to be cut off we abandoned our positions and crossed over by the Kluang road to the West. From now on it was a flight to the Island: that "Impermanent Fortress"; the world had been told up to that stage we too, had believed it. We had begun to regard the fighting in Malaya as some sort of skirmish out in Woman's Land. Back on the Island we could settle in and hold the enemy at bay for months, even years. We were due for sad disillusionment. It's all in the history books, now.

So we crossed the causeway one pitch black night and took up new positions on the Johore Strait. The last to come over were the Argyles and Sutherland Highlanders. The orderly officer came and told us, "The Argyles are coming over; to them are the honours of the campaign. When they come call out the guard and give them the 'present'."

An hour later in the darkness we heard a broad Scot's give the order, "The Battalion will march at attention!" And then they came, their pipers playing "Blue Bonnets over the Border," marching as though they were victors; marching as they had done ten weeks before when they had moved out, a full battalion, 700 strong.
And how many do you think were on their feet, now? Sixty-five. They had fought the Jap from the border to the sea down that long, long road, more than 400 miles of bitter retreat.

There was a Punjabi battalion on our flank and it was necessary to maintain contact with it. For some reason the powers that be thought I could help with the job. "You have had a lot of experience with natives in New Guinea, get yourself attached to the 45th Punjabis." My own CO, said, "The best you can do is to try and install some sense of hygiene into them."

Wondering at the thought processes of senior officers who could see any similarity between New Guinea natives and Indians I went over to their lines. Here I was promptly seized by the guard and put into the guard house where I languished for two hours. They could not speak English and I could not speak Punjabi — or whatever they do speak.

In due course one of their English officers arrived. "Do you know that you have been under close arrest for the last two hours?" "It seemed something like that," I replied. "And you were nearly shot out of hand," he added. "You see, the guards have been warned to watch out for a German agent who is reported to be working through our lines dressed as a British major" (there was some truth in this: A supposed British major ordered the Artillery not to fire on some heavy concentrations of Japanese troops which would have made perfect targets. The order never came from British Headquarters and the "major" was never indentified.)

"I showed them my pay-book," I told him. "They didn't recognize it," he went on. "They have been taught to recognize a British soldier's identification card, but an Australian soldier's paybook was something beyond them. And they can't read English, you know."

The 45th was a new regiment, only just recruited in India and sent over to Malaya for training. The Indian soldier is good, very good, when he's trained; and it takes at least two years to train him.

I joined up with a crew of signallers also attached to the regiment from a British unit and some Australian search-light crews. I didn't attempt any liaison work but concentrated on trying to teach them some field hygiene. They needed it. Their camp was a mess. They had come straight from ordered cantonments into the field and knew nothing, not even how to cope with their own water supplies.

I was still with them when the Japanese army made their attack across the straits, and this raw brigade was among the first to take the brunt of the onslaught. They broke and ran leaving the Australians exposed.
Easy enough to blame the Indians. But the fault lay higher up, right at the top. It started years before when the British set out to make Singapore an impregnable fortress. But they never considered an attack by land as a possibility. Great guns from 9" to 16" pointed out to sea, a great naval dockyard and base was built on the Johore Straits. The idea was that there would always be a navy to destroy any fleets or landing craft that might attempt to put troops ashore anywhere on the coast. There were half a dozen aerodromes on the island from which planes would defend the Naval Base and the ships. There was only one thing wrong: there were no ships and no aircraft—Britain's ships were too busy in the Atlantic and Mediterranean and her aircraft were required at home and in the Middle East. Two great battleships were sent out to dispute and landings but they were open to attack by air. Which is exactly what happened to them. The Prince of Wales and another ship were sunk by Japanese aircraft almost as soon as they put to sea.

On Singapore Island itself, there had been for ten weeks a million refugees and another two million people in the city. Yet the battle weary troops filed back to the island to find no prearrangements for them at all. There were no trenches, pill boxes, weapon pits or barbed wire along the lines of defence. The soldiers had to turn round and hurriedly dig themselves in after weeks of fighting, all that unlimited labour in the refugee camps had been sitting in idleness.

When the 45th started to get out so did I. I found my way into the 20th's positions and joined them in the rubber to await the Japanese. It came with a terrific attack on the battalion's headquarters which was wiped out, including the C.O.

Early in the evening Japanese were putting a heavy fire into our lines and we began to suffer casualties. We fired back and the Japanese stopped. The old story; finding opposition they had moved elsewhere to probe our defences. But they came back to try us out again. At this stage a runner arrived to tell us to fall back on the road; the Japanese had infiltrated and were behind us. Back on the road we found the whole battalion lined up with its transport. Casualties had been high and there had been no time to get the wounded out.

One of our half-track Fren carriers came up to me. In it was the Battalion Sergeant-Major. He wanted to know where the Japs were or had been last contacted. I told him what I knew. "Hop on," he said we'll go and have a look.

Back at our old positions in the rubber the Japs were still firing but not moving forward in spite of the fact that there was no return fire. This meant that they were covering a move somewhere else.
So we sped up through the rubber in the dark towards the head of the column waiting on the road for orders to move. The officer in command heard the N.S.W.'s report and ordered the move, with the infantry marching along the flanks. We in the half-track went ahead, not on the road but some fifty yards to the right in the cover of the rubber.

We had not gone more than 500 yards when we ran right into them, they were not in great strength but were concentrating fast. There were five of us perched on the half-track but we had two Vickers and two Brens and a box of grenades. Although we came under heavy fire none of us was hit and our extreme mobility and the heavy fire we returned kept the Japs down.

We heard the column come up and accelerate. The infantry took over the defence of the road and we went back to the head of the column. But we had just beaten the Japs to it and what was left of the battalion got out and took up new positions.

We had a lot of wounded and no one seemed to know where our C.C.S. was. But I did know where the main hospital was so I volunteered to lead the ambulances and trucks there. The AGF was on the outskirts of the city in an old girls' school. We were just taking the wounded upstairs when a bracket of shells hit the building, three shells smashed through the walls and exploded, doing terrible damage. I looked up through dust to see a nurse struggling to get a wounded man under his bed. Bricks were still raining down so I yelled, "Put your tin hat on, Sister!" "Never mind my bloody tin hat," she yelled back. "Help me get this man under the bed." That was the spirit of our girls.

A medical officer came along. "We are going to evacuate the hospital," he said. So I leant a hand and we loaded up our injured men again and took them off to another large building near the centre of the city. One of the other field hospitals nearby refused to move and was captured by the Japs but in this case they ignored the staff and wounded. Not like at the Alexandria hospital where they shot and bayoneted staff and patients in an orgy of butchery.

More wounded were coming in then we could handle here so another hospital was set up in St. Andrew's Cathedral. I took a convey there and was delighted to find the skipper and a few of the unit there. The skipper was working in the hospital. As a veterinarian he knew something of surgery and could give anaesthetics so was able to help the hard-pressed doctors.

"There's a job for you here," he said. "The Japs have cut the main pipelines that bring the city's water across the straits." (Actually the Japs did not - we blew them up when we blew the causeway.) There is still a large supply in the reservoirs outside the city but if the Japs destroy them by artillery or bombs things will be bad. So see if you can get a well or two down."
Civilians had been warned to fill baths and receptacles. There is a good deal of underground water on the island but no attempt had been made to tap it except by the army engineers who never like to depend on town supplies.

Choosing a likely site in the spacious grounds of the Cathedral we started digging. It was not long before we knew that any well put down here would need timbering; the soil was sandy and loose and we were in an area reclaimed from the sea.

Out in the open we were the objects of some sniper fire from houses near by where some renegade Indian fifth columnists were. But they were lousy shots and as soon as their positions were noted the Military Police moved in and eliminated them.

Bombs dropped in nearby streets but their was no deliberate attempt to bomb the Cathedral, now marked with a large Red Cross. Several shells landed in the grounds, hitting one ambulance and killing the crew but those had been fired from a long distance and more or less at random. Another salvo hit the road between the Cathedral grounds and the Tadang (open grassy space). A couple of cars were hit and one burst into flames. This shell landed only a few feet from us but was flying at a low trajectory and all its explosive force went forward.

A bomb dropped from a low flying aircraft landed near an Indian Bofors gun and buried most of the crew. We rushed over with our shovels and helped to dig them out. The Bofors never stopped firing.

In the middle of all this who should come tripping across the Cathedral lawns but a little, old and grey-haired lady. "This is no place for you, Madame" I told her. "Go home." "The dogs haven't been out for days," she replied. "They do so miss their exercise." "But what about yourself?" I asked her. "It doesn't matter about me," she answered. "I'm old and had my life. My husband is the Commissioner of Police so he had to stop here. So I remained with him. We sent our grown up children and the grandchildren home to England months ago. They are safe. That's all that matters."

We were discussing timbering the well when someone remarked that they had seen quantities of large concrete pipe sections in a yard of the Hume Pipe Company. So we set off with our biggest truck to see if we could make use of them.

The streets were shambles. Bombed houses had fallen in to them, there were deep craters and rubble everywhere. Sometimes we had to turn around and go back to try another route. The dead littered the streets, the injured had been dragged into the remaining houses to be attended to by relatives and friends. This was Black Friday, the 13th, February. It was estimated that there were 10,000 dead lying in the streets by nightfall. It was worse down near the docks where the people had crowded trying to get on the few remaining ships attempting to escape. Few did. If they got out to sea in the darkness the Japanese planes caught them the next day.
Much of the city was burning and a dense black cloud of oil-smoke from the burning oil tanks fell on the people staining them black with soot.

These oil tanks had been blown by our engineers, notable one lieutenant Watchorn to deny their use to the Japs. Years afterwards we were to learn that the greatest dread of the Japanese at the time was that the oil from them would be sent all the way down into the Straits of Johore while they were crossing. But none on our side thought of it.

We found the pipes and loaded them on to the track with the help of a hand-crane in the yard. Tied them securely and set out back again. It took us hours. Streets that had been clear when we came out had not been blocked off. Sometimes we had to get down and shovel away a heap of rubble to get a track clear. No doubt that the city was taking a terrible beating and that the civilians were far worse of than the soldiers fighting on the periphery. The civil services and ARP had broken down. The non-combatants were left to their own devices.

Back at St. Andrews we used the four-foot diameter pipes as casings and at about ten feet strack water: a slow trickle brown and brackish. We would have to get more than that, so we rigged a pump and one man at a time down in the well dug the soil away from the edges of the casing till it slid away a few inches at a time.

An English unit trying to did a similar well not far away liked the idea and asked us where we had got the pipes. We told them and away they went to try their luck. They never came back. Probably caught by a bomb or shell on the way.

On the Saturday, 14th, there was some let up from the aircraft. Instead they were streaming out to sea. We could see people on high building looking out towards the southwest with binoculars. The rumour went round: A large convoy of troops and warships is fighting its way towards us. Help is on its way.

There was no convoy. Those planes were on their way to sink the ships that had escaped from Singapore in the night. Crowded with refugees they were all sent to the bottom, amongst them was the "Vynor Brooke" with a large group of our Australian nurses on board who much against their will had been sent away in the slender hope of escape. They never made it. The ship was sunk off Serak Island, some of the girls got ashore only to be shot down from behind by the Japs after they had been ordered to walk back into the sea. One nurse escaped, Sister Vivien Pullewickie, who survived to give evidence against the Japanese in the Tokio war trials. She had another long story to tell but you can read it elsewhere.
On the Sunday afternoon several batteries of guns pulled in to the road along the harbour's edge, under the trees. And then started a terrific barrage. It was a last stand by the gunners. They had orders to use up all their ammunition (there wasn't much left, anyway) and then to destroy the guns. About four o'clock they fired their last round and shortly afterwards firing ceased all round the city. The Jap planes left us and the enemies guns fell silent.

The war was over as far as we were concerned. Singapore had surrendered.
Yamashita stopped outside the city. The Imperial Japanese Army had other things to do; to go on to the conquest of the Dutch East Indies. So Singapore was spared the terrible fate of Nankin, Hongkong and Manilla. There were some executions; of Chinese who had been known to oppose the Japanese invasions of their homeland.

An administrative force moved in to take over the city. The Allied High Command was given its orders; it was for them to see them carried out. One thousand armed men were allowed to maintain street patrols for the purpose of preventing looting and to maintain order.

Events moved quickly; we were ordered to pile arms and assemble at various points in the city. My own unit was ordered to Tanglin the same night as the surrender.

At Tanglin, one of the British Army's barracks, we found some of the buildings completely wrecked and most of the others badly damaged by shell-fire and bombing. We found one building at least weatherproof and occupied it. Next day we cleared away the debris and settled in. There was no knowing what the future held. It was most unlikely that we were going to occupy Tanglin indefinitely. But we put down a well, (the town's water supply had not yet been restored.) In the barracks, which had not been occupied since action had commenced were the quartermaster's stores of his regiment, one of the Scottish battalions. We broke these open and re-equipped ourselves with clothing and replenished our food supplies.

Shortly after our arrival other units started straggling in, some of the men in a bad way; all of them filthy, tired, hungry and reduced to rags. With the stores of the barracks we set up a receiving centre seeing that the men who came in had hot water for washing, clean clothes and a meal until they could organize their own.

We never saw a Japanese. The C.O. went daily to Headquarters to get the latest orders. They soon came.

On a certain day all prisoners of war were to march to Changi, the large British barracks on the north side of the island, about eighteen miles from Tanglin. We fitted ourselves out for a long stay. Some men feared we would be starved to death and loaded their packs with tinned food, heavy stuff. My own view was that if it was to be starvation a pack of tinned food would not last long enough to avert the end. I argued that we would probably be fed but would be put to work in rubber plantations and tin-mines and that clothing, especially boots, would be our greatest need.
On the morning of the march to Changi we set out; we had been allowed to keep one small truck to carry our cooking equipment, medical supplies and as much food as we could load on. As we marched along the road we saw our first Japanese acting as traffic police with a few guards at certain places where the Japanese Army had set up control points. No civilians were in evidence except a few poor Chinese trying to maintain their precarious livelihoods trundling barrows of vegetables from door to door. One of these attempted to cross the street through the moving stream of P.O.W.'s. A Japanese traffic officer hauled him to the side of the road and savagely bashed him: a taste of things to come.

There were long halts and we were seldom allowed to sit down by the side of the road but were kept standing, heavy packs up for half an hour at a time. The tropical sun grew hotter and hotter, water bottles began to empty and by mid afternoon some of the men were suffering from thirst and heat exhaustion. They started to discard the heavier items of their loads, in some cases their whole packs. But their comrades prevented this, merely throwing out what seemed unnecessary. The Chinese children reaped a harvest but they in turn were very good. Soon they were carrying out buckets of water and setting them down on the road of the march to revive the men. Actually the forced march was not beyond a fit soldier with a fifty pound pack and no weapons but many of the Englishmen had arrived only a few weeks before, had just left a European winter, had spent a long voyage by sea via the Cape and had foolishly overloaded themselves. Some had to be supported and even carried or they could manage themselves if relieved of their packs. But they all made Changi. There was a fear that any who dropped out might be shot or bayoneted by the Japanese guards who had appeared in increasing numbers as the march progressed.

It was dark when we arrived at Changi and we had no idea just where we were to go, so we flopped down on the grass and slept. Next day we were allotted our quarters in various parts of the barracks. These were undamaged as they had not been in the line of fire directed at the city. The water supply had not been re-established so that the engineers and ourselves had to get to work immediately. There was a small creak of good water running through the area and this was put under guard, deepened in places and revetted with stones. One end was reserved for drinking and cooking water the lower end was turned into a series of bathing pools.

The Japanese allowed us to recover our earthy auras and added several others from the public works supply and a vast complex of deep bore-hole latrines was put down. The camp was terribly overcrowded but we could cope.

While we were busy morale was good. Everyone was working most put onto the job of fencing themselves in with a barbed wire perimeter. Some Japanese guards appeared from time to time to demand working parties who were taken to the city's wharves by truck and set to emptying the smashed ships of their stocks. They allowed flour and frozen meat to be taken to the camp by truckloads - apparently they did not want it
so that temporarily we were living well. "Home for Christmas was the catchcry!"

Rumours drifted in: the Japanese were being driven back by the Americans; their fleet had been sunk. Even the lightning flashes and growling thunder on the northern horizon were interpreted as Allied landings. Anyone who suggested that the war could last a year or more was branded as a defeatist etc. etc. Looking back it seems incredible that so many men could delude themselves. One morning they did get a rude shock.

Into the Johore Straits, heading for the erstwhile British Naval Base steamed a great fleet. Four battleships, an aircraft carrier, and twenty four cruisers and destroyers. We counted forty-five other ships standing off the Straits, including seven aircraft carriers. And they all looked modern and in full fighting trim. Though we were, or the Japs, were not to know it most of that mighty fleet was to be sent to the bottom in the next few months. Those ships were on their way to the battles of the Coral Sea, Wake Island and Midway.

More prisoners, in ones and twos, were being brought into the camp. These were men who had been flushed out of hiding places after the battle or men who had been wounded and posted missing. One, a Scottish sergeant-major, had been wandering around dazed for nearly three weeks, living on tinned rations taken from dead men’s haversacks; another, fearfully wounded by a sword cut across the shoulders meant to decapitate him, had been buried on a shallow grave, covered over by only shrubs and bushes. He had recovered consciousness, clawed his way out of the grave and staggered around until picked up by Japanese troops. On being brought into the camp hospital his terrible wound was alive with maggots but it was the cleanest part of his body. The loathsome insects had kept the wound from suppurating. He made a rapid recovery.

The Japanese found a lieutenant and a soldier among a lost party; these two were covered with dreadful jungle sores. The Japanese did not like the look of them, thought they might be infectious. So they shot them down like diseased dogs. The others were brought into camp. Two more had been handcuffed by driving bolts through their hands.

It was not long before our own food supplies began to run short and rice became our staple diet. Unused to it, we developed a kind of "mechanical dentistry" and I fell sick with this. But a short stay in hospital put me on my feet. The hospital was full of sick, but the worst were the severely wounded. They died in scores. Every day, from my sick bed, I heard the pipes playing "The Flowers of the Forest" as another Scotsman was taken to his last long rest.
The mood of the men began to change. They became irritable, a state of mind not helped by the British officers insistence on saluting and the usual formal recognition of rank. The men did not have enough to do so the British officers started parade ground drill to maintain discipline. So thousands of men were set to marching up and down for hours. Fortunately this didn't last long - the Japanese didn't like it either.

Eventually more sensible ideas were brought into practice. Cultural classes were organized; from primary grade to university level. I took up bio-chemistry.

There were many men of high professional standing in the entertainment world and they put on evening concerts and plays. These did a lot to keep up morale. Actually, at this stage, Changi was a paradise by p.o.w. standards. The civilians over the way in Changi gaol were much worse off.

At the end of April Captain Creville told me that the Japanese had given orders that 3,000 men were to be sent to an unknown destination. "We have to provide six men. They will be you and I and four others. Pick four of the best."

"A" Force prepared to move out, noone knew where. The rumours were soon flying: we were going to the Andaman Islands, India's penal settlement. Here we would build barracks and prepare the island for the reception of the rest of the p.o.w.'s. We would remain there until the war was over, self-supporting, growing food and developing it for the "Greater Asia Co-Prospereity Sphere."

Another was that we were going to Timor, Portuguese territory, where we would be exchanged for Japanese prisoners held in Australia.

But the best was that we were being taken in two "Big White liners, now in the harbour" to Lourenco Marques, in Portuguese East Africa where we would be exchanged for wool-one bale for each Australian soldier, cleverly arranged by Mr. Curtin, Australia's Prime Minister. The British troops were so convinced of the truth of this that we were abused and even assaulted as "traitors."

On the 15th May "A" Force was ready. A kind of passing out parade was held: the G.O.C. took the salute, addressed us, the band played and everyone was happy. Those left behind were envious of us, so sure were they that we were on the way home. I didn't believe it myself although I did think the Andaman Island theory might have some truth in it.

The Japanese told us that we would have to march the seventeen miles to the wharves; that only the heavy equipment would be taken by truck. But at the last minute a fleet of about fifty trucks arrived and we piled on.
They took us by the East Coast road through the city which seemed comparatively deserted. Most of the shops were closed and there were few people in the streets. So different from the bustling, busy Singapore before the invasion. Food was becoming short; the Japanese rule was harsh and cruel. Hundreds of the inhabitants had been taken away as slave labourers and hundreds had been shot. The last often on the information of fifth columnists in the city repaying old scores.

Most of the rubble and wreckage had been cleared away. Thousands of tons of loot had been shipped to Japan. This consisted mostly of scrap metal: cars, copper and brass, and scrap iron. Ranges of coolies were sifting the dust and ashes of ruined buildings to salvage even nails and screws which were packed into drums and shipped.

There was very little shipping in the harbour. Certainly no sign of the "Two White Ships" we had been told of. Two dirty little Japanese ships were tied up and to these we were taken. A working party was set to loading thousands of picks and shovels. We did not know what they were for but we did not like the look of them. Drums of oil and petrol were already being loaded by Churko prisoners of war.

Late in the afternoon we filed aboard. Somehow 3,000 men were packed into these two little vessels that normally would have held about five hundred comfortably. Then we saw how the Japanese transports operated. In the holds platforms were built around the sides, leaving only a small space in the centre. There was barely headroom between them. When we were forced in there was eighteen inches allowed each man.

Shortly before nightfall we were under way, joined by two other ships and escorted by an ugly little Japanese gunboat "Submarines" we thought, not very happily.

I had kept a compass in my kit, having some vague idea that some day it might prove useful if an escape bid was made. We checked the movement of the "Celebes Baru" down there in the dark hold. First south, then west. Obviously we were not going to Timor or Japan, maybe the Andamans. But we soon turned north. Whereso now?

It was stifling in the hold. We were not allowed on deck except to go to the latrines, a few boxes lashd overside, and only about six men at a time were permitted out at one time.

In the terribly overcrowded, stifling hold thirst was a problem. Twice a day a few buckets of foul brackish water were lowered down but this did not go very far. Twice a day a meal of rice and thin vegetable soup were sent down.
On the 17th, there was land on the port side, obviously Sumatra and in the afternoon we pulled into swampy bay. On the shattered wharf was a notice: Delawan Deli. This is the port of Medan, capital of northern Sumatra, some forty miles inland and connected by rail.

In the harbour were a Japanese destroyer and another large ship packed with green uniformed Europeans. They were Dutch—prisoners like ourselves.

Here we took on board some more of our own people including a group under command of Colonel Coates, a Melbourne surgeon. This party had escaped from Singapore after the surrender but had only got as far as Sumatra where they were taken prisoner.

Also embarked were some three hundred Japanese soldiers. These men were of better physique than any we had seen hitherto. Many could speak English, having learnt at high school. They were veterans of the campaign in China and had had more than five years active service. These were the best, in fact, the only decent Japanese we were to meet. There was some fraternization, for these were fighting men and they had some sympathy for the vanquished. Later on, when I was pretty sick with dysentery one of their Sergeants, whose home town near Lake Hakone in Japan I had visited, brought me food and medicines.

On the 18th, we were on our way again and on the 20th, the convoy anchored off Victoria Point. Here part of our complement and 1,000 men from another ship were sent ashore for work on the aerodrome. It was twelve or fourteen miles to the shore and as there were large quantities of petrol and oil to be unloaded we were here until the 22nd.

It was from Victoria Point that Kingsford made his last take off. From here his Lockheed Altair soared into the morning sky—never to be seen again. When the men arrived at the aerodrome they found the Visitors' Book still intact. In it were the names of many famous fliers who had used the dome and amongst them was Smithy's. Someone tore out the page and kept it. I'd like to think it got home.

The 24th saw us at Mergui, the main port of Southern Burma and here we were ordered ashore, going in by lighters. Nothing of the town was visible from the ship but as the lighters rounded the point the town came into view: a town of temples and shrines with one great golden pagoda standing above all the others. It was about 75 feet high and completely covered with gold leaf. Actually it was not a temple but a stupa, a solid structure like an inverted ear-trumpet. At the top was an intricate and beautiful tracery of iron-work, all gilt, and on this were suspended hundreds of little wind-bells which tinkled musically in the breeze or clashed discordantly when a flock of chattering minah birds invaded the tracery. At night this stupa was brilliantly lit by strings of electric globes.
Nearby was a large monastery and the shaven-headed priests attended by their little boy novices included holding long-handled umbrellas over the priests' heads to shelter them from the sun.

Burma is a Buddhist country and every town has its temple, stupa or giant figure of Buddha. The priests move through the town with dignity attended by their novices. Every true Buddhist male must spend part of his youth in a monastery. These boys, clad in white or saffron robes accompany the priests each morning on a begging pilgrimage through the town carrying little baskets into which the pious put offerings of food and fruit. Ahead of the procession go two boys carrying a bell-shaped gong slung on a pole. A third lad strikes this repeatedly.

We went ashore at a little wharf and marched through the town watched with friendly curiosity by the Burmese and Indian inhabitants. Soon they were passing us packets of food and bundles of cheroots. At first the Japanese guards objected but after they had received a few presents themselves they shut their eyes to what was going on.

1,000 Australians from "A" Force and 500 British from Sumatra were landed here and marched about a mile through the town to the High School which the Japanese had taken over for our quarters.

Here we were almost as over crowded as we had been on the ship. There were no sanitary facilities and we had to start immediately, in pouring rain, to get the place organized. We remained here a month, under very bad conditions, with poor food. Soon there were hundreds of dysentery cases of which seventeen died.

But at the end of a month we moved into a spacious camp on the outskirts of the town that had been built by local contractors for the Japanese. It seemed as though the Japanese local forces had been passed the buck. The higher-ups had just ordered us out and left it to the small garrisons to arrange barracks and food for us as we were passed from one group to another. Nobody wanted us at this stage. There was little food available and no buildings prepared. No medicines except what we carried. Dysentery was treated with powdered charcoal.

We moved into the new camp on the 21st June 1942. Left pretty much to ourselves, provided we did not go past the single barbed wire fence, we got about organizing ourselves. We had a vague idea that we might be living out the rest of the war here. Food supplies became better, although mostly rice, and our cooks learnt how to prepare it properly. The people of the town used to leave billy cans full of stew and fish along the wire for us to pick up and there were vast quantities of durians and jackfruit, bananas, pomeloes, limes and rambutans. Every night we put the empty washed billy cans back under the wire and early in the morning collected them full. The heroine of Mergui was Tan Myo, a little twelve year old beauty who ran the gauntlet of the Jap guards a dozen times a day.
There were a lot of rumours of victories in Europe and the Pacific but it was impossible to sift the truth from fiction. But these stories did keep up morale. Then some of the men took to breaking camp and three decided to make a break for it. They were captured and shot. The Japanese then took a stern view of the fraternization going on between us and the Burmese and began punishing the Burmese. One Chinese woman was flogged to death and other civilians severely battered. Young children were tied up to posts and hung with placards for giving food to our men. We feared for Tan Hye and her friends and asked them not to go on with it. But they persisted, seemed to get a great kick out of deceiving the Japs. Although Burma had been battling with the British over independence for years there is very little doubt where the sympathies of Mergui’s 13,000 people lay. They did not trust the Japanese. One whole street of Mergui was given over to temples and statues of Buddha. It is said that these figures were encrusted with rubies, emeralds and diamonds before the Japs came. But when the British were driven out the priests gougéd out the jewels and hid them away.

There were always crowds of daily clad, pleasant-faced Burmese in the streets. The only cars were those driven by the Japanese but quite a lot of little pony carts having the seats along the sides.

And there were thousands of dogs who made the night hideous with their howling. If there were thousands of dogs there must have been millions of ducks along the edges of the swampy foreshores and in the ponds.

Our camp was soon invaded by great flocks of ravens and minah birds while the nats themselves became inhabited by the chirping little geckoes. Another large lizard also took up residence. This is the "co-te" so named from his barking call, which is very loud and can be heard up to a quarter of a mile away. The natives say that if he calls "co-te" seven times that house will be blessed with good luck.

The rain cleared away in July; our rations had improved, we saw few Japs and life, even as a prisoner was bearable. But it was too good to last. In August we were told we were moving to Tavoy whether the contingent we had left at Victoria Point had already gone, bypassing Mergui.

On the 17th August we left Mergui and embarked on a small coaster which threaded its way through the many islands and along the coast northwards to Tavoy which we reached the next day. We transferred from the coaster to barges which were lashed alongside a powerful tug. Then followed an eight hour journey up a broad river in the darkness. Disembarking at a small wharf we shouldered our kits and marched for one and a half hours till we arrived at the Tavoy High school. Here were the other parts of "A" Force from whom we had been separated.
We were very overcrowded at Tavoy. The food was not as good as we had had nor was there enough. Nor could we settle in or organize ourselves. The Japanese were constantly giving us orders to prepare to leave, then cancelling them. This gave rise to more rumours; one of which was that there were 15,000 Burmese guerrillas, (sometimes it was Chinese), in the vicinity and that they were only waiting their chance to attack the Japanese and rescue us.

At Tavoy we were marched one day to the local cinema theatre and shown a series of Japanese propaganda films. Most of these covered life in Japan, education and sports. They were not bad as travelogues. A section showing scenes from plays staged by the Takarazaka Girls’ Opera in medieval costume was very good.

By November things had tightened up in the camp. This was a result of a visit by the dreaded Kempi Tai, the Secret Police. Up to now most of the Japanese guards had seemed to be bored, and provided we gave no trouble left us alone. But the Kempi Tai changed all that.

Four cases of soap were stolen from a Japanese army store. The prisoners were lined up and the camp searched. A few pieces of soap were found so the owners were called out and accused of being the thieves. But these men had never left the camp at any time and said the soap had been given to them by others. But they would not name the men who had given them. They were subjected to severe torture by being forced to kneel on the concrete. Then a piece of six-sided timber was placed across their calves and a couple of Japanese soldiers stood on this and rolled it from knee to ankle. When the men fainted with pain they were brought to with cold water and the torture started again.

The C.O, Colonel Hamscoy, appealed to the real culprits to step forward to save the others further torture. Four men did so and were taken away by the Japanese, and placed in the guard-house. In fairness to the Japanese sergeant in charge of the guard, he is said to have shown indignation at the treatment meted out by the Kempi Tai and refused to allow the four who had confessed to be taken from the camp. The three arrested by the Kempi Tai returned to camp and were put into hospital.

One of our drivers, taking a truck for the Japanese through the town saw a Burmese arrested by the Japanese who apparently wanted some information which he either refused to give or did not know. So they tied his hands behind his back with wire, passed a rope through them and strung him up to a tree. They still did not get their information so they lit a fire under his suspended feet. He did not, or could not tell them anything so they shot him and walked away laughing.
At Tavoy we learnt of our real destination and what lay before us; the building of the railway. Through the latter half of November and early December groups of men left Tavoy and moved away to the north, 250 at a time.

The 8th December meant that Japan had been one year at war and in Burma at least there was no sign of counter activity by the Allies. On this day twenty-six heavy bombers of the Japanese Air Force flew southwards, the only ones we had seen since the fall of Singapore. We wondered, Allied landings in the South?

On the 16th December the last of us left in Tavoy prepared to move out in turn. We spent a day cleaning up the camp as Japanese troops were moving in, they were already quartered in the town and had apparently come by sea. And they were front line troops. Why?

At eight o'clock we took our places in the transport vehicles, trucks and buses. There were 180 of us. The vehicles were not Japanese army but Burmese and driven by Burmese. They drove through the town at breakneck speed with a constant sounding of horns to clear the streets. The bitumen ended a few miles out and the country changed. Paddy fields stretched for miles, now golden yellow with ripening rice. Threshing and winnowing had already started, the heavy, hairless, slate-coloured water-buffaloes patiently trampling the sheaves underfoot as they were driven round and round in a circle of hard, trodden earth.

The calves of these animals were as shaggy as their parents were hairless. They lose their hair because of their habit of wallowing in the mud which cakes and dries on their bodies. When the stiff mud breaks off it takes some of the hair with it.

At the 18-mile peg the Japanese staff-car turned back and the convoy of seven buses and two trucks continued their dusty way, now at a much reduced speed for we were climbing out of the river valley into the mountain spur. There were dozens of bridges, some of concrete and steel. Some were of heavy timbers. Many of these were in a bad state of repair.

As the convoy climbed the air grew cooler and we glad enough to wrap our groundsheets around us. But it did not seem to worry the Burmese drivers who continued on in their thin tropical shirts and shorts. All these vehicles were Burmese owned and belonged to the days when there was a regular bus run over this route. Now they were being chartered by the Japanese Army.

It was wild mountain jungle and bamboo country; many miles between habitations though sometimes a solitary bare rock would have at its summit the ubiquitous stupa of whitewashed stone. Sometimes, on a high ridge one would glimpse a golden temple with the monastery buildings clustered at its base.
At the foot of one of the saw-toothed ridges, 5,000 feet above sea level and on the banks of a tumbling river we came to a small village that seemed to be composed entirely of coffee shops and fruit stalls. Here we were given a meal of rice and allowed to walk about as we pleased. These country people were friendly and generous. We had no money to pay two annas for a cup of coffee but the villagers made us their guests, pressed their gifts of coffee and fruit upon us. And it was real coffee, made with goats' milk! The place was swarming with small brown children and goats and the goats were no less inquisitive than the children. It was more like a country picnic outing than a slave-march. Even the guards expanded, leaving their weapons in the buses and walking round with us unarmed.

The descent of the mountains was down a rough road of continuous hair-pin bends with great waterfalls at every turn, some of them actually downing the vehicles as the Burmese drove them through at reckless speed.

The mountains ended in a dusty plain with a village on a wide tidal river that was crossed by a punt. Across the river we loaded our gear onto bullock carts; the buses and trucks were left on their side. Then we marched into Ye, about two miles further on.

Ye was a dirty little town and our quarters were in some dilapidated huts which had housed all the prisoners going through. Some of the earlier parties had been here for weeks and there had been much dysentery among them. There were five graves: two Australians, a Scotsman and two Dutch. We spent all of the next day here so we tidied up the graves as well as we could. The graves were in the local Burmese cemetery and were the only ones marked. Apparently the Burmese, Buddhists, take a different view of the dead from what we do, or, say the Chinese, there had been some Indian dead but they had been cremated, as could be seen by a burnt patch of ground and a small heap of cinders. Strangely, the Japanese came to see us tidy the graves and they saluted there and then left a small packet of cigarettes and food on each grave.

Ye is 98 miles from Tavoy and 342 from Rangoon, so said a tattered signpost. There was a large monastery on the edge of the town, surrounded by a five-feet high wall of red brick and in the centre of multi-roofed buildings rose one of the "Golden Temples". Along the roof-tops ran friezes of delicate iron work, hung with the wind-bells. Square, pointed towers marked the corners of the walls and the gateways and just inside the gate were two life-sized wooden figures supporting a large bronze bell. The doorways of the main temples were guarded by grotesque dog-headed lions carved in wood and stone. And for living guardians proud Siamese cats wandered in the courtyard. It is said that these are trained to attack an intruder. All day and all night bells and gongs sounded from the temple. One can never hear a bell or gong now without being reminded of Burma and Thailand.
The next day's march was one we had been dreading back in Tavoy. Not that it was so long, 22 miles for the day, but it was along the railway track itself. As the ballasted track had been built up to cross the salt pans and swamps there was no adjoining roadway, not even a path alongside. We had to march on the ties, or try to balance on the rails themselves. Marching on sleepers is a painful process: the ties are too close to pace and too far apart to stride on. One is reduced to a sort of shuffling hop and after three miles of this the muscles of the legs seemed to be full of red-hot needles. The loose ballast is too rough to walk on. Those men who were badly shod were soon in difficulties and I was glad that I had packed good boots and looked after them. There was a halt every three miles but all one could do was sit down on the track in the blazing sun, the heat being intensified by being reflected back from the interminable salt-panes.

These salt pans were an important part of the country's economy but worked by primitive methods. At high tide the seawater was pumped into the flats by pumps consisting of small buckets on an endless chain operated by a hand crank requiring the efforts of two men to operate. Evaporation did the rest.

Where the flat low land was not used for salt-panes, there were rice paddi-fields and in these wallowed the giant water buffaloes with their six-foot spread of horn. These were herded by small boys who sat, or even stood on their broad backs. We were warned to avoid the buffaloes, it is said that they will charge a white man on sight in spite of their apparent docility with small boys.

At 11 miles we came to a small wayside station where we had a long rest under a line of large shade trees. There were no trains on the line because all the bridges had been blown by the retreating British and the Japanese had made no attempt to repair them. The rivers were crossed by boats or crude ferries.

The little stations became more frequent and at one of these we were waiting our simple rice meal. But again the local people showered us with kindness.

The afternoon's march was sheer torture. The guards were irritable to the point of being dangerous. Anyone lagging too far behind was savagely bashed and threats were made that anyone dropping out would be shot. Nor do I doubt that it would be so. There was little that we could do but to ask the loaders to set a slow pace and for the rest of us to help those in trouble.
I was quite satisfied with myself as I was at least getting along as well as anyone else. But three miles from the end of the march I suddenly started to stagger and gasp for breath. Immediately a younger fellow stepped alongside of me and took my pack. Freed of that I was able to manage. Nearly three years later, in Thailand, at a time when I was fairly fit and he was very ill I was able to discharge my debt.

That night’s camp was in the grounds of a monastery. Here there was a large rice mill consisting of three heavy posts on end resting in a shallow stone mortar about five feet across. The upper ends of the posts were fitted with wooden coggs and these in turn were driven by a large cogwheel, also of wood and this was driven by a pair of buffaloes moving in a constant circle.

The second day’s march was of only 12 miles and some of this could be covered by tracks alongside the line. Over another river and we were at the railhead. We were here for the remainder of the day during which time a goods train loaded with fruit pulled out for Moulmein and a small passenger train left full of village people with their fowls, ducks and garden produce. In the evening a special train of open trucks appeared and this was ours. The trains were all wood fuelled, a tall wooden rick being built on top of the usual tender to carry the greater bulk. Great piles of wood were spaced all along the line.

It was 32 miles to our destination and we got there in one and a half hours in the dark but we could see stacks of firewood, steel girders, rails and sleepers. The camp seemed to stretch for miles.

This was Tambuziat, Headquarters of the Japanese Army railway construction units. 40,000 prisoners of war had passed through on their way up the line and many more were to follow. And 1000,000 Indian, Chinese, Malayan and Burmese coolies had gone before. But most of them were dead and the survivors had been removed as being of no further use. It was our turn now.

We learnt that the camp was not new. It had been used as a prisoner-of-war camp for the Italians taken in the Libyan campaign. Italians are rather partial to rice and there was plenty of it in Burma. The buildings that had been occupied by the Italians were of a more permanent structure. The British evacuated their prisoners before the Japanese took over.

The food here was fairly good but rather scanty. Discipline was rigid and water was short. Dysentery was rife; there were more than 400 sick and a death rate of at least one a day. Beri beri was common and some men had gone blind from deficiency in vitamin A.